

Pictures of the Year
By
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Curtain rises on sitting room dimly lit, shaded lamp on table C, fireplace R, window L, curtained window up stage, in centre of back cloth.

Reciter discovered seated before fire, gazing thoughtfully into it. She raises her head, listening.

Reciter: It must be close on midnight (rises and walks to C) The old year is nearly gone - ah! the bells? Yes, there they go

(Bells heard outside)

(She stands for a moment, listening) I suppose I should follow the old custom, (smiling) and open the door to let the New Year in. (she pulls aside curtains and opens door, letting curtains fall again, and turns back to C) They are singing a carol. how sweet the voices sound in the quiet night. (She goes to window L opens it and looks out)

(Song outside)

(At the end she closes window and shivers slightly)

I must close the door, or I shall be letting in a bad cold instead of the New Year. Good Heavens! What is that?

(She moves towards the door as she speaks, and the New Year garbed in dark monk's robe of the same colour as curtain steps out of the shade and a limelight falls on him)

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New Year I am the New Year, madam. And you have no reason to be afraid of me - yet. I am very young

(Limelight off)

Reciter The New Year!

New Year Yes! (Moves to R) You very kindly left the door open. Oh, there were many doors open for me, but I chose yours because I like to come in quietly. Most folk offer me a noisy recitation and profess to be very glad to see me.

Reciter They are glad to see you.

NY Why should they be? Poor fools, they don't know what I
am bringing them - joy or sorrow - life - or death. What
is in my satchel no man knows (swings it)

Reciter (eagerly) If, if you would only tell me -

NY No, no; my secrets are my own. I tell nothing. But you
can tell me - something of that Old Year which has just
gone. I am a stranger and know nothing of him.

Reciter You would know the events of the year that has gone?

NY Some of them - not the small happenings of every day,
but the big things that come to your mind like pictures
as your memory flashes back over the months.

(He rests his arm on mantelpiece. As he speaks, she
raises her head, looking

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towards gallery, lips parted, eyes wide, thinking hard,
then speaks, slowly at first and as if hesitating for
the words, but arming as he goes on)

Reciter (Thoughtfully) Like pictures - pictures of the year?

I

I see a day of wonder, of sorrow and of dread,
when they told us of our warships lost and of our
sailors dead -
and I see a brighter morrow when we learned how well
they fought
that the gallant fellows' lives had not been sacrificed
for naught.
How the German fleet was battered and to port we
drove them back
while the cruisers and destroyers followed hard
upon their track.
Then we thrilled with pride for Britain and we gave
a British cheer
for our navy still unbeaten - that's a picture
of the year.

(Takes up letter form the table)

(Reads)

II

A tommy wrote his sweetheart of a battle big with
fate
'we've 'ad a reg'lar beano, Liz, a spree, I tell
yer straight.
We was fair fed up with waitin' waitin' in the '
bloomin' trench
and when they let us go at last - us tommies and

the French -
you'd a died o' laughin' Lizzie, if you could 'ave
seen the hun,
wiv 'is hands up shoutin' 'kamerad' - gorblimey,
it was fun!
That's the cheery Cockney soldier with a heart that
knows no fear,
who cracks a joke with Death himself - a picture of
the year

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III

I see a murder vessel floating in the upper air
long and slim and full of menace, outlined in the
searchlight's glare.
dropping death amongst our babies whilst our gunners
worked in vain,
and the raiders came and went unchecked and came
and went again
till one night the sky was crimsoned with a blaze
of ruddy flame,
and our airmen showed count zeppelin that two
(underlined)
could play that game.
how our people faced the terror - how our fighters
made it clear
a raid was not a picnic - that's a picture of the year.

IV

I see a nation mourning for a leader, silent, strong,
who warned us that the struggle would be cruel,
fierce and long
and I see the man who followed him and went from
place to place
ever working, ever winning, till he leading the British
race
and a shout of welcome went the rounds of empire,
near and far
"thank God! at last we've got a man who's out to
win the war!"
A trusted pilot's now in charge, the ship of state
to steer -
I hang Lloyd George's portrait in the pictures of
the year!

(She addresses the New Year)

Oh, tell me, kindly New Year, do you come as friend or
foe?
Do you bring us brighter, better days, or further war
and woe?

[St. P5]

(New Year shakes his head)

(She turns away from him and comes down stage,
addressing heaven, whilst:

New Year goes slowly up stage and disappears through
curtains)

oh, thou, who holds the future in the hollow of Thy
Hand,
Let the Right and Justice triumph! Guard and bless
our native land!
May the New Year end the struggle! May War's awful
carnage cease -
and send our boys safe home to use, with Victory and
Peace
to see their faces once again, the lads we love so
dear,
would be the finest, best of all the pictures of the
year

END