



O. Henry

**The Gift of the Magi
And
Other Stories**

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The Gift of the Magi

And Other Stories

By O. Henry

Retold by Nancy Taylor

Level 1

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Introduction

“How can I buy a special Christmas gift for Jim with \$1.87? What am I going to do?” she thinks.

O. Henry’s short stories are often about the difficult times of people in America from 1902 to 1910. In a lot of these stories we visit New York. Other stories take us to Texas and Oklahoma, away from the towns.

Money is a big problem for many people in the stories. They work long days, and they live in cold apartments with only a little food, but people in Texas and Oklahoma have problems with money, too. But in those stories we see people in the fields and on ranches. In some stories, people have money. They don't usually have difficult problems, but they have interesting stories.

O. Henry writes about love problems, too. Is an old man going to find love? Can a young man tell a woman about his love for her? Is a woman going to find the right man?

Many people remember O. Henry’s stories because they think, "How is this story going to finish?" You never know. Then you finish the story and you smile.

O. Henry was William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), a famous short-story writer from the United States. His family lived in North Carolina, and they had very little money. In 1882, William went to Texas and started to write for a newspaper. He had problems with money at work, and the police put him in jail for three years. At that time, he started to write short stories.

In 1902 he moved to New York. There he finished ten books of short stories. One famous book is *Cabbages and Kings*. There are movies of three of his stories.

The Gift of the Magi

The year is 1905. We are on the streets of New York, with its tall buildings, expensive stores, and important people. But what do we know about the little people? Who lives behind that door? Who works in that small, dark office?

Let's open a door and watch two young people on a cold day in December. The apartment is small. It has only two rooms. There are no pictures or photos. We can't see any special things on the table. Hut it is a happy home.

Mr. and Mrs. James (Jim) Dillingham Young live here. It is their first home—at \$8 a week. Jim works six days a week for \$20. Every evening he walks slowly home. His days are long and bis feet are heavy. Hut then he opens the door of the apartment.

There is Mrs. Young—his Della! She is the light in his dark days. She has food on the table for him, and she looks at him with her beautiful brown eyes. Jim always smiles. He is a happy man in his apartment with Delia, and she is happy, too.

This afternoon we can see Della in the apartment. Jim is at work. Della puts her money on the table. She has \$1.87, and tomorrow is Christmas.

“How can I buy a special Christmas gift for Jim with \$1.87? What am I going to do?” she thinks. Della walks across her kitchen. “What can I buy for Jim?”

Della looks at the window. She can see her unhappy face in it. She looks at her long, beautiful hair. Jim always says, “I like to see your hair every morning in the sun. At work, I think about your hair.”

Mr. and Mrs. James D. Young have two special things: Della's hair and Jim's gold watch. The watch was a gift from Jim's lather, and Jim always has it with him.

Sometimes Della says, "Excuse me, Mr. Young. What time is it?" Then Jim smiles, and he takes the gold watch from his coat. He opens the watch and looks at it with love. Then he tells Della the time.

But now Della is thinking about her beautiful hair. Quickly she puts on her thin, black coat and old hat. She goes into the street. She runs to Mrs. Sofronie's store on First Street. The old woman buys hair.

"Can you buy my hair?" Della asks.

Mrs. Sofronie smiles. "I can give you \$20 for it."

"OK. but. please, take it quickly," Della says.

Della sits down and Mrs. Sofronie starts to work. Della doesn't look at her hair on the floor. At three o'clock she takes the \$20 from Mrs. Sofronie and puts on her hat. She runs quickly to Fourth Street and looks in every store. She finds her gift for Jim: a beautiful gold chain for his watch, for \$21.

Della runs home and finishes the Christmas food. She is happy because she has the chain for Jim's watch. Then she sees her hair in the window.

"Is Jim going to love me with short hair?" Della thinks. "But I did it for him. I wanted a gift for him."

At seven o'clock, Della hears Jim at the door. Fie is never late. Della has her gift for him in her hand. The door opens and Jim walks into the kitchen. He looks thin, and he is cold in his old coat and shoes. Then he sees Della's hair. He isn't angry, but he is quiet.

"Jim. talk to me. I'm going to have long hair again one day. But this evening I have a special gift for you. Let's be happy. It's Christmas tomorrow," Della says.



