

Don't judge a book character by her cover

[Business](#)



It's common to judge other people when out in public.

It would be easy to assume that people dressed nicely are nice people and that people dressed poorly must have something wrong with their character. To the outside observer, it would be logical to speculate that Della, of, "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry, and Mathilde, of, "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant, would be similar in character, since both would be similar in physical appearance. Both are poor; dressed as those who belong to the lower classes of society. However, their actions towards their husbands reflect completely different outlooks on the relationships they have with their life partners, while their personal actions also reveal completely different ideas of what is or is not a realistic priority in life.

Della and Mathilde are quite poor, barely having enough money to afford a meager living, let alone any excesses, such as gifts for loved ones or respectable clothes for themselves. Although Della worked hard, many days of her efforts added up to only 1.87 dollars, and Mathilde lived in a very simple house in which there wasn't even a tablecloth to be changed. In their character development, each author makes it plain that both women are very aware of their place in society, setting the theme for the events that follow. Since both characters deal with their poverty throughout each story, the ways they deal with it and their outlook on themselves and their lives reveals that the women are actually quite different. Although they both are poor, the dynamics of their relationships with their husbands is quite different.

Della is content with her faithful husband Jim, making personal sacrifices so that she can have some money to give him a reasonable and thoughtful Christmas gift. This is in clear contrast to Mathilde, who is self-centered and never seems to show any appreciation of her husband and their life together. Where Della praises Jim, Mathilde only has ridicule for her husband. She criticizes his sincere efforts to get an invitation to a fashionable and exclusive event, insulting him cruelly. For Mathilde to accept his gift, she then forces him to go further and sacrifice his personal savings to buy a fancy dress for her to wear to the event.

Della would never have insulted or pressured her devoted Jim this way. Mathilde continues punishing her husband by forcing him to pay for her foolish mistake of borrowing an expensive necklace and quickly losing it. As the years go by, and both Mathilde and her husband work diligently to repay her selfish debt, she looks back at her greed and selfishness with no remorse, never seeing it for the ugliness it truly is. On the other hand, Della's warmth is always evident as she reflects on Jim's generosity. Not only are the two of them quite different in the ways they view their lives and their partners, but they are completely different in how they see the relationship of themselves and the world around them. Della is realistic while Mathilde is not.

Della realizes that in order to have a luxury, such as a chain for Jim's pocket watch, she must give up something of high value to her. This is completely different than Mathilde's outlook, expecting to possess and receive luxuries with little or no sacrifice on her part - that detail is put upon her husband. Unlike humble Della, who puts no demands upon Jim, Mathilde abuses her

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husband's generosity by continually demanding more and more, literally breaking their relationship. Also, Della's desire to provide her husband with a chain for his watch is practical, and long lasting, while Mathilde's greed for being in the spotlight for a few minutes, in front of people who only look down on her, is foolish and serves no lasting purpose. Even though, on the surface, the two women may seem similar, they are far from it.

Both are poor in money, but very different in how that poverty overflows into other aspects of their lives. Della appreciates the richness of Jim's love, while Mathilde dismisses the earnest loving actions of her husband. Della's actions reveal a realistic understanding of personal sacrifice in relationship to getting something she wants. Mathilde appears to have no concept of this relationship, simply allowing greed to consume her, and ruin her life more than just the poverty does. Taking time to get to know their character, it is easy to see that these two women are much more different than they are similar.