

The Gift of the Magi

A musical play.

Music, lyrics and book by

Mark Mitchell

based on the short story by O. Henry.

Characters in the play:	Balthazar	Wiseman (Tenor)
	Gaspar	Wiseman (Baritone)
	Melchior	Wiseman (Bass)
	Della Young	a young wife (Soprano)
	Jim Young	her loving husband (Baritone)
	Mme. Sophronie	a wig maker (Alto)
	Sophronie's Shop Girls (3)	SSA
	Mr. Balthazar	a pawn broker (Baritone)
	Balthazar's Shop Girls (2)	SS
	Carolers	SATB
	Fiddler	
	Woman Customer (Sc.2)	<i>non-singing</i>

The Play

Prologue	the Magi depart
Scene 1	Jim leaves for work. They exchange endearments.
Scene 2	Madame Sophronie's Wig Shop
Scene 3	Della and Jim reflect
Scene 4	Balthazar's Pawn Shop
Scene 5	Jim comes home. They exchange gifts.
Epilogue	the Magi return

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PROLOGUE

It is night. Three men have gathered in a simple room in ancient Babylon. They are learned and cultured; they are not poor, but neither are they rich or ostentatious. Balthazar stands by an open window. Melchior is sitting on a stool in the corner, reading from a scroll. Gaspar sits at a rude table, calculating, surrounded by several ancient astronomical books and instruments.

BALTHAZAR The stars are full tonight,
The air is clear and light.
What say you, brothers?
Perhaps this is the night
of the sign!

My heart hears the desert call to me:
Quietly, peacefully it sighs!

MELCHIOR Behold, a virgin shall conceive
And shall bear a son.

BALTHAZAR And deep from within its breast, my heart
Yearningly, longingly replies!

GASPAR Searching the prophecies we gaze nightly on the stars
Watching for the coming of the promised one:
David's Son,

GASPAR &
MELCHIOR Who shall reign in justice and pow'r;

ALL Waiting in patience for the hour.

BALTHAZAR Each night I am drawn ponder in
Solitude: marveling, serene.

MELCHIOR For unto us a child is born,
A son is given.

BALTHAZAR To look on this great creation and
Contemplate what it all can mean.

GASPAR Ye planets through all your motions
Are following Eloheim's will,

MELCHIOR There shall come a Star out of Jacob
and a scepter shall rise from Israel.

GASPAR Proving your glory and magnificence,
Proving his pow'r by your obedience.

ALL Near is the time your King shall arise.
Give us the sign: God's finger is in the skies!

[a blinding flash is followed by a slowly dissipating glow: a new star has appeared]

BALTHAZAR Such splendid beauty now delights my eye!

MELCHIOR But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah...

GASPAR My soul is quivering like this fiery sky.

MELCHIOR ... out of thee shall He come forth!
There's but one thing this can signify.

ALL The Prince of Truth and Light
Is born this night!

MELCHIOR But thou, Bethlehem...

ALL Some treasure rare
Would now I bear
To offer there...

EXEUNT

End of Scene

SCENE 1

A New York street ca. 1900-1910. There is a street musician with a violin who plays and a choir of carolers sing "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen".

As the music fades, Jim hurries down the street and enters his humble flat. Simple Christmas decorations brighten the room. A nativity scene on the mantel depicts the Magi offering their gifts to the Christ child. Della is sitting at a small table sewing a vest.

JIM I'm back with the chops, Della: our Christmas feast is prepared!

DELLA Hmm. Well then, it's like every dinner is Christmas dinner 'round here, isn't it?

JIM Ha ha. [as in, "Very funny". *He deposits the chops and removes his coat*] Come over here for a moment, Jim.

She is just finishing sewing and lifts up the vest. She helps him on with it in front of a small mirror.

O, you look dandy, Jim, really you do. Quite presentable.

JIM You're a wonder, Dell', a true wonder. How I ever kept myself properly clothed before I you came along I'll never know.

DELLA *Well*, the future Dr. James Dillingham Young, renowned physician, philanthropist, and pillar of the city of New York cannot be seen dragging around town dressed like a common chimney sweep, now can he?

JIM Hmm. [*mimicking her 'Well'*] *Well*, before I start giving away my millions to local charities, I'd better finish medical school first, don't you think?

DELLA [*she waves it off*] Hmff! Details.

JIM Perhaps, but I would have trouble giving a beggar change for a doughnut these days. [*serious now*] Can't even buy my sweetheart a proper present, and tomorrow Christmas, our first Christmas together as husband and wife. [*he sits backwards on one of the chairs, facing away from her*] Perhaps we were wrong, Dell'. If we'd waited you would still be living in a fine house, enjoying everything money could buy, as you deserve.

