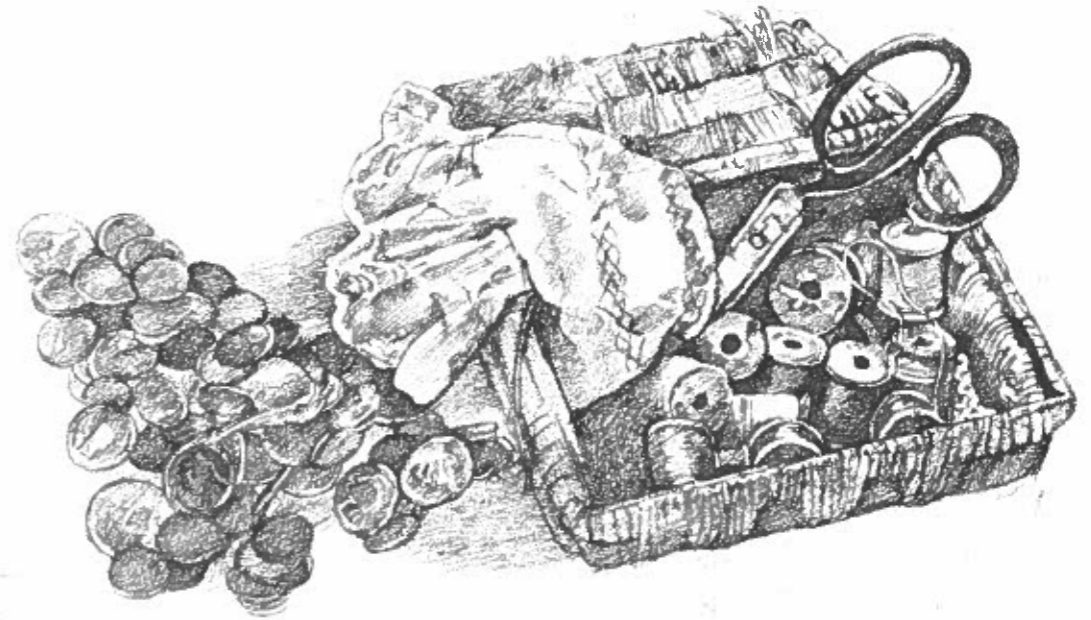




The Gift of the Magi

by O. Henry



Three times Della counted the money. It always came out the same. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time. Della counted the money again. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day was Christmas!

Della sat down on the **shabby** little couch. She thought about the problem. What kind of gift could she buy for Jim with just one dollar and eighty-seven cents? For several minutes Della kept **pondering** this problem.

Then Della rose from the couch. She walked to the window. She looked out at a gray cat walking on a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow

would be Christmas Day. And she had only \$1.87 with which to buy a present for Jim. She had been saving every penny she could for months. And this was the result. Expenses had been greater than she had figured. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. She had spent many a happy hour planning something nice for him. Something fine and rare. Something perfect for Jim.

Suddenly Della turned away from the window. She walked to the mirror. She stood before it and looked at herself. Her eyes were shining brightly. But in less than twenty seconds, her face had lost its color. She rapidly let down her hair. She let it fall all the way down to its full length.

Now Jim and Della had two possessions in which they both took great pride. One was Jim's gold watch. It had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's beautiful hair. A queen with all her riches might have envied Della's hair. A king with all his treasures might have longed for Jim's gold watch.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell down about her. It rippled and shone like waves of brown water. It reached below her knees.

Then, quickly and nervously, she began to put her hair up again. She paused for a moment once. A tear came to her eyes. But she continued.

On went her old brown jacket. On went her old brown hat. With the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she rushed out the door and down the stairs to the street.

She stopped in front of a store. In the window was a sign. It read, "Mrs. Sofronie. Wigs Made Here."

Della caught her breath for a moment. Then she entered the store.

"May I help you?" asked Mrs. Sofronie.

