



## THE GIFT OF MAGI AS A SYMBOL OF COMMITMENT

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### **Abstract**

William Sydney Porter spent his childhood in North Carolina, where he read voraciously and attended his aunt's elementary school. His uncle trained him to become a pharmacist at nineteen. At twenty, he moved to Texas to work on a sheep ranch. Soon afterwards, he worked a number of jobs as a bank teller, draftsman, and journalist, all while writing on the side. The setting of "Gift of the Magi" likely reflects O. Henry's location at the time in New York City.

**Key words:** affectionate, selfless, quietness and value

### **Introduction**

#### **The Gift of the Magi Characters**

**Della:** The narrator, although omniscient, tells most of the story from Della's perspective. She's described as young, affectionate, selfless, and somewhat hysterical, requiring Jim to comfort her when she's upset.

**Jim:** Jim, Della's husband, and "the lord of the flat," is only twenty-two and heavily burdened by the need to support the household on a low salary.

#### **Discussion**

The story begins with Della despairing over the meager amount of money she's managed to save over the past few months by pinching pennies. She had been hoping to save enough to buy her husband Jim a worthy Christmas present. Della suddenly goes to gaze at her reflection in a window, letting her hair fall to its full length below her knee. Della's brown hair and Jim's gold watch that had been passed down from his grandfather are the couple's most prized possessions. Della runs to a hair shop and sells her hair for twenty dollars. Then she uses the money to buy Jim a simple platinum watch chain. The chain is described as possessing "quietness and value," like Jim. Della returns home to fix her hair into curls and make dinner. When Jim walks into the door, he freezes, staring at Della's hair. Della tells him that she did it in order to buy a proper Christmas present for him. Jim snaps out of his shock, hugs Della, and throws a package on the table. He explains that no haircut could make him



love her any less, but that he was surprised because of the present that he bought for her. Della opens the package to find expensive tortoiseshell combs for her long hair. She's ecstatic for a moment before she begins crying, and Jim has to comfort her. Suddenly, Della remembers her present to Jim, and asks to see Jim's watch so that she could put the new chain on it. Jim sits back on the couch and smiles, then admits that he sold his watch in order to buy the combs. Della stops crying but is still at a loss for how she might buy a Christmas present worthy of Jim. She suddenly remembers the pier-glass—a sort of thin mirror between the windows of the apartment—and stands before the glass, releasing her hair to fall to its full length. Here, the narrator describes the couple's most prized possessions: Della's long, brown hair that falls below her knees and Jim's gold watch that was passed down from his grandfather. He compares these items to King Solomon's treasures and the queen of Sheba's jewels. Della runs downstairs onto the street, where she finds a hair shop run by a Madame Sofronie. After a brief exchange during which Madame Sofronie evaluates Della's hair, Della sells her long locks for twenty dollars. Della spends the next two hours looking for a perfect present for Jim. She decides finally on a simple platinum chain for Jim's watch, comparing the watch's lack of ornamentation and value to Jim's personality, which is equally quiet and valuable. Della returns home to fix her hair into curls and prepare dinner before waiting for Jim at the door. She says a little prayer hoping that Jim will still find her pretty without her long hair. When Jim enters the door, he freezes, staring at Della's hair without expression. Della runs to Jim and tells him that she had her hair cut and sold in order to buy him a Christmas present. Jim continues to stare, and Della repeats that her hair is gone—but that her love for him is immeasurable. Jim finally moves, giving Della a hug and throwing a package on the table. He reassures her that no haircut could make him like her any less, but that he was shocked because of the present he bought for her hair. Della opens the package to find the beautiful tortoiseshell combs that she had coveted for her hair. She shrieks in joy before crying, and Jim comforts her before she remembers her own present to Jim. She pulls out the watch chain and asks to see Jim's watch so that she might try the chain on it. Jim flops down on the couch and smiles, saying that they should put their presents away for now and that they're too nice to use just yet—before admitting that he sold the watch to buy the combs for Della. They decide to have dinner, and the narrator sums up the story with a little paragraph on the magi. He describes them as wise men who invented the art of giving Christmas presents, and he compares Jim and Della to the magi—saying that of all who give gifts, these two are the wisest.



### Conclusion.

Love is central theme in the gift of Magi. The major theme of the story is pure love, which is the most valuable thing in the world. It is unconditional since Della and Jim do not need anything special from each other, they are just happy to be together. The gift of the Magi also tackles the theme of wealth and poverty. Indeed, the Young family is very poor, and Della has to haggle with vendors over every single penny. Even though they hardly make ends meet, Della and Jim are happy because they possess a much greater treasure than money – their love. As Zhang and Wang rightly stated, “There is no pure love in the world of money while there is no money in the world of love”. The story, therefore, conveys the idea that material possessions do not play a significant role in human life because deep affection is the only thing that matters. Their love is revealed by their willingness to sacrifice the most valuable things they own to bring joy to each other. Apart from the theme of affection, the story is concerned with the concepts of poverty and wealth. It asserts that rich people are not those with much money but those who love and are loved in return. After all, communication is a crucial part of a strong relationship. Therefore, instead of sacrificing something precious to surprise one’s partner, one had better inform him or her of one’s plans to avoid possible unpleasant consequences. Though Della and Jim’s respective sacrifices have rendered their gifts functionally useless, they maintain their good humor and decide to save the fine gifts for a later time. Della rushes home, elated with her purchase. She carefully curls and styles her shorn hair but is disappointed with the results, remarking that she looks like a “Coney Island chorus girl.” She begins to worry that Jim will be upset that her hair is gone. When she hears Jim approaching the apartment, she stands beside the door and prays that he will still find her attractive. Jim enters the apartment and immediately stares at Della with an inscrutable expression on his face. Yet rather than mocking the couple for their evidently pointless sacrifices, Henry instead implies that their lives are enriched by the selfless love they have for one another. In other words, what is remarkable about ‘The Gift of the Magi’ is that its moral seems to be not just ‘giving is better than receiving’ but ‘giving *and losing* is all that matters’, since what they receive is of no practical use to them.

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