She comes up close behind him and puts her chin on his shoulders, both hands on his arms. They remain thus a moment. She brightens.

DELLA Look, Jim, I've fixed the pocket. You won't have to worry about your watch falling out any longer. [*she runs to the dresser and fetches a fine looking pocket watch; they both admire it a moment*]

JIM It is a beauty, isn't it? Belonged to my father and his father before him. At least we have one thing worth owning around here, I guess.

DELLA [*she puts it in the pocket*] Here you are, a time-piece fit for the finest physician. [*her 'f's' were a little exaggerated; he wipes his eye as though she has spit in it*] Beast! I don't know why I bother, sometimes.

JIM [*he grabs her*] 'Cause you're so in love.

DELLA *[quietly]* Oh yes. That's right. *[she kisses him tenderly, sighs]* Don't you worry about what money can or can't buy, my darling. Money can't buy this— can't buy love. I should know.

JIM I don't deserve such a jewel.

DELLA Now you're talking sense. *[he snatches the pin holding her hair in place; It falls down her back]* Oh! *[he laughs as she quickly replaces the hair, looking in the mirror]* See? There, you just proved it.

JIM Oh well. It was worth risking the Dellian wrath to see that hair of yours fall down around your body. *[he is standing behind her and gently strokes her hair a moment]* I think I was mistaken just now. We have two great possessions in this household.

DELLA *[she giggles]* Dr. Young of the silver tongue!

JIM Sure you're not bothered that we can't celebrate in style this year?

DELLA Who says we can't?

JIM My friend, Martin Theodore Pockets, that's who.

DELLA Martin Theodore? Never heard of him.

JIM Well, he comes with me wherever I go. Call him MT for short: MT Pockets. Look here. *[he speaks to his trouser pocket]* Say, MT, what are the chances of our having a few presents under the tree tomorrow. *[he wiggles the edge of his pocket to make it "talk"]* **“Somewhere between poor and miserable”**. Maybe a nice fat turkey? **“Fraid not. It's chops again for the Youngs”** You're a real party pooper, aren't you Pockets? **“Well, it's only 'cause I don't get fed but once a week, and then it's pretty meager fare!”**

DELLA Well, *Mr. Pockets*, where there's a will there's a way.

JIM **“Say Jim, that's some girl. Bright, charming and cute as a... a button, I'd say.”** Yes, well, you stick with the buttons, Pockets, and leave the girl to me.

[she laughs as the music starts]

DELLA I believe it, Jim. We'll have a fine Christmas after all, you'll see.

Don't you worry,
Here we two will take our pleasure.
You're my treasure
Just as you are.

[she examines her wedding ring]

Here's my safety:
With this ring I feel protected
Feel connected
Whether near or far.

Buy me a palace
Or golden dove:
I'd be poorer
If I lost your love.

JIM Lovely Della,
Can you know how I adore you
I implore you
Stay as you are.
Hold me, love me,
Feel my glowing ardor shimmer
Feel it glimmer
Like the morning star.

Make me a doctor
Of worldly fame:
I'd feel humble
Whisp'ring Della's name.

DELLA I don't care if you never have fame
I love your name.

While the world wanders
I've found the path of my life.

JIM Let the world wander
I've found the loveliest wife.

DELLA Here's my treasure.

JIM Here's my happiness.

DELLA Here's my pleasure.

JIM Here in our little nest.

DELLA Surely I've never been richer than now.

JIM Never was freer than after our vow.

BOTH Richer or poorer
Of one thing I'm sure:

DELLA Our covenant of love
Is eternal, beyond time.

JIM Our covenant of love will endure,
I will love you,
For you are my treasure,
My Della mine.

DELLA You are my treasure,
are mine.

Jim leaves. Della goes to the mantel and takes out a small bag and empties it onto the table. She quickly counts it up. She's on the verge of tears.

DELLA Oh! Scraping and saving six months and all I have to show is a paltry dollar and eighty-seven cents! I won't be able to find anything decent for a dollar eighty-seven.

She walks to the mirror and lets her hair fall down below her waist. After a moment she whirls away from the mirror, doing her hair back up.

Oh, I hope you don't kill me, boy!

She quickly grabs her hat and coat and goes out the door.

SCENE 2

A downtown street. There is a shop with a sign that reads: "Madame Sofronie's: Hair Goods of All Kinds." Della walks in shyly. Sophronie, who has been busy under the counter, suddenly jumps up, startling Della. (During the scene Sophronie moves around incessantly, and manifests a tendency to prod and twirl Della, confusing her somewhat).

