

## **A Letter to Father Time (New Year's Eve)**

**From Mince Pie**

**By Christopher Morley**

Dear Father Time—This is your night of triumph, and it seems only fair to pay you a little tribute. Some people, in a noble mood of bravado, consider New Year's Eve an occasion of festivity. Long, long in advance they reserve a table at their favorite café; and becomingly habited in boiled shirts or gowns of the lowest visibility, and well armed with a commodity which is said to be synonymous with yourself—money—they seek to outwit you by crowding a month of merriment into half a dozen hours. Yet their victory is brief and fallacious, for if hours spin too fast by night they will move grindingly on the axle the next morning. None of us can beat you in the end. Even the hat-check boy grows old, becomes gray and dies at last babbling of greenbacks.

To my own taste, old Time, it is more agreeable to make this evening a season of gruesome brooding. Morosely I survey the faults and follies of my last year. I am grown too canny to pour the new wine of good resolution into the old bottles of my imperfect humors. But I get a certain grim satisfaction in thinking how we all—every human being of us—share alike in bondage to your oppression. There is the only true and complete democracy, the only absolute brotherhood of man. The great ones of the earth—Charley Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks, General Pershing and Miss Amy Lowell—all these are in service to the same tyranny. Day after day slips or jolts past, joins the Great Majority; suddenly we wake with a start to find that the best of it is gone by. Surely it seems but a day ago that Stevenson set out to write a little book that was to be called "Life at Twenty-five"—before he got it written he was long past the delectable age—and now we rub our eyes and see he has been dead longer than the span of life he then so delightfully contemplated. If there is one meditation common to every adult on this globe it is this, so variously phrased, "Well, Bo, Time sure does hustle."

Some of them have scurvily entreated you, old Time! The thief of youth, they have called you; a highwayman, a gipsy, a grim reaper. It seems a little unfair. For you have your kindly moods, too. Without your gentle passage where were Memory, the sweetest of lesser pleasures? You are the only medicine for many a woe, many a sore heart. And surely you have a right to reap where you alone have sown? Our strength, our wit, our comeliness, all those virtues and graces that you pilfer with such gentle hand, did you not give them to us in the first place? Give, do I say? Nay, we knew, even as we clutched them, they were but a loan. And the great immortality of the race endures, for every day that we see taken away from ourselves we see added to our children or our grandchildren. It was Shakespeare, who thought a great deal about you, who put it best:

Nativity, once in the main of light,

Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,  
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight  
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound—

It is to be hoped, my dear Time, that you have read Shakespeare's sonnets, because they will teach you a deal about the dignity of your career, and also suggest to you the only way we have of keeping up with you. There is no way of outwitting Time, Shakespeare tells his young friend, "Save breed to brave him when he takes thee hence." Or, as a poor bungling parodist revamped it:

Pep is the stuff to put Old Time on skids—  
Pep in your copy, yes, and lots of kids.

It is true that Shakespeare hints another way of doing you in, which is to write sonnets as good as his. This way, needless to add, is open to few.

Well, my dear Time, you are not going to fool me into making myself ridiculous this New Year's Eve with a lot of bonny but impossible resolutions. I know that you are playing with me just as a cat plays with a mouse; yet even the most piteous mousekin sometimes causes his tormentor surprise or disappointment by getting under a bureau or behind the stove, where, for the moment, she cannot paw him. Every now and then, with a little luck, I shall pull off just such a scurry into temporary immortality. It may come by reading Dickens or by seeing a sunset, or by lunching with friends, or by forgetting to wind the alarm clock, or by contemplating the rosy little pate of my daughter, who is still only a nine days' wonder—so young that she doesn't even know what you are doing to her. But you are not going to have the laugh on me by luring me into resolutions. I know my weaknesses. I know that I shall probably continue to annoy newsdealers by reading the magazines on the stalls instead of buying them; that I shall put off having my hair cut; drop tobacco cinders on my waistcoat; feel bored at the idea of having to shave and get dressed; be nervous when the gas burner pops when turned off; buy more Liberty Bonds than I can afford and have to hock them at a grievous loss. I shall continue to be pleasant to insurance agents, from sheer lack of manhood; and to keep library books out over the date and so incur a fine. My only hope, you see, is resolutely to determine to persist in these failings. Then, by sheer perversity, I may grow out of them.

What avail, indeed, for any of us to make good resolutions when one contemplates the grand pageant of human frailty? Observe what I noticed the other day in the Lost and Found column of the *New York Times*:

LOST—Hotel Imperial lavatory, set of teeth. Call or communicate Flint, 134 East 43d street. Reward.

Surely, if Mr. Flint could not remember to keep his teeth in his mouth, or if any one else was so basely whimsical as to juggle them away from him, it may well teach us to be chary of extravagant hopes for the future. Even the League of Nations, when one contemplates the sad case of Mr. Flint, becomes a rather anemic safeguard. We had better keep Mr. Flint in mind through the New Year as a symbol of human error and disappointment. And the best of it is, my dear Time, that you, too, may be a little careless. Perhaps one of these days you may doze a little and we shall steal a few hours of timeless bliss. Shall we see a little ad in the papers:

LOST—Sixty valuable minutes, said to have been stolen by the unworthy human race. If found, please return to Father Time, and no questions asked.

Well, my dear Time, we approach the Zero Hour. I hope you will have a Happy New Year, and conduct yourself with becoming restraint. So live, my dear fellow, that we may say, "A good Time was enjoyed by all." As the hands of the clock go over the top and into the No Man's Land of the New Year, good luck to you!

Your obedient servant!

**Source:**

Public Domain 13694

**Sonnet 60**

**By William Shakespeare**

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end;  
Each changing place with that which goes before,  
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.  
Nativity, once in the main of light,  
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,  
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,  
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.  
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth  
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,  
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,  
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow:  
And yet to times in hope, my verse shall stand,  
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

**Source:**

Public Domain Text #1041