



Tracy Wells

Adapted from the short story by O. Henry

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*For Eric,
You are the greatest gift
that life has given me.
Thank you for showing me
what true love really is.
I love you.*

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The Gift of the Magi

HOLIDAY CLASSIC. It's Christmas Eve and newlyweds Jim and Della have no money to buy each other a Christmas present. Della decides to sell her long, lustrous hair so that she can purchase a gold chain for Jim's prized pocket watch. Meanwhile, Jim decides to pawn his pocket watch in order to buy Della a pair of hair combs to adorn her beautiful hair. In the end, the couple discovers the richness of their love through their self-sacrificing acts. Easy to stage, this timeless tale is suitable for audiences of all ages.

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.

About the Story



(O. Henry 1862-1910)

One of O. Henry's best known works is "The Gift of the Magi," which was published in his short story collection *The Four Million* in 1906. O. Henry is the pen name for William Sydney Porter, who was born in Greenboro, NC, and later lived in Texas and in New York City. In 1897, Porter was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison for embezzlement, though his guilt was much debated. While in prison, Porter began to write short stories under the pen name of O. Henry. After serving three years in prison, Porter was released and changed his name to O. Henry. O. Henry's stories are famous for their humorous depictions of ordinary people and use of surprise endings. The O. Henry Award was established in 1918 and is awarded annually for outstanding short stories.

Characters

(3 M, 7 F, 4 flexible)

(With doubling: 2 M, 4 F, 3 flexible)

JIM: 22, newlywed, married to Della; wears a shabby suit and tie and a well-worn overcoat and hat.

DELLA: Young newlywed, married to Jim; wears worn clothing and a shabby brown coat and hat; has long beautiful hair.

NANCY: Della's sister; wears a shabby dress and coat.

MR. JONES: Jim and Della's elderly neighbor; hard of hearing and walks with a cane.

MRS. JONES: Jim and Della's elderly neighbor and Mr. Jones' wife; wears a coat and hat.

MADAME SOFRONIE: Miserly hair salon owner; a large woman who wears fine clothing; female.

CLERK: Snobbish employee at Madame Sofronie's salon; female.

MR./MRS. BARNES: Jim's imposing, no-nonsense boss; wears fine clothing; flexible.

GEORGE/GEORGINA: Jim's co-worker; flexible.

MARY/MARK: Jim's co-worker; flexible.

MRS./MR. LOWERY: Greedy pawn shop owner; flexible.

SHOPPER 1: Interested in buying Mrs. Lowery's hair combs; female.

SHOPPER 2: Married to Shopper 3; female.

SHOPPER 3: Would like to buy Mrs. Lowery's hair combs; male.

Options for doubling:

CLERK/SHOPPER 1 (Female)

MR. BARNES/SHOPPER 3 (Male)

GEORGINA/SHOPPER 2 (Female)

MARY or MARK/MRS. or MR. LOWERY (Flexible)

NANCY/MADAME SOFRONIE (Female)

Setting

Early 1900s, Christmas Eve, New York City.

Set

The sets can be as simple or as elaborate as your budget allows.

Shabby loft apartment in New York City. The apartment is drab and quite sparse with only a shabby sofa with cushions, a standing or tall mirror, a small table with a lamp and bowl, and a clock.

Jim's office. There is a chair and a small desk with a small desk lamp and files stacked high at CS.

Madame Sofronie's Hair Goods. There is a counter CS with a sign that reads, "Madame Sofronie's Hair Goods of All Kinds."

Lowery's Pawn Shop. There is a counter CS and a sign that reads, "Lowery's Pawn Shop" near the counter. A few items for sale are prominently displayed on the counter including a hat, scarves, and a set of hair combs.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Jim and Della's apartment.

Scene 2: Jim's office.

Scene 3: Madame Sofronie's Hair Goods.

Scene 4: Lowery's Pawn Shop.

Scene 5: Jim and Della's apartment.