SOPHRO. Well, hello my dear. Come to look at those combs again? [*she gets a set of combs from the window and shows them to Della*] Let's try them on. [*she puts them in Della's hair. Della looks at herself in a mirror*] They're perfect! Pure tortoise shell, just the shade for your hair. They're on special, only twenty one dollars.

DELLA They are magnificent. I've admired them a hundred times... [*taking them out and handing them back*] But no, I've not come to buy the combs.

SOPHRO. Let me guess: you've always wanted to be a blonde. It's a sin, but say the word and we'll have a *nouveau toi* in no time.

DELLA [*hesitant*] Thank you, but...

Sophonie puts a finger to Della's lips and sings:

SOPHRO. Some people are given the gift to serve others.
We're all brothers...
Well, you know what I mean.

DELLA [*spoken, aside*] That remains to be seen.

SOPHRO. Well, Madame Sophronie aspires to the highest in service,
It's my purpose,
So please, don't be nervous.

Come on in to Madame Sophro'
Let your inner fantasies go.
Name your pleasure, Mademoiselle:
I can make you anyone else.
Want a head of curlicues?
Want a fancy 'doo?
Tease it, twirl it,
Twist it, curl it,
Bring it for a rendezvous:
I can make a new you.

I realize nobody's gettin' no younger:
We all hunger to be pretty and lean—
(You know what I mean,)
So, honey, I rake in the money for making
The ladies feel breath-taking.

Come on in to Madame Sophro'
What's your preference, betcha I know!
Movie stars or sweet southern belles,
We all envy somebody else.
Even if you don't have a clue,

Just some revenue,
If you've got it, you have bought it!
With imagination and glue
We can make a new you.

GIRL 1 | Come on in to Madame Sophronie,
You can trust her, she's not a phony.
You know her services are in great demand,
She only wants to lend a helping hand.

GIRL 2 | Come on in to Madame Sophro',
You can trust her, I oughta know.
She really wants to serve in any way that she can,
She just wants to lend a helping hand.

GIRL 3 | Come on in to Madame Sophronie's store,
She'll serve whoever walks through the door.
Her talents are in demand,
Just let her lend a helping hand.

SOPHRO.
& GIRLS | You don't need a genius IQ,
Just some revenue!
Feed your passion
For high fashion.

SOPHRO. | You'll be stunning.

GIRLS | Come on, the meter's running.

SOPHRO.
& GIRLS | This could be your greatest debut.

[big jungle drum dance break]

SOPHRO | If you're feeling hunchbacked-ive

GIRLS | She'll make you attractive.

SOPHRO | Just imagination and glue
And I will make a new you!

[song ends]

DELLA | Well, Madame, I can see you enjoy your work, but, actually, I'm not here to buy a
new me: I want to sell the old one.

SOPHRO. | *[out of breath]* I beg your pardon?

DELLA | You make wigs here, don't you?

SOPHRO. | Yes, yes of course.

DELLA | Will you buy my hair?

SOPHRO. I see, I see. It is truly fine. I've not seen any better. [*she feels Della's hair*] Twenty dollars... but... are you sure dear?

DELLA Give it to me quick.

Sophrone sings as the girls go to work on Della's hair. Della is laid back on a chair, out of view, and when she sits up her hair has been backed to within a few inches.

SOPHRO. Leave it up to Madame Sophro'
Just sit back, dear, here we go.
It's a treasure, Mademoiselle,
That will be a pleasure to sell.
Close your eyes dear, take it from me,
You don't want to see,
To fill your purse it
Will be worth it.
And I *may* make some dough-re-mi...
[*spoken*]
Say! Pr'aps I'll make a new me!

Could I interest you in a wig? A nice head of blonde hair, pr'aps? I could let this one go for twenty dollars... [*as she says "this one", she whips the wig off of her own head!*]

DELLA [*frightened*] No, no thank you. Good-bye.

[*she exits hurriedly as a rich old woman makes her entrance*]

WOMAN [*looking at wigs*] Do you have something in a brunette?

SOPHRO. Soon, madam,... very soon. [*cut to black*]

SCENE 3

The background is dark and spotlights are on Jim and Della, who stand separately on stage. They are both alone in their thoughts.

DELLA Oh Lord, what have I done?
 They took my treasure for a song,
 A tattered bill, and sent me on my way.
 But now that I've begun,
 It doesn't matter right or wrong,
 I couldn't think of any other way.

