

Most Noble Contessina...

In the year 1604, on Christmas Eve, a churchman known as Friar Giovanni wrote a letter to the Contessina Allagra Aidobrandeschi who lived in Florence, Italy. This letter has been remembered and quoted often since.

A Christmas Greeting

Most noble Contessina, I salute you. Believe me
your most devoted servant.
Contessina, forgive an old man's babble. But I am your
friend, and my love for you goes deep.

There is nothing I can give you which you
have not got;
but there is much, very much, that,
while I cannot give it, you can take.
No Heaven can come to us unless our hearts
find rest in it today.
Take Heaven!

No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in
this present little instant.
Take peace!

The gloom of the world is but a shadow.
Behind it, yet within our reach,
is joy.
There is radiance and glory in the darkness,
could we but see;
and to see, we have only to look.
Contessina, I beseech you to look.

Life is so generous a giver, but we,
judging its gifts by their covering,
cast them away as ugly or heavy or hard.
Remove the covering,
and you will find beneath it a living splendor,
woven of love, by wisdom, with power.
Welcome it, grasp it, and you touch the angel's hand
that brings it to you.



Everything we call a trial, a sorrow,
or a duty, believe me,
that angel's hand is there;
the gift is there,
and the wonder of an overshadowing Presence.

Our joys, too: Be not content with them as joys, as
they too conceal diviner gifts.

Life is so full of meaning and of purpose,
so full of beauty—beneath its covering—
that you will find that earth
but cloaks your heaven.
Courage, then, to claim it: That is all!

But courage you have, and the knowledge that
we are pilgrims together,
wending through unknown country, home.

And so, at this Christmastime,
I greet you, not quite as the world sends greetings,
but with profound esteem,
and with the prayer that for you, now and forever,
the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

