

The Gift of the Magi

O. Henry

The year is 1905. We are on the streets of New York, with its tall buildings, expensive stores, and important people. But what do we know about the little people? Who lives behind that door? Who works in that small, dark office?

Let's open a door and watch two young people on a cold day in December. The apartment is small. It has only two rooms. There are no pictures or photos. We can't see any special things on the table. But it is a happy home.

Mr. and Mrs. James (Jim) Dillingham Young live here. It is their first home-at \$8 a week. Jim works six days a week for \$20. Every evening he walks slowly home. His days are long and his feet are heavy. But then he opens the door of the apartment.

There is Mrs. Young- his Della! She is the light in his dark days. She has food on the table for him, and she looks at him with her beautiful brown eyes. Jim always smiles. He is a happy man in his apartment with Della, and she is happy, too.

This afternoon we can see Della in the apartment. Jim is at work. Della puts her money on the table. She has \$1.87, and tomorrow is Christmas.

"How can I buy a special Christmas gift for Jim with \$1.87? What am I going to do?" she thinks. Della walks across her kitchen. "What can I buy for Jim?"

Della looks at the window. She can see her unhappy face in it. She looks at her long, beautiful hair. Jim always says, "I like to see your hair every morning in the sun. At work, I think about your hair."

Mr. and Mrs. James D. Young have two special things: Della's hair and Jim's gold watch. The watch was a gift from Jim's father, and Jim always has it with him.

Sometimes Della says, "Excuse me, Mr. Young. What time is it?" Then Jim smiles, and he takes the gold watch from his coat. He opens the watch and looks at it with love. Then he tells Della the time.

But now Della is thinking about her beautiful hair. Quickly she puts on her thin, black coat and old hat. She goes into the street. She runs to Mrs. Sofronie's store on First Street. The old woman buys hair.

"Can you buy my hair?" Della asks.

Mrs. Sofronie smiles, "I can give you \$20 for it."

“OK, but, please, take it quickly,” Della says.

Della sits down and Mrs. Sofronie starts to work. Della doesn't look at her hair on the floor. At three o'clock she takes the \$20 from Mrs. Sofronie and puts on her hat. She runs quickly to Fourth Street and looks in every store. She finds her gift for Jim: a beautiful gold chain for his watch, for \$21.

Della runs home and finishes the Christmas food. She is happy because she has the chain for Jim's watch. Then she sees her hair in the window.

“Is Jim going to love me with short hair?” Della thinks. “But I did it for him. I wanted a gift for him.”

At seven o'clock, Della hears Jim at the door. He is never late. Della has her gift for him in her hand. The door opens and Jim walks into the kitchen. He looks thin, and he is cold in his old coat and shoes. Then he sees Della's hair. He isn't angry, but he is quiet.

“Jim, talk to me. I'm going to have long hair again one day. But this evening I have a special gift for you. Let's be happy. It's Christmas tomorrow,” Della says.

“But...” Jim says. “Where is your beautiful hair?”

“At Mrs. Sofronie's store. She has my hair now, and I have a gift for you. And, I love you,” Della says.

Jim doesn't answer. He looks at Della. Then he says, “Della, I loved you with long hair and I love you with short hair. And, I have a special gift for you, too.”

Della opens the gift quickly, and she finds two expensive combs for her long, brown hair. Della knows these combs because she sees them every day in a store window on Fifth Street. She loves them, but now she has no hair for them!

“Jim, they're beautiful, and in six months I can put them in my hair”, says Della. “But, wait! I have a gift for you.”

Jim opens his gift slowly, and he looks at it.

“Jim, do you like it? I looked in every store. Give me your watch. Let's put it on your watch,” says Della.

But Jim doesn't give Della his watch. He sits down and smiles.

“Della, let's put our gifts away for a year,” he says. “I don't have my watch. I went to that store near my office. They buy watches there. You can see my watch in their

window now, and you have the combs.”

What do we have here? The story of two people. They don't have a lot of money, but they have a lot of love. And now they are going to have a happy Christmas because they understand about special gifts.