 So now the piper's paid,
 this is the bargain that I made:
 I only hope it will be worth the pain.
 To see the smile upon his face
 I know I'd gladly do it all again,
 Do it all for him!

JIM Oh Lord, what shall I do?
 It's sure my treasure will be gone:
 A tattered bill, and I will turn away.
 But then, it's also true,
 It doesn't matter right or wrong,
 I just can't think of any other way.

 And when the piper's paid,
 I hope the bargain that I make
 Gives compensation that is worth the pain.
 To see the smile upon her face
 I know I'd gladly do it all again,
 I will gladly do it all again!

DELLA This is my gift, this is my sacrifice.
 To show my love, this is an easy price!

JIM This is my gift, this is my offering.
 To show my love, this is the gift I bring!

BOTH This is my gift, my devotion, my delight.

JIM This is my love.

BOTH This is my gift, this is my love!

DELLA But still, I can't help worrying about my tattered hair,
 The thing he took such pleasure in now vanished into air.

JIM What will I say when Della asks how much her present cost?
 Will she think I'm a fool because my heirloom has been lost?

DELLA Just please, God, let him think that I am still a pretty wife.

JIM I only want to show her she's the wonder of my life.

DELLA Oh please, God, let him understand

JIM Please let her realize.

BOTH My one eternal treasure is
The true love in his/her eyes!

SCENE 4

Back on the Street. Jim stands before a pawn shop, the sign for which reads: "BALTHAZAR'S BAZAAR, Jewelry Bought and Sold". Balthazar is behind the counter and two shop girls are in the shop with him. He sings cheerily:

BALTH. Balthazar! Balthazar!
 Need some cash?
 Well you can thank your lucky stars
 'Cause at Balthazar's, Balthazar's
 I'm dealin', no stealin'
 People come from near and far
 To make a deal at Balthazar's.

 Do you have a sterling silver ring,
 Or anything
 That has a fine design—
 Genuine?
 Looking for a fair and generous guy
 Who will want to buy?

[music continues softly as Jim enters]

JIM How do you do.

BALTH. And how may I help you, sir?

JIM I'd like you to take a look at this watch.

BALTH. *[he looks for a moment and shakes his head]* What a shame.

JIM What do you mean? The watch is in perfect condition.

BALTH. Aye, that it is. And I had the perfect fob to complement it, but just an hour ago...

JIM No, no. I'm not looking for a fob. I'd like to sell the watch.

BALTH. I see, I see. It is truly fine. I've not seen any better. *[he examines the watch]* Twenty dollars... but...

JIM Balthazar, O Balthazar!
 You don't know how lucky you are!
 I'm a man who is in desperate need.
 I'll proceed,
 Just please don't mislead me
 Balthazar, O Balthazar.
 Life is so bizarre!
 I will risk the only treasure I own,
 I'll sigh and moan
 To get a loan
 From greedy Balthazar.

[he hands over the watch and waits expectantly for the money. Balthazar is too busy admiring the watch. The music continues]

I'm in a bit of a hurry, I've got to get to Sophronie's before she closes: buying a Christmas present for my wife.

GIRL 1 Sophronie! You'd better watch yourself in there, sir.

GIRL 2 We've got plenty of nice things right here I'm sure she'd like.

JIM No, there's a set of combs in Sophronie's shop that Della's had her eye on for months.

BOTH GIRLS Oh, I see...

[the singing starts up again— all sing at once!]

BALTH. Balthazar! Balthazar!
Honesty
Is what the city knows me for
'Cause at Balthazar's, Balthazar's
It's freaky, I'm so squeaky!
They'd all say how smart you are
To trust the honest Balthazar!

JIM Balthazar, O Balthazar!
You don't know how lucky you are!
I'm a man who is in desperate need.
I'll proceed
Just please don't bleed me
Balthazar, O Balthazar.
Don't push me too far!
I don't want to have to ask you again,
I won't complain.
Don't profane,
Just pay me, Balthazar.

GIRLS Just beware of Madame Sophro',
She's the biggest cheater I know.
O, the stories that I could tell,
Balthazar could tell you as well.
Please believe what I'm telling you
Every word is true!
Take precaution,
I ain't joshin'
Buy your gift and bid her adieu
Then hit the avenue.

[Balthazar continues to examine the watch, trying to ignore Jim]

JIM Excuse me.

BALTH. Yes?

JIM Twenty dollars?

BALTH. Oh, right.

[Balthazar produces a bill but still clings to it. They play a little tug-o-war with it. With the final chord Jim yanks it out of his hands, and the stage cuts to black.]

