

The Gift of the Magi

Warm-up Session

A gift, even if it is small, is a token of love. Della and Jim, a young couple wanted to gift the best things to each other on the occasion of Christmas. However, they did not have the means. What did they do? Let's read the touching story and learn.

One dollar and eighty-seven cents! That was all she had. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bargaining with the grocer and the vegetable man. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents! And the next day would be Christmas.

For months Della had been saving every penny she could. She had been planning to buy some nice Christmas present for Jim, her dear husband. She loved Jim more than her life even.

Jim earned only twenty dollars a week. Out of it, eight dollars went for the rent of their flat. With the remaining twelve dollars they could hardly make both ends meet. And with all her parsimony Della had been able to save only one dollar and eighty-seven cents!

It was Christmas Eve, and poor Della could do nothing but cry. She was baffled. She didn't know how she could get a good present for her Jim. She flopped down on the little couch and began to cry.

Then suddenly she got up and stood before the mirror. A brilliant shine came in her eyes, though her face had lost its colour. Quickly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Jim and Della had two possessions in the family. Both of them took great pride in these two things.

One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair that reached below her knees. It fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It made itself almost a garment for her.

Swiftly and nervously Della did her hair up again. She faltered for a minute and stood still. A tear or two dropped on the floor. But then at once she put on her brown jacket and brown hat.

She ran down the stairs and came into the street. With quick steps, she hurried towards the market till she came near a saloon.



Slowly, she stepped in and asked, "Will you buy my hair?"

"Yes, that's what we deal in," said the lady at the counter. Take your hat off and let me have a look at it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said the lady, lifting the hair with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Scissors worked in the expert hand and gone was the brown cascade! Now forget about it.



And the next two hours she was ransacking the stores for a beautiful gift. She found it at last. There was none other like it in any of the stores. It was a platinum fob chain, simple in design but beautiful. It was worthy of The Watch- Jim's Gold Watch! As soon as Della saw it, she knew it was made for Jim, and no one else.

Twenty-one dollars they took from Della for the platinum chain, and she hurried home with the remaining eighty-seven cents in her purse.

When Della reached home, her excitement gave way to a little prudence and reason. She became thoughtful for a moment.

She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas. Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls. She stood before the mirror and looked at her reflection. With her curls she looked like a truant schoolboy!

'If Jim doesn't kill me before he takes a second look at me,' said Della to herself. 'But what could I do? Oh, what could I do with one dollar and eighty-seven cents?'

At seven O' clock the coffee was made, and the frying pan was placed on the gas stove, 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. Then she heard his steps on the stairs below. She turned white for a

moment. She had the habit of saying little prayers about simple things. "Please, God!" she said in a whisper, "make him think I am still pretty."



Soon the door opened and Jim stepped in. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two and was burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat, and didn't have gloves either.

He stopped inside the door. It seemed as if he had turned into a statue. His eyes were fixed upon Della. There was in them a strange expression that she couldn't read. It terrified her. It was neither anger nor surprise. He simply stared at her fixedly.

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. I did it because I couldn't live through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again. You won't mind it, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows so fast, you know. Merry Christmas, Jim! Now come, let's be happy. You don't know what a nice and beautiful gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, as if he had yet to believe his own eyes.

"Cut off and sold," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold. I tell you-sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, dear. Be good to me, for it went for you. Nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, dear?"

Jim seemed to wake up, as if from a dream. He drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

"Don't make any mistake about me, Dell," he said. "I don't think a haircut could make my love for you any less. But if you unwrap that package, you'll see why I looked so lost at first."

White fingers at once tore at the string and the paper. Then came a scream of joy which quickly changed into feminine tears and then sobs.



For there lay The Combs - the set of combs - that Della had worshipped for many months in a shop window.

They were beautiful combs, made of pure tortoise shell and jewelled rims. They were just the colour to wear in Della's beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew. Her heart had always longed for them without the least hope of possession. And now they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned them were gone.

Della hugged the combs to her bosom and kissed them. She looked up and smiled through her tears.

"Jim, darling, my hair grows so fast," she said with a sobbing smile.

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. Very eagerly she held it out to him upon her open palm.

"Isn't it lovely, Jim?" she said, "I hunted all over the town to find it. You'll have to look at your watch a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. Let me see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch. He put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

"Dell," he said, "let's put our Christmas presents away for a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get money for your combs. And now will you put the chops on?"

—O Henry (adapted and bridged)

Words to know

bargaining = haggling, negotiating; **parsimony** = cost-cutting, thriftiness; **possessions** = belongings; **rippling** = waving, **cascade** = sprout, gush; **garment** = piece of cloth; **faltered** = hesitated, paused; **ransacking** = searching frantically; **fob chain** = chain of a pocket-watch; **prudence** = forethought, caution; **truant** = absentee, malingerer; **fixedly** = earnestly, steadily; **wriggled** = twisted, **unwrap** = open, **scream** = yell; **vanished** = gone; **expensive** = costly, **tresses** = hair; **adorned** = decorated; **eagerly** = keenly; **hunted** = searched; **tumble** = dropped sadly.

EXERCISE ZONE

Lesson Insight

Test Your Comprehension Skill

A. Answer the following questions briefly:

1. How much money did Della have?
2. What had Della been planning to do with her saving?
3. How did Della look with her curls?

B. Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ'S)

Tick (✓) the correct options:

1. Della had saved the money by bargaining with the _____ and the vegetable man.
(a) baker (b) grocer (c) florist
2. And with all her _____ Della had been able to save only one dollar and eighty-seven cents!
(a) bargaining (b) efforts (c) parsimony
3. Della got _____ dollars by selling her hair.
(a) ten (b) twenty (c) fifty
4. And the next two hours she was _____ the stores for a beautiful gift.
(a) ransacking (b) exploring (c) searching
5. Jim sold his watch and bought a _____ for Della.
(a) set of combs (b) set of utensils (c) set of new dress

C. Answer the following questions:

1. How much money had Della saved for buying a gift for Jim on the Christmas? How had she saved it?
2. What was Della's most precious possession? Why did she falter for a minute before going out?
3. What made Della turn white when she heard Jim's steps on the stairs?
4. What was Jim's reaction when he saw Della's cropped hair?
5. What did the package that Jim had brought for Della contain?

D. Write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements:

1. Della wanted to buy a precious gift for her husband.
2. Della sold her hair because she didn't like it.
3. Jim admired Della for her new hair-style.
4. Jim was happy to get the beautiful fob chain for his wristwatch.
5. The young couple loved each other every much.

E. Fill in the blanks choosing suitable words from the lesson:

1. Della had been planning to buy some nice _____ present for Jim.
2. Both of them took great _____ in these two things.
3. A brilliant _____ came in her eyes, though her face had lost its colour.
4. It was a _____ fob chain, simple in design but beautiful.
5. Della hugged the _____ to her bosom and kissed them.

F. Who said the following statements and to whom:

Statement	Said by	said to
1. "Take your hat off and let me have a look at it."	_____	_____
2. "Give it to me quick."	_____	_____
3. "Make him think I am still pretty."	_____	_____
4. "I tell you-sold and gone, too."	_____	_____
5. "They're too nice to use just at present."	_____	_____

G. HOTS Questions (Think and Answer):

1. How did Della arrange money to buy a present for Jim? Describe briefly.
2. 'Then came a scream of joy which quickly changed into feminine tears and then sobs.' Explain the statement.

Sharpen Your Vocabulary

A. Find one word from the lesson for each of the following expressions. Follow the example:

- the day before Christmas *Christmas Eve*
1. the money a tenant pay to the owner for using his premises _____
 2. a chain used for a pocket watch _____
 3. chief monetary unit in the US, Australia etc. _____
 4. a marine animal _____
 5. a toothed strip of rigid material used for tidying the hair _____

B. Write the opposites for each of the following words:

Column 'A'	Column 'B'
1. parsimony	_____
2. pride	_____
3. expert	_____
4. prudence	_____
5. fixed	_____

C. Use the following words and make meaningful sentences of your own:

1. hardly : _____
2. garment : _____
3. expert : _____
4. expensive : _____
5. hugged : _____

Improve Your Speaking Skills

❖ Della and Jim was a young couple. They loved each other very much. Della wanted to give the best Christmas gift to Jim but she didn't have enough money for it. She sold her hair and bought a beautiful fob chain for Jim. On the other hand, Jim had also sold his favourite wrist watch to buy a gift for Della. Take hints from the lesson and complete the following imaginary conversation between Della and Jim:

- Jim (Surprised)** : How strange! Della, you have cut your hair!
- Della** : Actually, I _____.
- Jim** : But why did you _____?
- Della** : I wanted to buy _____ on Christmas.
- Jim (baffled)** : But Della, _____ for you.
- Della** : Where did you get money to buy this beautiful comb?
- Jim** : I have sold _____.
- Della** : What! My _____ again. But the watch _____.
- Jim** : Yes, none of us can _____ at present.
- Della** : No matter, _____.

Listening Skills

❖ Your teacher will read out a small paragraph in the class. Listen to him/her carefully and answer the questions set below:

1. What was Grandma doing in the sunny morning? What was her name?

2. What drew her attention?
3. Who were the two boys? Why were they sad?
4. How did Grandma try to help them?
5. Give synonyms of the following words:
 - (i) whimpered _____
 - (ii) garret _____

Improve Your Writing Skills

❖ *Imagine that Della had written a letter to her mother narrating the whole incident. Complete the letter on her behalf.*

Dear Mother,

What a memorable Christmas for both of us! I wanted to give a beautiful gift to Jim on this day. Jim also wanted to do the same. But it seems both of us were foolish. Do you know why? It's because

Della

Improve Your Grammar

A. *Fill in the blanks using appropriate form of the verbs given against each sentence:*

1. The students of our class _____ a picnic tomorrow. (go)
2. The carpenter _____ some beautiful furniture. (make)
3. It _____ hard since last night. (rain)
4. The farmers _____ in their fields. (work)
5. When _____ you _____ your work? (begin)
6. We _____ some ripe mangoes in the evening. (eat)
7. Many boats _____ in the river. (sail)
8. We _____ him the monitor of our class. (elect)

9. Has he _____ his job? (do)
10. A mad dog _____ the little boy. (bite)

B. Rewrite the following sentences after necessary corrections:

1. My uncle will return from Mumbai yesterday evening.

2. The train reached the station before I had left home.

3. The little boy is climbing the tree and plucked some ripe mangoes.

4. Our result will be declared last week.

5. The audience will definitely applauded her songs.

Time for Activities

- A. It is believed that Santa Claus visits every house on Christmas Eve. He gives presents to children who remained good all through the year. Discuss with your partner and make a list of the things each of you would ask from him during this Christmas Eve:
- B. Christmas is the greatest festival of the Christians. It is celebrated on 25 December every year. Lord Jesus Christ was born on this day. What is your favourite festival? When does it fall every year? What do you do on this occasion? Work in groups and discuss in the class.
- C. Draw the picture of a Christmas tree on a chart paper and decorate it beautifully. Show the chart to your class.