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Props

Small shopping bag	Misc. hats and scarves, for pawn shop
Change	Set of hair combs
Purse	(Described as tortoise-shell with jeweled rims but can be any type)
Bowl	Gold watch chain
Glass or cup	Hairbrush
Small lamp	Hand mirror
Watch, for Mr. Jones	2 Wrapped packages
Small desk lamp	Wig, for Della
Stack of file folders	
Gold pocket watch with leather strap, for Jim	
Misc. hair supplies, for Madame Sofronie's shop	

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*“But in a last word
to the wise of these days
let it be said
that all who give gifts
these two were the wisest.”*

*—O. Henry,
from “The Gift of the Magi”*

Scene 1

(AT RISE: *Early 1900s, Christmas Eve, New York City. Lights are dim. Spot up on Mr. and Mrs. Jones as they enter and slowly cross the stage. Mr. Jones walks with a cane.*)

MRS. JONES: I think that Christmas Eve is my favorite day of the year. Wouldn't you agree, darling?

MR. JONES: (*Hard of hearing.*) What's that, dear?

MRS. JONES: (*Loudly into Mr. Jones' ear.*) I said...Christmas Eve is my favorite time of year.

MR. JONES: Oh, yes, of course.

MRS. JONES: And there is nothing better at Christmas than to see a young couple in love. (*Della rushes past, carrying a small shopping bag. She is wearing a shabby brown coat and hat. She exits on opposite side of stage.*) Speaking of young love, there goes our neighbor Della. You remember Della and Jim from next door, right, dear?

MR. JONES: Of course. It seems they pretty much keep to themselves, though.

MRS. JONES: I think most newlyweds do. (*Chuckles.*) They may not have much money this Christmas, but what they lack in dollars and cents, they sure do make up in love.

(*Lights dim on Mr. and Mrs. Jones, who stand off to one side and watch the following scene. Lights up on a shabby loft apartment in New York City. The apartment is sparse with one worn sofa, a mirror, and a small table with a lamp and bowl. Della's and Nancy's coats and hats rest on the arm of the sofa. Della stands in front of the table, emptying change from her purse into a bowl.*)

DELLA: (*Counting change.*) One dollar and 87 cents. And 60 cents of it in pennies! I can't believe that this is all I have to show for months of bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher!

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(Nancy enters SR, carrying a glass of water and hands it to Della.)

NANCY: Times are tough right now. I guess Jim's going to have to do without a Christmas present this year. I know that I won't be able to get Tom anything. Janie and little Tommy need new shoes, and that's already stretching my budget thin.

DELLA: I know, Sis, but it's our first Christmas together, and I just wanted it to be something special.

(Nancy sits next to Della and puts her arm around Della.)

NANCY: Well, you have each other, and these days, that's the most important thing.

DELLA: I know that you're right. It's just that so many unexpected expenses have come up. I guess I thought I'd be able to save more, but now that Jim's salary has dropped from 30 dollars a week to 20 dollars a week, it's been harder than ever to pay all of our bills. *(Starts to cry into her hands. Nancy comforts her. Della wipes her eyes.)* I've just got to find a way to get Jim something nice. *(Brings her hand to her head and then suddenly jumps up and runs to the mirror.)* That's it!

NANCY: *(Alarmed.)* Della, surely you can't mean—

(Lights dim on scene. Spot up on Mr. and Mrs. Jones.)

MRS. JONES: *(To Mr. Jones.)* There are two possessions that Jim and Della treasure more than anything else. One of them is Della's long hair.

MR. JONES: It sure is beautiful. It's a shame she doesn't wear it down more often. I have admired it from time to time.

MRS. JONES: *(Playfully.)* Oh, really? I guess I'd better keep my eye on you.

(Lights dim on Mr. and Mrs. Jones. Lights up on apartment.)

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DELLA: *(To Nancy.)* I can sell my hair! Everyone has always told me how beautiful it is, and I'm sure a wig shop would pay me a modest sum for it.

NANCY: But, Sis, surely a gift can't be as important as your hair. You haven't cut it for years! How are you going to look with short hair?

DELLA: *(Unsure.)* Maybe you're right.

NANCY: Of course, I'm right. *(Grabs her coat and hat and begins to put them on.)* Now, I really must be going so that I can spruce up the apartment a little before tonight's dinner. *(Turns to Della and puts her hand on Della's shoulder.)* My dear sister, please don't give a second thought to cutting your hair. Jim will understand about the gift.