Della sits down and Mrs. Sofronie starts to work

“But...” Jim says. “Where is your beautiful hair?”

“At Mrs. Sofronie’s store. She has my hair now, and I have a gift for you. And, I love you,” Della says.

Jim doesn’t answer. He looks at Della. Then he says, “Della, I loved you with long hair and I love you with short hair. And, I have a special gift for you. too.”

Della opens the gift quickly, and she finds two expensive combs for her long, brown hair. Della knows these combs because she sees them every day in a store window on Fifth Street. She loves them, but now she has no hair for them!

“Jim, they’re beautiful, and in six months I can put them in my hair,” says Della. “But, wait! I have a gift for you.”

Jim opens his gift slowly, and lie looks at it.

“Jim, do you like it? I looked in every store. Give me your watch. Let’s put it on your watch,” says Della.

But Jim doesn’t give Della his watch. He sits down and smiles. “Della, let’s put our gifts away for a year,” he says. “I don’t have my watch. I went to that store near my office. They buy watches there. You can see my watch in their window now, and you have the combs.”

What do we have here? The story of two people. They don’t have a lot of money, but they have a lot of love. And now they are going to have a happy Christmas because they understand about special gifts.



And now they understand about special gifts.

The Art Game

"Jeff, my friend," Andy Tucker says one day, "we aren't making any money. Let's try a new game."

"Well, Andy." Jeff says, "tell me your plan. Hut remember this. I don't want to take money from people."

"We aren't going to *take* money from them. They're going to *buy* things from us," Andy says.

"But that's our old game. What's new?" Jeff asks.

"We're playing a child's game here. People buy our things for one dollar. Let's move to Pittsburgh. We can find some millionaires and make a lot of money," Andy says.

"Why do you want to go to Pittsburgh?" Jeff asks.

"The millionaires in Pittsburgh worked for their money. It's new to them. Now they want to buy beautiful, expensive things," Andy says.

"But what are they going to buy from us?" Jeff asks.

"Wait and see," Andy says.

After three days in the bars and restaurants of Pittsburgh, Jeff and Andy meet at their hotel on Thursday evening.

"Let's have a drink. Jeff," Andy says. "I know a Pittsburgh millionaire."

"Where did you meet him?" Jeff asks.

"At a little coffee bar on Twelfth Street. Pittsburgh millionaires don't like expensive restaurants and bars. We talked, and he liked me. His name is Scudder. I went to his house, too. He has \$12,000,00 in the bank, but he's a new millionaire. Now he wants to know about good books, the theater, and beautiful art. He wants to be a gentleman," Andy says.

"How is he going to do that?" Jeff asks.



"Let's have a drink, Jeff," Andy says. "I know a Pittsburgh millionaire."

"He has teachers, and he buys expensive books and pictures," Andy says.

"OK, but what is he going to buy from us?" Jeff asks.

"He has a lot of pictures in his house. He has a famous little gold horse, too. It's from Egypt and it's very old. I asked him about it. He said, 'There are two of these gold horses. I want the other horse, but I can't find it.'"

"We don't know about art. Where can we find a gold horse for Scudder?" Jeff asks.

"Wait and see, my friend," Andy says.

On Friday, Andy comes back to the hotel in the afternoon. He has a bag in his hand.

“Look, Jeff. I was in a little store near here. Look at this,” Andy says. Lie opens the bag.

“Andy!” Jeff says. “Is this a gold horse from Egypt?”

“It is. It was under some old things in the back of the store. I said to the old man, ‘Can I have that horse for \$2?’ He said, ‘That’s a beautiful little thing. Give me \$35 and it’s yours.’”

“What did you give him?” Jeff asks.

“He was happy with \$25, and Scudder is going to be *very* happy. He’s going to buy my little horse from you.”