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Mrs. Sofronie. "For wigs. Take off your hat and let me see what your hair looks like."

Down rippled the brown waves.

"Twenty dollars," said Mrs. Sofronie.

"I'll take it," said Della.

The next two hours went quickly by. Della spent them searching through the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores. And she had looked through them all.

It was a watch chain—simple but beautiful. And though it was not fancy, it was very elegant. It was even worthy of Jim's gold watch. As soon as Della saw it, she knew that it must be Jim's. Twenty-one dollars they charged her for it. And she hurried home with the 87 cents.

With that chain, Jim might look at his watch in any company. The watch was grand, it was true. But, sometimes, he would just sneak a look at it. That was because he was a bit embarrassed by the old, worn leather strap that he used instead of a chain.

When Della reached home, her joy began to give way to reason. She began to fix her hair. Della did the best she could. In half an hour, her head was covered with small tiny curls. She looked at her reflection in the mirror.



“Jim will be awfully surprised,” she said. “But what could I do? What could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?”

At seven o'clock the coffee was made. The frying pan was on the stove ready for dinner.

Jim was never late. Della clutched the watch chain in her hand as she sat at the table. Then she heard his steps on the stairs. For a moment her hands flew to her head as she thought about her hair.

“What will he think when he sees me?” she said to herself.

The door opened. Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two. He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Once inside, Jim stopped suddenly. His eyes were fixed on Della. There was an expression in them that she could not read. It terrified her. It was not anger. It was not surprise. It was not horror. It was not any of the things she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her with that strange look on his face.

“Jim, darling,” she said. “Don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off. I sold it because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow back again. You won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice—what a beautiful gift I've got for you.”

“You've cut off your hair?” asked Jim very slowly. He seemed to be having trouble accepting the fact.

“Cut it off and sold it,” said Della. “Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, aren't I?”

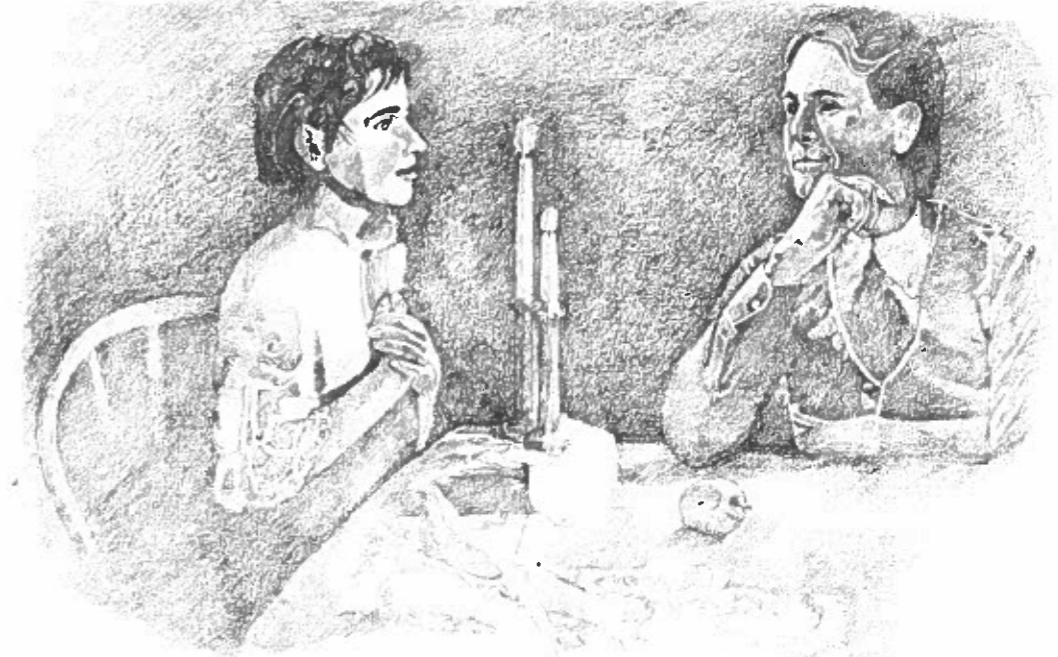
Jim looked around the room.