SCENE 5

Back in the Young's apartment, Della enters excitedly. She takes off her coat and throws it on a chair. Heading for the stove, she suddenly remembers the package in her coat pocket and hurries back to get it. She looks around for a moment and decides to put it on the mantel, behind the magi scene. That done, she stands pensive for a moment and slowly walks over to peer in the mirror. She is horrified and whispers:

DELLA Oh! Oh my. [*she tries to fix it up.*] If Jim doesn't kill me before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?

A cheerful Jim enters and shuts the door. He has a small package. He turns to her:

JIM Hello Dell— [*he just stares*]

DELLA Jim, darling, 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 out 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.

JIM You've cut off your hair?

DELLA Cut it off and sold it. Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?

JIM [*looks around the room curiously*] You say your hair is gone?

DELLA You needn't look for it. 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, but nobody could ever count my love for you. [*she is nervous about his strange expression and tries to change the subject*] Shall I put the chops on, Jim?... Jim?

The music starts as Jim suddenly comes to himself, smiles and enfolds Della in a tender embrace. They remain thus for several moments

JIM Don't make any mistake, Dell, 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 a while at first.

Della rips open the package, takes out the combs and screams with delight. Suddenly the realization dawns on her and she begins to cry. Jim takes her in his arms and comforts her. He sings :

It's not a palace
Or golden dove,
Just a token
Of my tender love.

DELLA My hair grows so fast, Jim! [*suddenly she leaps up*] Oh, oh! [*she runs to the mantel and gets his gift.*] I almost forgot about your present. [*he opens it and holds up the job slowly*] Isn't it a 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.

Jim laughs lamely. He flops on a chair, grinning, and beckons her to sit. He sings:

JIM Let's wrap up both our gifts, my pet,
 And put them safely by.
 They're far too nice to use just yet,
 Come close, I'll tell you why.

 The watch which was so dear to me,
 That fits your gift so well,
 Was sold to buy the combs, you see:
 A present for my Dell'.

 Then what was my surprise, my dear,
 And what are we to do?
 I thought to be the giver here,
 But got a gift from you.

 It's best to store them, I believe,
 Let's hide them in a chest.
 And have a Merry Christmas Eve,
 The brightest and the best.

DELLA Surely I've never been richer than now.

JIM Never was freer than after our vow.

BOTH Richer or poorer
 Of one thing I'm sure:

DELLA Our covenant of love
 Is eternal, beyond time.

JIM Our covenant of love will endure,
 I will love you,
 For you are my treasure,
 My Della, mine.

DELLA You are my treasure,
 are mine.

They kiss and the stage darkens.

EPILOGUE

The same room we saw in the Prologue. The three Magi enter the room looking worn and weary, having just returned from their long pilgrimage.

BALTHAZAR The hills of my homeland welcome me
 Joyfully, gratefully I rest.

MELCHIOR Now let thy servant go in peace
 According to thy word.

BALTHAZAR The pilgrims are safely home and for
 Guiding us may the star be blessed.

GASPAR Bearing our precious gifts we knelt down before the child
 In the humble dwelling of a carpenter.

GASPAR &
MELCHIOR Struck we were at the gentle strength in his smile,

ALL Bidding us tarry for awhile.

BALTHAZAR Sacred shall be the mem'ry of
 What we saw, what we heard and felt. 8

MELCHIOR Everyone that thirsteth,
 Come ye to the waters,

BALTHAZAR The weight of oppression vanished
 As chilly frost in the sun does melt.

GASPAR We thought we would be the givers of
 Wonderful, beautiful gifts.

MELCHIOR Yea, come buy wine and milk
 Without money, and without price.

GASPAR Praising his glory and magnificence,
 Proving his pow'r by our obedience.

ALL Off-ring those gifts so precious and wise,
 The Givers received that treasure which never dies!

[All cast joins them on stage. They move to the front of the stage and address the audience:]

FULL CAST Wisest of all those who gave and who got
 Are those who offered what cannot be bought.
 They are no fools who can answer this call:
 They are the Magi, the wisest of all.

CURTAIN

The Gift of the Magi

O. Henry

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 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 eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

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

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 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 "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, 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. James 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 backyard. To-morrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which 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 greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 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 of the honour of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an \$8 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 colour 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 knee 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 cluttered 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 practised 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. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly 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 that 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 a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At 7 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. 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, God, 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 the scent of 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 out 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 labour.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain'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 his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight 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 valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

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 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 a while 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 for long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise-shell, 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 adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, 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 leaped 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 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 'em a while. 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 that 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.