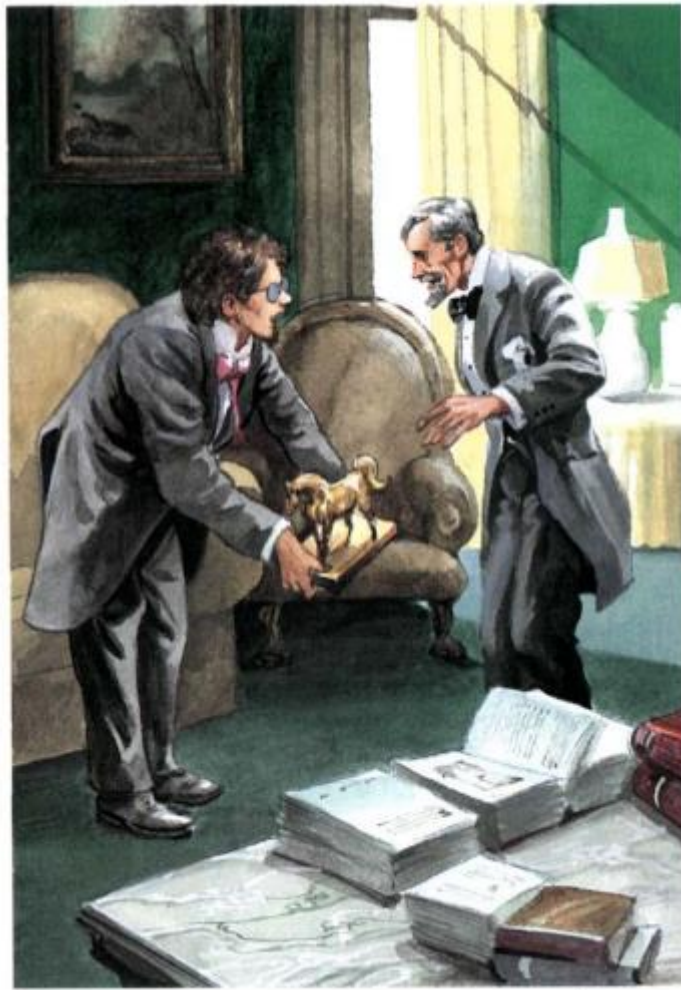
“Why from me?” Jeff asks.

“You’re going to call him. You are a famous art teacher. You want to buy *his* horse,” Andy says.

After Jeff’s telephone call, Mr. Scudder arrives at the hotel. He wants to see the art teacher’s gold horse.

“It’s beautiful!” Mr. Scudder says. “It’s the other horse from Egypt.”

“Yes, yes, I know about your horse. Now I want to buy it. I want to put the two horses in a special place at my art school. I can give you \$2,000 for your horse,” the “art teacher” says.



"It's beautiful!" Mr. Scudder says.

"Never! You can't buy my horse. I'm going to buy yours. Here's \$2,500," Mr. Scudder says.

"OK. With \$2,500 I can buy two or three pictures for my school," the "art teacher" says.

"Now I'm going to have two horses in my bedroom," Mr. Scudder says.

Jeff runs to Andy's room. Andy is looking at his watch. "Did Scudder buy the horse?" he asks.

"Yes. He loved it. The money is in my bag," Jeff says.

"Good, good. Let's go. There's a train to Cincinnati at 10:45," Andy says.

“Why? Let’s stay in Pittsburgh for the weekend. Mr. Scudder is happy and we’re happy. He has two horses and we have \$2,500. No problems,” Jeff says.

“You’re right and wrong. We have \$2,500, but Scudder has only one horse,” Andy says.

“Andy, did you take that horse from his house?” Jeff asks.

“Yes. It wasn’t difficult ”Andy says.

“But why did you tell me that story about the old man and the store near here?” Jeff asks.

“Oh, because you never want to take money from people. Mr. Scudder had a horse for his money,” Andy says.

“But ...”

“Jeff, stop. No questions. Let’s go! The train is waiting,” Andy says.

The Troubadour

Sam Galloway is a troubadour. He moves across Texas and Oklahoma. He goes from place to place and plays music. He tells stories, too, and he talks to people about their good days and their bad days. The ranchers and their families like listening to him, and Sam gets a bed and food and drink for his work.

On this hot summer day, we are at the Merrydew Ranch in Texas. The Merrydews are good people, and their ranch is big. There are always a lot of people in the house, and there is a lot of noise. After six weeks with the Merrydews, Sam is putting his things on his horse and moving to a new place. He wants to go to a ranch with strong coffee, good food, and some quiet people.