DELLA: No, I've made up my mind. I'm off to see Madame Sofronie. *(Grabs her coat and hat and exits SR.)*

NANCY: *(Shakes her head sadly. To herself.)* I should have known she wouldn't listen. *(Exits SR. Blackout.)*

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Later that day. Spotlight up on Mr. and Mrs. Jones.)

MR. JONES: *(Checks his watch.)* I guess Jim's probably at work now.

MRS. JONES: What does Jim do for a living? I've forgotten.

MR. JONES: I don't remember. I know he works in one of the big office buildings downtown. I don't think he makes a lot of money, but he'd do anything to make Della happy – even work at a job he doesn't like.

(Spotlight down on Mr. and Mrs. Jones. Lights up on Jim's office. At CS is a chair and desk with a small desk lamp and files stacked high. Jim is sitting behind his desk while his coworkers, Mary and George, are standing near his desk and talking to him.)

JIM: *(To George and Mary.)* I've just got to get up the courage to ask Mr. Barnes for a larger Christmas bonus this year. I had planned for my measly bonus to go to some repairs that need to get done around the apartment. It's just that I have something special in mind that I would like to get Della for Christmas.

GEORGE: If anyone deserves an extra bonus this year, it's you, Jim.

MARY: *(To Jim.)* George is right. You are always here before everyone else, and you're the last one to leave at night.

GEORGE: *(To Jim.)* And Mr. Barnes is always giving you extra accounts. What more could a boss want?

JIM: Thanks. You're right. I do deserve this bonus. In fact, I have a meeting with Mr. Barnes in a few minutes. I'll ask him then.

(Mary collects some files from Jim's desk. Mary and George start to exit.)

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MARY: Good luck, Jim.

GEORGE: *(To Jim.)* Let us know how it all turns out.

(George and Mary exit. Jim stands up, straightens his tie, and smooths out his shabby suit coat.)

JIM: *(To himself.)* I really need this bonus. Without it, I'll never be able to get Della something nice for Christmas.

(Lights dim on office. Spotlight up on Mr. and Mrs. Jones.)

MR. JONES: I've often heard Jim complain about his boss, Mr. Barnes.

MRS. JONES: Indeed! It seems this terrible economy has not affected him. He continues to live quite comfortably in a large house in the suburbs while his employees struggle to make ends meet.

MR. JONES: The rich keep getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer. That's what I always say!

(Spotlight down on Mr. and Mrs. Jones. Lights up on office. Mr. Barnes enters. He is an imposing, no-nonsense man.)

MR. BARNES: *(Gruffly.)* Good morning, Jim.

JIM: *(Flustered.)* Good morning, sir.

MR. BARNES: Do you have those figures I need on the Smith account?

(Jim grabs a file off of his desk and hands it to Mr. Barnes.)

JIM: Right here, sir. *(Pause.)* But if you don't mind, I'd like to trouble you with a small favor.

MR. BARNES: A favor? I don't do favors.

JIM: *(Flustered.)* Well, maybe "favor" is the wrong word. You see, I'd like an increase on my Christmas bonus this year. I've worked very hard putting in long hours and picking up

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extra accounts. It's just that money has been so tight and with Christmas coming—

MR. BARNES: Money is tight for everyone. Your Christmas bonus is more than fair and is the same bonus that everyone in this office is getting. You'll just have to find a way to stretch it further this holiday.

JIM: But, sir—

MR. BARNES: If you want to keep your job here, Jim, you will not speak of this topic again. *(Calms down. Grabs another file.)* Now, I trust that everything with the Smith account is in order. I'll review this file and meet with you later.

JIM: *(Deflated.)* Yes, sir.

(Mr. Barnes exits SR. Jim sits down at his desk and begins to sort files. George and Mary enter and approach him.)

GEORGE: How did it go?

MARY: *(To Jim.)* Did Mr. Barnes increase your Christmas bonus?

