

The gift of the magi by o. henry essay



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O. Henry, an American writer, is famous for his short stories with an unpredictable ending. The Gift of the Magi is one of his masterpieces, which has become a traditional Christmas tale. In this story, the author shows a genuine love between young spouses, which is more precious than any material possessions. In this essay, the plot will be summarized, the main themes and characters will be discussed, and personal opinion will be given.

The story takes place just before Christmas, and Della Young is concerned about what she should give her husband, Jim, as a present. She counts her savings and finds only \$1.87, which is not enough to buy a worthy gift. She is frustrated since she wants to present her husband with something he deserves for his hard work. Della tries to find a way out of the situation and finally comes up with an idea. The most precious thing she has is her long shining brown hair. After she looks at it in the mirror, she dresses up and goes to Madame Sofronie, a hairdresser. The woman cuts Della's hair quickly and gives her \$20.

Having enough money, Della visits several shops to find a present for Jim. She is not satisfied with anything she finds until she knows exactly what she needs. Della remembers that her husband's most valuable thing is his gold watch, but he has to wear it with a leather strap since the original one has been broken. The woman finds a platinum chain that will perfectly suit the watch, pays \$21 for it, and goes home.

When Jim arrives and sees his wife without her gorgeous hair, he becomes surprised and puzzled. Della cannot understand his reaction until she unpacks his present for her. She discovers a set of combs that she has

desired for a long time, but since she does not have her long hair anymore, they appear to be useless. To comfort her husband, she hands him the platinum chain, only to find out that Jim has sold his gold watch to buy a present for her. Jim suggests they should put away their Christmas gifts and have dinner. The story ends with the statement that Della and Jim are the wisest of those who give presents.

Della is one of the two main characters of the story. She is young and beautiful, and she is distinguished by complete devotion to her husband. Della appreciates him so much that she does not agree to present him with some trifle because he deserves something precious. For this reason, she dares sell her hair, which is the only treasure she possesses. She explains to Jim that she “ couldn’t have lived through Christmas without giving you a present” (O. Henry 5). Apart from being deeply in love with her husband, Della is a highly emotional person. She does not hold back her tears when she is desperate and does not restrain her laugh when she is happy. Moreover, her mood can change in an instant, which happens when she grieves over her haircut, and the next moment she is anxious to give Jim his Christmas gift. Perhaps, the abundance of emotions contributed to Della’s deep affection to her husband.

Since Jim appears on the scene only at the end of the story, readers do not know his thoughts, but they see his actions. Like Della, Jim sacrificed the most precious thing he had, his gold watch, to buy a present for his wife. Thus, it may be assumed that he is as much deeply in love with Della as she is with him. After all, the story is intended to show true affection, which is why the author made his characters so pure and loving.

The major theme of the story is pure love, which is the most valuable thing in the world. It is unconditional since Della and Jim do not need anything special from each other; they are just happy to be together. When Della counts her scarce savings, she does not even think to blame her husband for earning little money. On the contrary, she is happy to be his wife and wants to give him the best present she can afford (Study Guide 5). Due to the couple's sacrifices, the author compares them to the magi who brought presents to baby Jesus (Zhang and Wang 657). However, he says that Jim and Della are wiser because they gave each other the most precious gift in the world, which is pure love (Zhang and Wang 657). Thus, the story conveys the idea of a relationship, which should be pursued by everyone.

The Gift of the Magi also tackles the theme of wealth and poverty. According to Nagel, the story " resonates throughout American marriages, many of which went through periods of economic struggle at some point" (102). Indeed, the Young family is very poor, and Della has to haggle with vendors over every single penny (Tong 207). Even though they hardly make ends meet, Della and Jim are happy because they possess a much greater treasure than money - their love. As Zhang and Wang rightly stated, " there is no pure love in the world of money while there is no money in the world of love" (657). The story, therefore, conveys the idea that material possessions do not play a significant role in human life because deep affection is the only thing that matters.

Although the story is written to show readers pure love and encourage them to pursue this feeling in their lives, it seems slightly unreasonable when regarded from a realistic rather than a romantic point of view. The exchange

of useless gifts would not have happened if the spouses had discussed their desires and plans with each other. Perhaps, they could have agreed upon a festive dinner or something pleasant for both, which would have saved their money and their personal treasures. After all, communication is a crucial part of a strong relationship. Therefore, instead of sacrificing something precious to surprise one's partner, one had better inform him or her of one's plans to avoid possible unpleasant consequences.

In conclusion, The Gift of the Magi is a kind and inspiring story about two young people truly loving each other. Their love is revealed by their willingness to sacrifice the most valuable things they own to bring joy to each other. Apart from the theme of affection, the story is concerned about the concepts of poverty and wealth. It asserts that rich people are not those with much money, but those who love and are loved in return.

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