That afternoon, Sam arrives at old man Ellison's sheep ranch. Mr. Ellison and his men are very happy with this new visitor. The men sit at a big table in the evenings. They eat and drink well. Then they listen to Sam's stories and his music. Mr. Ellison always wants to hear Sam's story about an old boat, and Sam tells it every evening.

Mr. Ellison is a good rancher, but he is getting old. Now he has problems with his sheep and with the bank. He doesn't always have money for a lot of food and drink. He can't buy things for his house and his ranch. Every day he thinks about his problems. "What am I going to do?" the old man thinks. But at night he listens to Sam Galloway's music and stories and he smiles. He thinks, "Tomorrow is going to be OK."

But it isn't OK. In the morning, Mr. Ellison gets on his horse and goes to the fields. He wants to look at his sheep. On the road he meets a tall young man on a horse.

"Good morning," Mr. Ellison says.



They eat and drink well. Then they listen to Sam's stories and his music.

"Good morning," the young man says. "Are you Peter Ellison?"

"Yes, I am," Mr. Ellison says. "What can I do for you?"

"My name is James King, but people usually call me King James. These are my fields. I don't want your sheep here. Move them or they're going to be dead sheep."

"But, Mr. King, I don't have...," Mr. Ellison starts to say.

"You have one week, Mr. Ellison. Seven days. Goodbye," James King says.

Mr. Ellison arrives home in the early evening. He is quiet and his eyes are unhappy. After a little food, he sits with Sam Galloway at the table.

“Sam, play some music, please.”

“OK, Mr. Ellison, but why are you unhappy this evening? Problems?” Sam asks. A troubadour knows about ranchers’ problems.

“Yes, a very big problem. His name is James King.”

“Oh, King James. I know about him. People talk about him on every ranch in Texas. He has a lot of animals, and he has money in every bank in the country. He’s a difficult man. Don’t go near him,” Sam says.

“That’s the problem,” Mr. Ellison says. “My sheep are in James King’s fields, and he doesn’t want them there. I don’t have any good fields for sheep. But, that’s not *your* problem. Please, play some music for me.”

Sam plays his music, but he watches the old man. King James is going to be a big problem for old Mr. Ellison.

In the morning, Mr. Ellison goes to the store and to the bank. He is looking for an answer to his problems. He talks to some ranchers, but he can’t find an answer.

In the afternoon, Mr. Ellison is looking at his sheep. Suddenly King James comes across the field to him. “Good afternoon, Mr. Ellison,” the young man says. “I want to talk to you. It’s important.”



“These are my fields. I don’t want sheep here.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. King. I don’t have a place for my sheep. I’m looking for a new field for them.” Mr. Ellison says.

“I don’t want to talk about the sheep. I have some questions for you. First, are you from Jackson. Mississippi?”

“Yes, I lived there for twenty-one years,” Mr. Ellison answers.

“Do you know the Reeves family in Jackson?” Mr. King asks.

“Yes, I do. Mrs. Caroline Reeves was my only sister.”

“Mr. Ellison, please, listen to my story. I can remember an important day in 1902. It’s a cold winter day and I am only fifteen years old. I arrive

in Jackson with no family, no food, and no money. Mrs. Caroline Reeves sees me on the street and takes me to her house. She gives me food, a heavy coat, and good shoes. Then she finds a job for me at the Jackson Hotel, and every Sunday for five years I go to her house. She is my friend and my family.

"In 1907, I have some money in the bank. I talk to Mrs. Reeves about my plans. She listens and she gives me some money and a gold watch. I say goodbye and then I go to Texas. I buy my first field and four sheep. Today I have a lot of fields and a lot of sheep because Mrs. Caroline Reeves was good to me one day in 1902.

"I want to be good to you, too. I have a lot of fields. Your sheep can stay here. And, do you have any problems with money?" King James asks.

The old man tells the young man about his problems with the bank and with the ranch.

"You aren't going to have any problems after today. I'm going to put \$2,000 in the bank for you tomorrow morning. I'm going to talk to Mr. Brooks at the store. Buy the things for your house and your ranch. I'm going to give Mr. Brooks the money for them. You're Mrs. Caroline Reeves's brother. That's very special to me," King James says.

