# Her Gift--and His

**Here is a brilliant and unique Christmas Story from the pen of the late O. Henry, now recognized as one of the world's greatest story-tellers. It is a charming tale, full of character, sentiment—and surprises!**

One dollar and ninety-four cents. That was all. And seventy-four cents of it was in coppers saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher, until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and ninety-four cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing left to do but to flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which indicates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, sobs, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsidizing from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at $7.50 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the look-out for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box, into which no letter would go, and an electric button, from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name of "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity, when its possessor was being paid thirty dollars per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to twenty dollars, the letters of "Dillingham" looked blurred, as though they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming "D." But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim," and greatly hugged by Mrs. Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder-rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a grey cat walking a grey fence in a grey back yard. To-morrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only one dollar and ninety-four cents with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every cent she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated; they always are. Only one dollar and ninety-four cents to buy a present for Jim! Her Jim!

Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him, something fine and rare and sterling, something just a little bit near to being worthy the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in a $7.50 flat? A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair, and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch, that had been his father's and his grandfather's; the other was Della's hair. Had the Queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out of the window some day to dry, just to depreciate her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knees and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still, while a tear or two splashed on the worn, red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts, and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out of the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off, and let's have a sight at the looks of it!"

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars!" said Madame, lifting the mass with a practiced hand.

"Give it to me quick!" said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings! Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking 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 turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob-chain, simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone, and not by meretricious ornamentation, as all good things should do.

It was even worthy of the watch. 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. Eighteen dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the two dollars. With that chain on his watch Jim might properly be anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly, on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas, and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls, which made her look wonderfully like a truant 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 Coney Island chorus-girl. But what could I do? Oh, what could I do with one dollar and ninety-four 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.

Della looked long and anxiously in the mirror.

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

"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package, you may see why you had me going awhile at first."

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy, and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay the combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped in a downtown window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoiseshell, with jewelled rims, just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now they were hers; but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted ornaments were gone.

"Dell," he said, "I sold my watch to buy the combs for you!"

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob-chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair, away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered:

"Please, Heaven, make him think I am still pretty!"

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

Jim stepped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at scent of a quail. His eyes were fixed upon 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 fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"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 laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet, even after the hardest mental labor.

"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.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too! It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on, with a sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction.

Seven dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The Magi brought wonderful gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with the dim eyes and a smile, and say:

"My hair grows so fast, Jim." And then Della leapt up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!"

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull, precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

"Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over the 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 tumbled down on the couch, and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

"Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep them awhile. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on!"

The Magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men— who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house.

But, in a last word to the wise of these days, let it be said of all who give gifts, these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the Magi.

### Christmas, 1919.

Again, the days bring Christmas Day,
The day of the Holy Story!
And songs of glee are in the air,
And merry bells peal everywhere
For the Holy Child Who came to earth
And chose a stable for His birth
And stripped Himself of His glory.

"Peace on earth, good-will to men!"
We hear the angels singing,
And our hearts rebound to the gladsome sound,
And we set the bells a-ringing!

Eager, we welcome thoughts of peace,
Banish our long-worn sadness:
Glad that the battle's noise is dim,
Glad for the thought of gladness!

Anxious to spread some joy and mirth
Where hearts were full of sorrow;
Clear, from the star of the Baby King,
Rays of the brightness borrow.

Cast away care, ye sons of men!
Set aside gloom and sinning;
Into the stable, with the sheep,
Come, with the shepherds' winning.

Ease from the pain of yesterday
Strength for a brave to-morrow;
Purest joy for the King's birthday,
And a heart's surcease from sorrow.

"Peace on earth, good-will to men!"
Still, I hear them singing!
"Peace on earth," 'tis come at last!
"Good-will to men," as their wings brush past;
And hearts have found the Christmas joy
While the Christmas bells are ringing!

### Watching the Falling Snow.

Fall, Magic snow, in great white flakes, and still;
Mantle old Mother Earth in radiant white;
Cover the sweeping plains, the valleys fill,
Crown all the hill-tops with a hazy light,
This winter's night.

Fall, kindly words, in great heart-whispers fall;
Mantle the aching hearts lest they increase;
Cover the wounded souls, the friendless call,
Crown all the restless wth a wreath of peace,
Ere kind words cease.

When the children have had their fun from the Christmas tree, convert it into a Christmas tree for the birds by putting it outside and trimming it with suet, crusts and popcorn.


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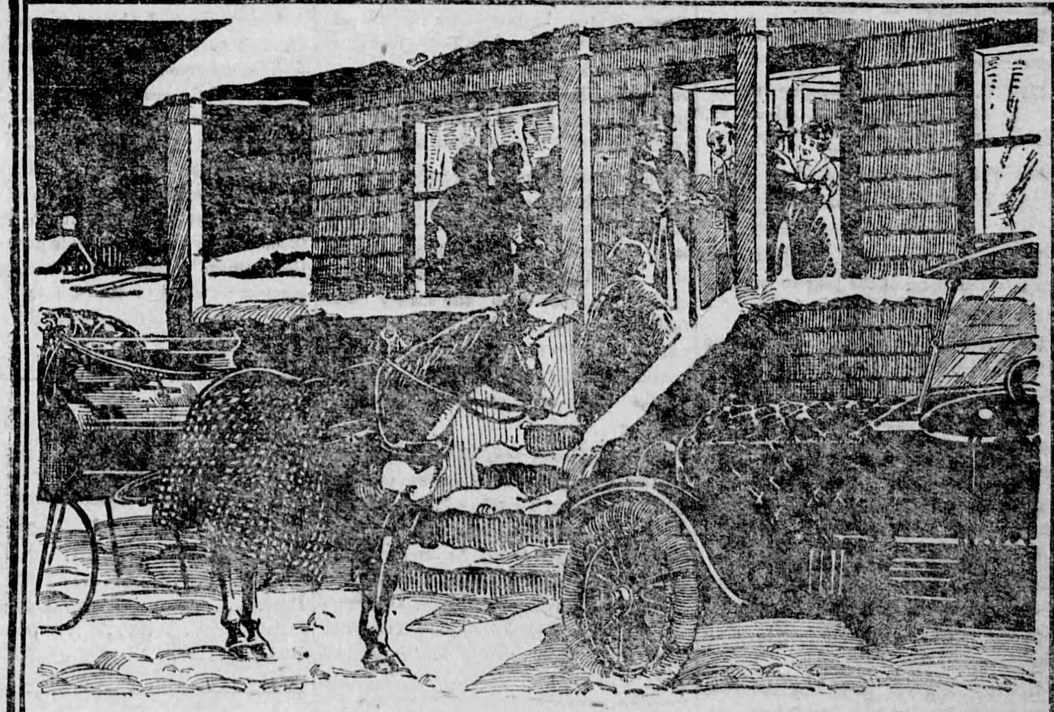

**EASING UP**

The earth has delivered her bounty—provided for her own. Contented, she sleeps the winter months.

And the men who worked with her, who toiled in her furrows and delivered the harvest—they, too, have earned a rest. Thoughts may turn to hospitality and social evenings. The

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