JIM: Of course not. I don't know why I even bothered to ask. *(Puts his head in his hands.)* I just have to find a way to get Della a present she deserves. I guess I'll stop by a few shops during my lunch break and see what I can afford. *(Pulls out his pocket watch.)* There's just an hour until lunchtime. *(Starts to put his watch away, suddenly pulls it out again, and excitedly stands up.)* That's it!

(Lights down on scene. Spotlight up on Mr. and Mrs. Jones.)

MRS. JONES: Besides Della's hair, the other possession that Jim and Della treasure is Jim's gold watch.

MR. JONES: It's a splendid timepiece. I believe Jim told me that it once belonged to his father and to his grandfather before him.

MRS. JONES: That's right. Jim often looks at it on the sly, due to the old leather strap that he uses in place of a chain.

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(Spotlight down on Mr. and Mrs. Jones. Lights up on office.)

JIM: *(To Mary and George.)* I'll head out on my lunch break and see how much money I can get for my watch.

MARY: Are you sure?

GEORGE: *(To Jim.)* Mary's right. That watch means so much to you.

JIM: *(Looks at watch, hesitant.)* I know. It has been in my family for many years...

MARY: It's such a wonderful timepiece, Jim. Della will understand if you can't get her a gift this year.

GEORGE: *(To Jim.)* I'm not going to be able to get my wife anything, either. *(Pause.)* But, then again, I never remember to get her gifts, so that's nothing new!

MARY: *(Disapprovingly.)* Oh, George!

(Jim looks at his watch.)

JIM: Thank you for the advice. But this watch is only an object, and Della deserves something really special for Christmas. *(Stands up and stuffs his watch back into his pocket.)* My mind is made up. At lunchtime, I'll go to Lowery's Pawn Shop and see how much she'll give me for my watch.

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: Later that day. Lights are dim. Spotlight up on Mr. and Mrs. Jones.)

MRS. JONES: This is Madame Sofronie's Salon! This is where I get my hair done! (*Pouting.*) Not that you ever notice!

MR. JONES: Of course, I do, dear. Your hair always looks lovely.

MRS. JONES: Oh, really? And did you say anything when I came home yesterday after getting my hair styled?

MR. JONES: Oh...well...I...uh...

MRS. JONES: (*Crosses her arms.*) That's what I thought.

(*Spotlight down on Mr. and Mrs. Jones. Lights up on Madame Sofronie's Hair Goods. There is a counter CS with a sign that reads, "Madame Sofronie's Hair Goods of All Kinds." Salon Clerk is standing behind the counter. Della is at the counter wearing a brown coat and her hair is tucked under a shabby brown hat.*)

CLERK: (*Snobbishly.*) May I help you?

DELLA: Yes, you may. I would like to speak to Madame Sofronie to see if she is interested in purchasing my hair.

CLERK: Madame Sofronie only buys the most exquisite hair. By the looks of you, I can't imagine that your hair will be satisfactory. I will fetch her for you, but I would not get your hopes up.

(*Clerk exits SR. Madame Sofronie and Clerk enter.*)

MADAME: (*To Clerk, indicating Della.*) And who is this young woman?

CLERK: Madame, this woman is interested in selling her hair to you. I told her that you are very selective with the hair you purchase.

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MADAME: (*Haughtily.*) That is correct. (*To Della.*) Come here, my dear, and let me take a look at you. And do take off that dreadful hat!

(*Della steps forward slowly and removes her hat. Her hair spills out dramatically.*)

CLERK: Oh, my!

MADAME: I am simply stunned!

DELLA: I know that you probably only buy the most beautiful hair in the world, but I take such good care of my hair and I haven't cut it in years. Surely, you can use it to make a wig that would fetch you a good sum.

(*Madame runs her hands through Della's hair and inspects it.*)

MADAME: This is some of the most beautiful hair I've ever seen. It will make an amazing wig. (*Pause. Thinks.*) I'll give you 20 dollars for it.

DELLA: That's wonderful! (*Momentarily upset.*) But you'd better cut it quickly before I change my mind.

MADAME: I will take good care of you. This will only take a moment.

DELLA: I can't believe I've been growing out my hair for so long and now it will be gone in only a moment.

[END OF FREEVIEW]