Mr. Ellison goes back to his ranch with a smile on his face. He wants to hear some music, but Sam Galloway isn't in the house.

In the evening, Mr. Ellison is drinking coffee at the table. The door opens, and Sam walks in.

"Hello, Sam," Mr. Ellison says. "You're very late. Did you go to Frio for the slay? Play some music for me, please. I'm a happy man and tomorrow is going to be a new day."

But Sam doesn't play any music that night. He sits at the table and looks at Mr. Ellison. "I went to Frio, and I looked for King James. I had your big knife in my coat. He was in the hotel behind the theater. His hand moved to his knife, but I was quick. You aren't going to have any problems with him tomorrow. He's dead," Sam says.

Mr. Ellison is quiet. Then he looks at Sam and says, “Can you play some music now? I can’t understand things this evening. Maybe tomorrow ...”

Money Talks

Number 24 Park Street is a big, expensive house. Old Mr. Anthony Rockwall lives there. He worked for many years, and now he has a lot of money. He is old and he doesn't work. A man drives his car for him. A woman makes his food. A boy brings the newspaper to him. Mr. Rockwall sits in his big chair and smiles. He is a happy man.

Mr. Rockwall calls his son, "Richard, come here. I want to talk to you."

Mr. Rockwall's son comes in and sits down. He is a quiet young man of twenty-one. "Yes, father?"

"Richard, the men on this street are gentlemen. They come from good families and have a lot of money. We aren't a famous old family, but we have a lot of money. My money makes *you* a gentleman, too. Money can open a lot of doors for you," Mr. Rockwall says with a smile.

"It can open *some* doors, father, but not *every* door," Richard says.

"My son, don't say that. We have no problems. Ask people on the street. Ask your friends. What door doesn't open with money?" Mr. Rockwall asks.

"Money can't buy a place at the table of the right people," Richard says.

"You're wrong, young man," his father says, and he looks into his son's eyes. "Son, the families of these men didn't always have a lot of money. They know about work. You make a lot of money with a lot of work."

Richard is quiet.



“Money can open a lot of doors for you,” Mr. Rockwall says with a smile.

“Son, what's the problem? Are you sick? What’s wrong? You can talk to me,” Mr. Rockwall says.

“Father, I'm not sick. I have a good home, an interesting job, and a smart old father. But ...”

“What’s her name?” Mr. Rockwall asks.

“Oh, Father. She’s beautiful and very special. Her name is Ellen Lantry. She’s the only woman for me,” Richard says.

"Talk to her. Dance with her. Walk in the rain with her. She’s going to love you, too." his father says. “You’re a good young man. You’re special, too."

"But she's always with people," Richard says. "I never have any time with her. She never has time for me."

"Richard! Take some money, and buy some time with her. Talk to her about your love," the old man says.

"I can't," Richard says. "She's going to Europe by boat tomorrow morning. She's going to stay there for two years. This evening I'm going to take her to the theater, but it's a very short drive. I'm not going to have much time with her, and you can't buy *her* time."

"OK, Richard, now I understand. Your love for her is very strong, but she doesn't know about it. That's your problem," Mr. Rockwall says.

"She can't know because there isn't time," Richard says. He's very unhappy. "Your money can't talk to her."

At eight o'clock in the evening, Richard goes to the beautiful young woman's house.

"Good evening, Richard," Miss Lantry says. "Mother and Father are waiting for us at the theater. I don't want to be late."

"To Wallack's Theater, please," Richard says to the driver. But at Thirty-fourth Street, the car stops.

"What's wrong?" Richard asks.

"I'm sorry. Mr. Rockwall," the driver says. "There are cars to the left, to the right, and behind us. We can't move. Every car in New York is sitting here."



“We can’t move. Every car in New York is sitting here.”

“Oh, Richard. Are we going to be late?” Miss Lantry asks.

“I’m very sorry, Ellen. No theater for us this evening,” Richard says.

“That’s OK. I don’t like theater very much. I’m happy here in the car with you,” Miss Lantry says.

“Are you?” Richard asks with a smile.

Later the same evening. Richard walks into his father’s office. The old man is reading his newspaper.

“Father,” Richard says, “Miss Lantry and I are in love!”

“Very good, Richard. I’m happy for you,” his father says.

