

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

PART 1

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 by bargaining with the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until her cheeks burned with embarrassment. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but sit on the shabby little couch and cry. So Della did it. Della lived with her husband in a furnished apartment at \$8 a week. At the front door, there was an empty mail box and a doorbell that no longer worked, and under the broken doorbell, there was a card with the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young." But whenever Mr. James Dillingham came home and reached his apartment, he was called "Jim" and greatly loved by Mrs. James Dillingham, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della stopped crying and fixed her makeup. She stood by the window and looked out at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been more than she calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. She had spent many happy hours planning something nice for him. Something fine and rare. Something Jim deserved.

Glossary

pennies /'peniz/ *noun* used to emphasize a small amount of money
grocer /'grouəsər/ *noun* a person who works in a store selling food
shabby /'ʃæbi/ *adj* in poor condition because they have been used a lot



PART 2

Glossary

garment /'garmənt/ a piece of clothing

tear /tɪr/ a drop of liquid that comes out of your eye when you cry

hesitate /'hezəteɪt/ verb to be slow to speak or act because you feel uncertain

sparkle /'spɑːkl/ noun a series of flashes of light

pant /pænt/ verb to breathe quickly with short breaths

turn sth inside out to turn the inner surface of sth outward

Della looked at herself in the mirror. She pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length. Now, there were two possessions that Jim and Della were very proud of one was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. It reached below her knee and made itself almost like a garment for her. As she looked in the mirror she had an idea. She did her hair up again nervously and quickly. She hesitated for a minute and stood still while a tear or two fell on the worn red carpet.

But then she put on her old brown jacket; she put on her old brown hat. With a brilliant sparkle in her eyes, she danced out the door and down the stairs to the street. Where she stopped the sign read: "Madame Sofronie.

Hair Goods of All Kinds." Della ran up one flight of stairs and then stopped, panting.

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take your hat off and let's take a look at it." Down came the brown hair.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the hair with her hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

The next two hours sped by quickly. She hurried through the stores looking for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for him and no one else.

There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned them all inside out. It was a platinum chain, simple and elegant in design. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both Jim and the chain. She paid twenty-one dollars for the chain, and she hurried home with 87 cents.

PART 3

Glossary

curling iron /'kɜːlɪŋ 'aɪərn/ *noun* a tool that is heated and used for curling hair

chorus girl /'kɒrəs ɡɜːl/ *noun* a girl or young woman who is a member of the chorus in a musical show

chops /tʃɒps/ *noun* a thick slice of meat with a bone attached to it

When Della reached home she got out her curling irons and went to work repairing the damage to her hair. Within forty minutes her head was covered with curls that made her look wonderfully like a naughty schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically. “If Jim doesn’t kill me,” she said to herself, “before he takes a second look at me, he’ll say I look like a chorus girl. But what could I do – oh! What could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?”

At seven o’clock the coffee was made and the frying pan was on the back of the stove, hot and ready to cook the chops. Jim was never late. “Please, God, make him think I am still pretty,” Della whispered.

The door opened and Jim stepped in. He stopped inside the door. His eyes were fixed on Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her with a peculiar expression on his face.

“Jim, darling,” she cried, “don’t look 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 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, nice gift I’ve got for you.”

“You’ve cut off your hair?” asked Jim, as if he could not understand 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 about the room curiously.

“You say your hair is gone?” he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

PART 4

Glossary

comb /kəʊm/ *noun* a flat piece of plastic or metal with a row of thin teeth along one side, used for making your hair neat

long for sth to want something badly

dandy /ˈdændi/ *adj* very good

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package, you may see why I was upset at first."

Della tore at the string and paper. And then a scream of ecstatic joy; and then, alas! a quick change to hysterical tears and crying.

For there lay the set of combs that Della had really wanted. Beautiful combs, just the colour to wear in her beautiful, vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had longed for them without the least hope that she would ever own them. And now, they were hers, but the hair that the beautiful combs should have adorned was gone.

But she hugged them to her chest, and, at length, she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

And then Della jumped up. Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present.

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

Instead of obeying, Jim sat down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled. "Dell," he said, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use right now. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now, suppose you put the chops on."