

The Gift of the Magi

Characters:

Narrators 1, 2, 3 (N1, N2, N3)

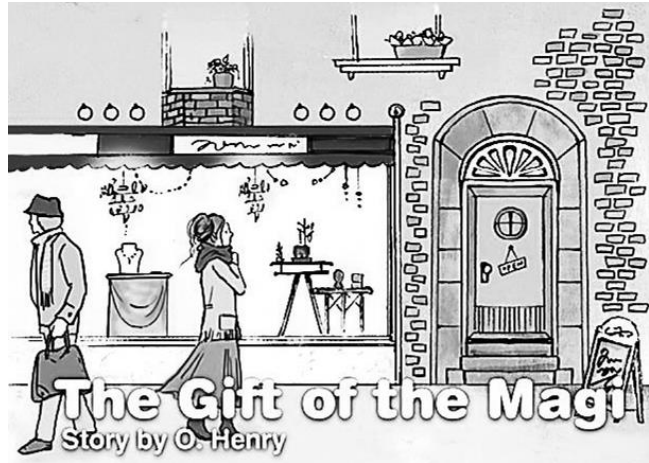
Della

Jim

Sydney (janitor)

Mrs. Porter (neighbor)

Shopkeeper



Prologue

N1: The holidays are near, a time of love and celebration—and gifts too.

N2: Many people associate the tradition of giving gifts at Christmas-time with the Three Kings.

N1: They are often called the Magi, or "Wise Men."

N2: But today, let us tell you a tale about some other gift-givers.

Scene 1: *New York City, two days before Christmas, 1900.*

N3: Della and Jim are a young married couple living in New York City.

Della: What a splendid walk that was!

Jim: Indeed it was, Della. Central Park at Christmas-time is always so delightful.

Della: What shall we do now?

Jim: Let's walk down Broadway and window-shop.

Della: But we haven't any money.

Jim: It costs nothing to look. Besides, we can dream, can't we? Why, look here. Look at these scarves.

Della: And look at those combs! I've admired them forever. Pure tortoiseshell. Imagine how they'd look in my hair.

Jim: Della, your hair is already so long and beautiful. Look, it's almost to your knees.

Della: Do you think so, Jim? Do you really think it's beautiful?

Jim: I may be poor, Della, but I'm still the luckiest man in all New York!

Scene 2: *the next morning, Jim and Della's apartment.*

N1: Jim and Della live in a shabby little one-room apartment.

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N2: But Jim does have one possession he is proud of: his pocket watch.

Jim (checking his watch): I must be off to work.

Della: Don't be home late, Jim.

Jim: I'll put in my time and nothing more.

Della: You look so sophisticated when you glance at your watch.

Jim: Do I? Even with this old leather strap I use in place of a chain?

Della (hugging him): Who's to notice the strap when such a handsome man is holding such a glorious watch?

N3: Jim leaves for his office. On the way out, he waves to the janitor, Sydney.

Sydney: Good morning, Mr. Young. Off to work already, are you?

Jim (checking his watch): I mustn't be late for work, Sydney.

Sydney: No, sir. That's quite a watch.

Jim: It was my grandfather's. Keeps perfect time.

Sydney: It's quite remarkable.

Jim: Sydney, about my mailbox.

Sydney: It says on it, "Mr. James Dillingham Young," just like you asked.

Jim: That's just it. Perhaps it would be best if it just said, "Mr. James D. Young."

Sidney: Oh, no, sir. Dillingham sounds so distinguished.

Jim: Distinguished for a man who makes \$30 a week— not for a man who makes a mere \$20.

Sidney (shaking his head, frowning): Another pay cut? Times are hard.

Jim (checking his watch again): Yes they are, Sydney. But whether \$20 or \$30 a week, I must be on time.

Scene 3: *Jim and Della's apartment.*

N1: Like Jim, Della has only one treasure—her long, beautiful hair.

N2: Della and her neighbor sit together at the kitchen table.

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Della (counting coins): . . . 85, 86 . . . one dollar and 87 cents. No matter how often I count it, Mrs. Porter, the amount never changes.

Mrs. Porter: Of course not, dear, but a penny saved is a penny earned.

Della: And how I've earned these pennies, Mrs. Porter. I've learned to drive a hard bargain. The grocer, the butcher, the milkman—I think they cringe when they see me coming. I'll take the worst cuts of meat to save a penny, the bruised fruit to save two.

Mrs. Porter: Don't you worry now, dear. Things will turn around for you two. I just know it.

Della (crying): But it's Christmas Eve. One dollar and 87 cents! What can I buy my wonderful Jim with one dollar and 87 cents?

