

## The Gift of the Magi Summary

Writer: O. Henry | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

*Della and Jim's poverty and love: Della and Jim are a very poor couple. They live in a small, cheap flat in New York City that costs only eight dollars a week. The flat is so cheap that no letter fits into the mailbox downstairs, and the electric doorbell does not work either.*

**Della and Jim's poverty and love:** Della and Jim are a very poor couple. They live in a small, cheap flat in New York City that costs only eight dollars a week. The flat is so cheap that no letter fits into the mailbox downstairs, and the electric doorbell does not work either. These small details show how difficult their life is. Jim once earned thirty dollars a week, but now his income has fallen to only twenty dollars. With this money it is very hard to pay for rent, food, clothes, and other needs. So Della spends every penny very carefully and saves little by little. Even after trying for so long, she manages to save only one dollar and eighty-seven cents. Out of that, sixty cents are in small coins. To save this money she had to bargain with shopkeepers for many days, and she even felt embarrassed. Still, she never gave up.

This poverty makes their life difficult, but it cannot reduce their love. Della has only one wish: to give Jim a beautiful gift for Christmas. The lack of money cannot stop her, because Jim is the most important person in her life. Della thinks that seeing Jim happy will make all her struggles worthwhile. On the other hand, Jim also loves Della deeply. He knows how careful Della is with money and how hard she tries to save. Their home is small, their life is tough, and their income is low, yet the love and care they show for each other is their greatest strength. The lack of money has not weakened their relationship. Instead, even in poverty, they want to make each other happy, and this selfless love is the central idea of the story.

**Della's most valuable possession and her sacrifice:** The most precious and proud possession in Della's life was her long, thick, beautiful brown hair. In the story, it is said that if the Queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the air shaft, Della would happily let her hair hang out the window to dry, just to show the queen that her jewels were nothing compared to Della's hair. This comparison shows that Della's hair was a symbol of her beauty, confidence, and womanhood. But Della faced a difficult truth. She had only one dollar and eighty-seven cents to buy Jim a Christmas gift. With so little money, she could not buy anything good. Della knew how precious Jim was to her. So she felt she had to make a big decision for Jim's happiness. At last, Della decided to give up her most beloved possession. She quickly ran to Madame

Sofronie's shop, where hair was bought and sold. There, Della cut her long hair and sold it for twenty dollars.

Cutting her hair was emotionally painful for her. When the hair fell to the floor, it was as if it broke a little piece of her heart. Still, she held on to her smile, because her mind was filled with only one person, Jim. After selling her hair, Della searched the whole city for a gift. After visiting many shops, she finally found a beautiful platinum chain. It was simple and plain, but perfect for Jim's gold watch. To Della, it felt as if the chain was made only for him. She paid the full twenty-one dollars for it, and after that she had only eighty-seven cents left. Della's action shows the depth of her love. She sacrificed her most valuable possession to buy a gift for Jim. This selfless act becomes the strongest example of true love in the story.

**Della's new hair, fear, and waiting:** After selling her hair and returning home, Della looked in the mirror and became frightened when she saw her short hair for the first time. Her long hair had been a major part of her beauty, but now her head was covered with small, curly locks. Della felt as if she looked like a little schoolboy. She wondered whether Jim would feel sad when he saw her, or whether he would think she looked less beautiful. Jim had always loved her long hair. Still, Della tried to calm herself. She decided that whatever happened, she must stay strong. She arranged her hair as well as she could, curled it neatly, and then lit the stove to prepare dinner. Only one thought filled her mind: she wanted Jim to be happy when he saw her.

At exactly seven o'clock, Della heard Jim's footsteps. Her heart began to beat fast. She whispered a small prayer, "Please God, let Jim still think I am beautiful." Holding the gift in her hand, she waited near the door. When Jim entered the room, he stopped suddenly. He stared at Della with an expression she could not understand. It was not anger or surprise, but something strange and unreadable. Jim stood so silently that Della became even more afraid. She thought he must be shocked by her new appearance. The moment was full of tension. Della realized that Jim's first look at her was the hardest test she had ever faced. This scene shows Della's inner fear, her deep love, and her fear of losing Jim's affection.

**Jim's sacrifice and irony:** Della first tells Jim that she has cut and sold her long hair only to buy him a beautiful Christmas gift. Jim stays silent for a moment, but he does not get angry. He understands how deeply Della loves him. So he accepts the fact that she cut her hair. Then Jim gives Della his own gift. When she opens the package, she finds the expensive set of combs she had admired for a long time in a Broadway shop window. The combs were beautiful, decorated with jewels, and would have looked perfect in her long hair. Seeing the gift, Della screams with joy, but immediately breaks down crying, because she no longer has the long hair

needed to wear the combs.

At this moment, the greatest irony of the story appears. Della sold her hair to buy Jim a gold watch chain. And Jim sold his most precious possession, his family's gold watch, to buy the combs for Della. As a result, Jim cannot use the chain that Della gave him, and Della cannot use the combs that Jim gave her. Both sacrificed their most valuable possessions to make each other happy. But because of these sacrifices, the gifts become useless. This is the dramatic irony of the story. However, within this irony lies the deepest truth. The real value of the gifts is not in their price or their use, but in the sacrifice, love, and selfless feeling behind them. Jim and Della are the true wise ones, because they are willing to give up everything for love.

**The lesson of the story and the true Magi:** At the end of the story, the writer gives us an important lesson. Della and Jim are very poor. Their life is full of hardship. But they love each other so deeply that they do not hesitate to sacrifice their most valuable possessions. Della sells her long, beautiful hair to make Jim happy. And Jim sells his family's gold watch to buy an expensive set of combs for Della. As a result, Jim cannot use the chain Della gives him, because he no longer has the watch. And Della cannot use the combs Jim gives her, because she no longer has long hair. But according to the writer, this is not something to be sad about. Because the real value of a gift is not its use, but the love that comes with it.

This is the lesson of the story. True love does not require expensive things. It requires sacrifice, sincerity, and affection. When someone is willing to give up their best possession for another person's happiness, that love becomes the greatest of all. In the last line of the story, the writer calls Della and Jim the "Magi." The Magi were the three wise men who brought gifts for baby Jesus on the first Christmas. They understood the true meaning of giving. O. Henry believes that Della and Jim are just like them. Because they understand that selfless love is the greatest gift. In the writer's eyes, Jim and Della are the real Magi. Their sacrifice and love form the most beautiful and timeless message of the story.