“We talked and talked. She loves me! You see! Money can’t buy love,” Richard says.

Then the happy young man goes to bed. But let’s finish his story. At seven o’clock in the morning, Mr. Kelly comes to the door of Mr. Rockwall’s house.

“Good morning, Mr. Kelly,” Mr. Rockwall says. “You did a good job yesterday evening. Here’s your \$5,000.”

“It was difficult, Mr. Rockwall. The drivers of the cars wanted \$10, and the policemen wanted \$50. But cars stopped for us on every street. Did it all go well?” Mr. Kelly asks.

“Well? Yes! It was *beautiful*. Let’s drink to love and to money!”

Soapy's Winter Home

Soapy lives on the streets of New York. He likes the sun and the trees. He doesn't like buildings or houses or jobs. For nine months of the year. Soapy is a happy man. Then the first week of December comes. At night Soapy puts on his old coat and hat, and he puts three newspapers under him. But he is cold and he can't sleep. He gets up and he walks up and down the streets. He can't live on the streets all winter.

But Soapy has a plan—he has the same plan every December. He is going to do a bad thing. Not a *very* bad thing, but a policeman is going to put him in jail for three months for this thing. Then Soapy is going to have food and a bed for the winter. In March, he is going to finish his time in jail. He is going to be on the streets of New York again for nine beautiful months.

Soapy thinks about his plan. He is going to visit a very smart restaurant. First, he is going to eat some expensive food, and then he is going to sit in the bar with an expensive drink. After his food and drink, Soapy is going to say, "I'm sorry, but I don't have any money." Then the men at the restaurant are going to make a telephone call. A policeman is going to come and put Soapy in jail for three months. No cold streets for the winter.

Soapy smiles and walks into Sanborn's Restaurant. But the man at the door looks at Soapy's old shoes and says, "You can't come in here. The people in here have money. They have good coats and shoes. Go home. You can't eat here."

Soapy sits down and thinks about his plan again. This time he walks down Sixth Street. He finds an expensive store with a big window. He hits the window with a heavy bottle. Many people—and one policeman—hear the noise and run to the store. Soapy stands near the window and smiles.

"Who did this?" the policeman asks. "Where's the man?"

"Maybe I'm that man." Soapy says with a friendly smile.

"You aren't the man. Look! Down there! A man is running away," the policeman says. He runs after the man. No jail for Soapy this afternoon.

That evening Soapy walks to a street with many theaters. He sees a lot of beautiful men and women in expensive coats and dresses. They are talking and smiling. They are going to have a good time in the theaters and restaurants. Near one theater, Soapy sees a tall policeman, too.

Suddenly Soapy runs in front of the people and starts to dance. Then he makes a lot of noise. He is very friendly. He talks to the important people. "Hello. How are you, my friends? What are you going to see this evening? Can I come to the theater with you?"

The policeman sees Soapy. He looks at him and says to the people, "He's a student from the theater school. They always make a lot of noise, but they aren't a problem. It's a game for them."

Soapy is angry and very unhappy. How can he get into jail for the winter? He walks down the street and sees a man in a big office. The man's pen is on a table near a window. Soapy puts his hand in the window and takes the pen. He walks slowly down the street.

The man runs into the street and says, "Stop! You have my pen!"

"Your pen?" Soapy asks. "Then call a policeman."

But the man from the office doesn't call a policeman. He has problems with the police, too. He doesn't want to talk to a policeman. "Maybe it *is* your pen," the man says to Soapy. "Goodbye."



Suddenly Soapy runs in front of the people and starts to dance.

Soapy is going to sleep on the street again today. He sits down and makes a new plan. Maybe he can get a job. Maybe he can have some money and an apartment and good shoes and a lot of food. Maybe he is too old for the street. Tomorrow he is going to find a job. This winter he isn't going to be cold, and he isn't going to be in jail. He is going to be an important man. He's happy with this new plan.

Then Soapy hears a person near him. "Excuse me," a policeman says. "What are you doing here? What's your problem?"

"No problem, my good man," Soapy says.

"What's your address? Where do you work?" the policeman asks.

“No address, no job, but I’m going to look for a job tomorrow,”
Soapy says.

“No address? Come with me. Three months in jail for you,” the
policeman says.

— THE END —

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