“You say your hair is gone?” he said, as though dazed.

“You needn't look for it,” said Della. “It's sold I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, Jim. Don't be angry for it went for you.” Della smiled, “Nobody could ever measure my love for you. Now shall I put dinner on, Jim?”

Jim seemed to awake from his daze. He gave Della a giant hug.

Then Jim took a package out of his coat pocket. He dropped it on the table.



“Don't make any mistake about me, Della,” he said. “No haircut could ever make me like you any the less. But just unwrap that package. You'll see why you had me going at first.”

Della's fingers tore at the strings and the paper. And then there came a scream of joy. And then, alas! a sudden change to tears.

For there lay THE COMBS—the beautiful set of hair combs she had wanted for so long. Della had seen them in a shop window on Broadway. They were beautiful combs made of the purest shell. Just the shade to wear in her beautiful vanished hair. She knew they were expensive combs. And her heart had yearned for them. But she didn't have the slightest hope of having them. And now, they were hers. But the hair she should have worn them in was gone.

Still, she hugged them to her closely. Finally, with damp eyes and a smile, she said, “My hair grows so fast, Jim.”

And then Della leaped up and cried, “Oh!”

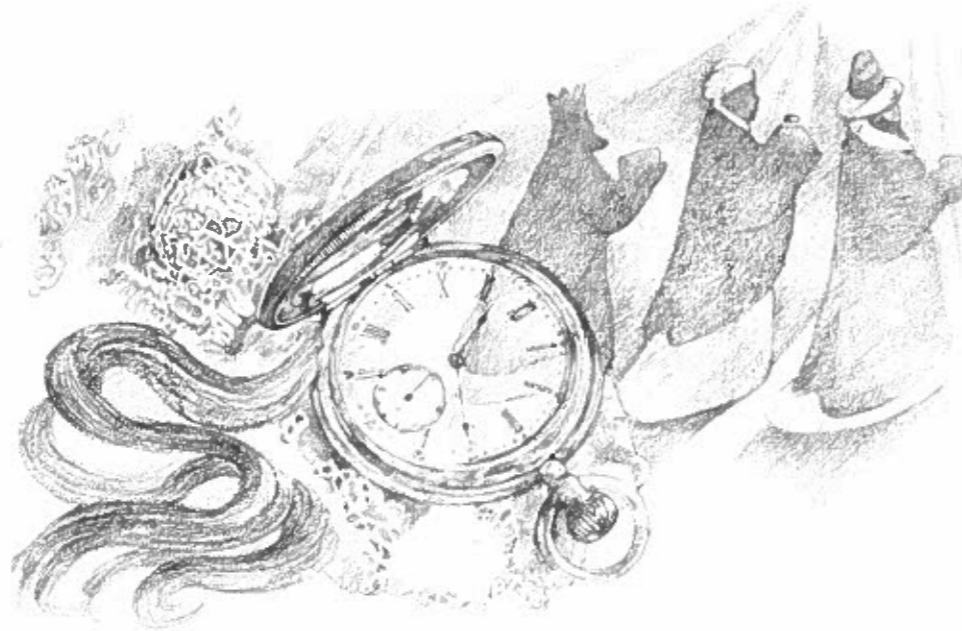
Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held the chain out to him on her open palm.

"Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at your watch a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

But instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch. He put his hands under the back of his head.

"Della," he said. "Let's put our Christmas presents away. Let's keep them for a while. They're too nice to use right now." Jim smiled. Then he said, "I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs."

The magi were wise men. They were wonderfully wise. They brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. And here I have told you the story of Della and Jim. These two **sacrificed** for each other the greatest treasure they owned. But the gift they gave was the gift of love. Those who give with love are always the wisest. Everywhere they are always the wisest. They are the magi.



GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY. Complete each of the following sentences by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. Each sentence helps you get the meaning of the story.

- Della sold her hair because she
 a. wanted to surprise her husband.
 b. needed money to buy a present.
 c. didn't like the way it looked.
- Della picked a watch chain which was
 a. on sale.
 b. beautiful and elegant.
 c. so popular she saw it in several stores.
- When Jim saw Della after she had her hair cut off, he
 a. stared at her with a strange look on his face.
 b. said he didn't love her any more.
 c. said he was very disappointed.
- Jim sold his watch
 a. because it was old and out of style.
 b. because he was embarrassed by the worn leather strap on it.
 c. to get money to buy combs for Della.

× 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS. Each of the following questions reviews your understanding of story elements. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer to each question.

- What happened first in the *plot* of the story?
 a. Della went into Mrs. Sofronie's store.
 b. Della showed Jim the watch chain she bought.
 c. Jim asked Della to unwrap the package he brought.
- Which sentence best *characterizes* both Della and Jim?
 a. They were very angry because they were poor.
 b. They both acted in a selfish way.
 c. They cared very much about each other.
- "The Gift of the Magi" is *set*
 a. during the summer.
 b. on a cold day in November.
 c. at Christmastime.
- Pick the statement which best tells a *theme* of the story.
 a. You can't enjoy a gift unless it is very expensive.
 b. The thought behind a gift is more important than the gift itself.
 c. If you buy a present at the last moment, it will always turn out to be a mistake.

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NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. If you wish, look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- Della sat down on the shabby little couch in their small apartment. What is the meaning of the word *shabby*?
 - a. very worn
 - b. quite large
 - c. new and expensive
- Jim and Della sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures they owned. The word *sacrificed* means
 - a. broke into small pieces.
 - b. wondered about.
 - c. gave up.
- A queen with all her treasures might have envied Della's beautiful hair. As used in this sentence, the word *envied* means
 - a. wanted very much.
 - b. clipped or cut off.
 - c. refused or turned down.
- Della didn't have enough money for a gift; she spent time pondering this problem. The word *pondering* means
 - a. laughing at.
 - b. thinking over.
 - c. forgetting about.

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ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE. Complete the following paragraph by filling in each blank with one of the words listed in the box below. Each of the words appears in the story. Since there are five words and four blanks, one word in the group will not be used.

The first watches were invented about 500 years ago. These early watches were _____¹ of iron and were very heavy. They were really _____² clocks that could be carried about. Today, watches are usually _____³ on the wrist. In those _____⁴, watches were hung from a belt which was tied around the waist.

mirror	small
worn	
made	days

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THINKING ABOUT THE STORY. Each of the following questions will help you to think critically about the selection. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer.

- When Jim saw that Della had cut off her hair, he was
 - a. pleased.
 - b. frightened.
 - c. amazed.
- Which statement is true?
 - a. Della found it upsetting to sell her hair, but she was willing to do it for Jim.
 - b. Jim didn't really like his gold watch, so he didn't mind selling it.
 - c. Della and Jim could probably have afforded to live in a bigger apartment.
- Why did Jim suggest that they put away their presents and keep them for a while?
 - a. He didn't like the watch chain and wanted to give it back later.
 - b. He thought that the gifts would be worth much more later.
 - c. He knew that it was not possible to use the presents right now.
- The last paragraph of the story suggests that
 - a. Jim and Della were both very foolish.
 - b. the gift of love is the best gift of all.
 - c. you should always give gifts that can be returned.

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Thinking More about the Story. Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- When it came to money, Jim and Della were poor. However, they were rich in other ways. Do you agree with this statement? Give reasons to support your answer.
- Della will be able to use the combs when her hair grows back. Will Jim ever be able to use the watch chain? Explain.
- According to an old saying, "It is better to give than to receive." Do you think Della believed this? Did Jim? Explain your answers.

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises.

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