Mrs. Porter: Now don't cry, Della.

N3: Just then, Della happens to glance in the mirror.

N1: She catches sight of her long, beautiful hair, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown water.

N2: She stands for a moment. A final tear splashes on the worn carpet.

Della: I have it, Mrs. Porter!

N3: Della's face grows pale as she quickly arranges her hair into a bun.

Mrs. Porter (concerned): Oh, Della, you mustn't.

Della: I must. For Jim. For Christmas.

N1: On goes Della's old brown coat and old brown hat.

N2: And with a whirl of skirts and a brilliant sparkle still in her eye . . .

N3: . . . she flutters out the door and down the stairs into the street.

Scene 4: on Broadway.

N1: Moments later, Della arrives at Madame Sophie's '*Hair Goods of All Kinds*'.

Della: Will you buy my hair?

Madame Sophie: I do buy hair. Take off your hat and let's have a look at it.

N2: Down ripples the brown cascade.

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Madame Sophie: What could be so important that you'd sacrifice such lovely hair?

Della: I'd sacrifice anything for my Jim. How much is it worth?

Madame Sophie: Your hair? Twenty dollars.

Della: I'll take it.

N3: Her hair gone and 20 dollars crumpled in her fist, Della rushes out onto the street.

Della (to herself): Now for Jim's present.

N1: For two hours, Della ransacks the stores searching for that special something.

Della: He needs a new overcoat, and every day he goes off to work without gloves to warm his hands. But his gift must be something precious, something worthy of Jim.

N2: She soon spots just the thing.

Shopkeeper: May I help you?

Della: Might I see that watch chain?

Shopkeeper: Why certainly, Miss. It's platinum. A fine chain—but very expensive.

Della: It's so perfect for my husband. With a chain like this on his watch, he could check the time in anyone's company. How much is it?

Shopkeeper: Twenty-one dollars.

Della: I'll take it.

Scene 5: *Jim and Della's apartment.*

Della: How bad is it, Mrs. Porter?

Mrs. Porter: A pretty thing like you? You're adorable with or without your hair. We'll curl what's left of it. That's what we'll do. We'll curl it.

N3: Within 40 minutes, Della's head is covered with tiny curls.

Mrs. Porter: That's not so bad now, is it?

N1: But when Della looks at her reflection in the mirror, she remains worried.

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Della: If Jim doesn't faint before he takes a second look, he'll say I look like a truant schoolboy!

Mrs. Porter: Now, now.

Della: But what could I do with a dollar and 87 cents?

Mrs. Porter: I'll go now, before Jim gets home.

Della: Yes, you had better. He's never late.

Mrs. Porter (leaving): Don't you worry now. It'll be all right.

Della (aside): Oh, please, let him think I'm still pretty!

N2: A moment after Mrs. Porter leaves, Jim steps in.

N3: Seeing Della, he freezes.

N1: He says nothing. He merely stands there with a peculiar expression on his face.

Della: Jim, darling, don't stare at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow back.

N2: But Jim continues to stare at Della. He seems to be in a trance.

Della (almost crying): You don't mind, do you, Jim? My hair grows awfully fast. Jim, say something. You can't imagine what a wonderful gift I have for you!

Jim (confused): You cut off your hair.

Della (crying): And sold it. Don't you like me just as well anyhow? I'm still me without my hair, aren't I?

N3: Jim looks around the room curiously. Jim (coming out of his trance): You say your hair is gone?

Della: Don't look for it. It's gone. I did it for you.

Jim (hugging her): Don't make any mistake, Della. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut that could make me love you any less. But if you unwrap this present, you'll see why you took me by surprise.

N1: Della unwraps the gift and screams for joy . . .

N2: Then cries aloud.

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N3: For there are the combs, the precious tortoiseshell combs she'd so long desired without the hope of ever having.

Della (sniffing): My hair does grow fast, Jim.

N1: Jim has not yet seen his present.

N2: Della holds it out to him in her open palm.

Della (excited): Isn't it dandy, Jim? Let's put it on your watch. I want to see how it looks!

N3: Jim tumbles onto the sofa and begins to laugh.

Jim: Della, I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs!

N1: Now they laugh together.

Jim: Let's put our presents away and keep them for a while. They're too nice to use just yet. And now, suppose we have some dinner.

N2: Today, we've told you of two people who sacrificed their greatest treasures.

N3: You might think they were foolish.

N1: But in a word to the wise, let us conclude with this:

N2: Of all who give and receive gifts, these two are the wisest.

N3: They are the Magi.

THE END