

# Irony of life assignment

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Love, care and sacrifice are indispensable to most of the relationships of life; especially in marriage, these factors become more important. Each of the couple has to know for whom and for which they live and work. In “The Gift of the Magi”, O. Henry was really successful in describing the love, care and sacrifice that Della and Jim give each other. The story would not become famous without its “surprising ending”, the accident and coincidence.

Readers are attracted to the moving love story between Jim and Della, which is transfigured by O.

Henry’s unrivalled flowery language, academic and belles-letters style, and his superb ironical tone. At the end of the story, readers will only be able to say “How ironical their life is!” “The irony of life” in “The Gift of the Magi” is presented through a story of love and sacrifice between a young couple, Jim and Della, who are poor materially but not poor spiritually. They always live happily in a poor living condition. Their happiness is described simply by the call “Jim” and the great hug of the wife, Della, for her husband, Jim whenever he came home.

Della always feels happy in “the look-out for the mendicancy squad” because she loves Jim, who is living there. And also, she is happy in thought of the nice and precious present for Jim though she has to “save every penny by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher”. However, the fate is ironical; God wants to provoke her. “Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only one dollar and eighty-seven cents to buy Jim a present”. What could she do with this small amount of money? Perhaps the answer is very clear: “There was clearly nothing left to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl”.

She howls. She cries painfully. If only they were not so much poor, if only Jim's salary was more than twenty dollars per week, if only she had more money then, if only... By putting " three times" at the beginning of the sentence " Three times Della counts her money", by using the conversion, O. Henry can lead readers to Della's state of mind, a little doubt, a little hope that she could mistake. Then, " One dollar and eighty-seven cents" between two sentence points confirms that there is no mistake here. Exactly, she has only \$1. 87.

The reality of life is always ruthless! However, " many a happy hour she spent planning for something nice for him" can't become waste; " her eyes were shining brilliantly" as she looks into a mirror, an idea comes to her, she makes her own decision ??? selling her beautiful long blonde hair, her only own treasure to buy a platinum fob chain which is, for her, " worthy of The Watch". It's Jim's own treasure that he inherited from his grandfather and his father. If the story stopped here, everything could be all right because Jim loves Della not for her hair.

It is shown in the words Jim said: " 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". Jim loves Della herself. And it is for his great love he gives her that he can sacrifice everything he has for her, even his only own treasure ??? The Watch. At this time, the irony occurs. He was stunned by the truth he heard and saw; he was so shocked that he maybe could not know that he said with an air almost of idiocy: " You've cut off your hair? ", " You said your hair is gone? ".

These seemingly silly questions show not only that he had not recovered from his shock but also that he still felt sorry for his sacrifice for her sake. There is a bitter and sadness in his says. How heart-rending he is when his love gift for his darling becomes useless! He becomes more heart-rending when he sees Della tearing at the string and paper of the gift, and her ecstatic scream of joy giving place to tears and wails. In addition, it was the time when Della told him to give her his watch to see how the chain would look on it, Jim, instead of obeying, “ tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smile”.

He didn't give her his watch but smiled. He must have thought that life was making fun of them, that God was teasing them because his watch was bought for the set of beautiful combs for his dear Della's hair. Up to then he bitterly said: “ They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. “, and it is not until this time that readers realize why he has been shocked, why he “ stared at her fixedly” when he comes home from work. The story comes to an end with an ironical result; the love gifts they give each other for Christmas become useless and unacceptable.

Going with the irony of life is the love and sacrifice for each other. Their love for one another is indubitable. They are, in fact, generous lovers. They love each other unconditionally. The love, care and sacrifice they show to each other is beyond doubt and beyond limit. Although they both can feel the happiness in their small flat on the basis of their unselfish love that are demonstrated and confirmed by the wonderful gifts for each other, they each still feel sorry for the uselessness of them, of the things that ought to have

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been extremely valuable. Maybe it is one of the most ironical situations of life.

As we know, out of love and sacrifice, the things that are the most important to them are Della's hair and Jim's watch. Della loves her hair, and so does Jim. It is beautiful so much that the Queen of Sheba would want her hair. She loves it and she loves that Jim loves it as well. However, in the case of choice, she decides to sacrifice her hair for a fob chain for Jim's watch. She knows that Jim's watch is a fine piece of work that he treasures, but that he is also embarrassed that such a fine watch is worn on a leather strap and the fob chain is the perfect gift. What a pity! His watch is gone.

If only he didn't sell it. In turn, Jim cherishes his watch very much because it's a beautiful family heirloom, but he cannot do anything else but sells it to buy Della beautiful shell combs to adorn her exceedingly beautiful hair, a significant gift because "the next day would be Christmas". And once again, we can say "What a pity!" because her hair was cut. Each one sacrifices their most prized possession to please the other and display their love for one another, but their sacrifice is not repaid. It is ironical for both of them ??? Della and Jim, and for all the readers to accept this.

In "The Gift of the Magi", "the irony of life" also lies in the coincidence of Della's and Jim's thoughts and actions. Each of them tries to show their love, care and sacrifice for each other through the selling of their own treasures to glorify the beauty of the treasure of the other with a true sense of delight and satisfaction. Each of the couple in the story feels happy with their thought and act of love and generosity until they find out that they have

failed to anticipate the other's sacrifice for the other's sake: the gifts of love and generosity turn out to be unacceptable to the other! Great minds think alike", says a proverb. The couple in "The Gift of the Magi" is true lovers with not only great minds but also great hearts. Della loves Jim in every act of parsimony by bargaining with the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher for every cent, in every day of her life. Jim loves Della, not with his words but with his daily care, understanding and sacrifice. And it is their love and sacrifice for each other that make them the wisest among "the wisest of these days". The story comes to an end with Jim's act of selling his watch for a set of combs for Della's hair.

However, what the writer wants to convey to his readers goes beyond the story itself. It is his philosophy of love. Any quick-minded reader would soon recognize a close correspondence between the two protagonists and O. Henry himself. If Della and Jim unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house, only to find later that they were stuck in a half-clever half-foolish situation, then O. Henry, likewise with all his love for his little daughter, had offered her "generous Christmas gifts of money", only to find later that he was constantly in financial difficulties.

Through his own example and his story, O. Henry might have wanted to raise a philosophical point of view about love: love means making sacrifices for happiness. The two young lovers in the story showed no hesitation in selling their own treasure to buy a gift of love for the other, and they must have been happy people, despite the fact that the irony of life did occur to them and make their unexpected gifts become unacceptable! Another message

implied in the story is that once we are in love, we should love with all our heart and never doubt that the sacrifice for our lover may come to nothing.

Though the tortoise combs for Della and the fob chain for Jim become useless at the moment, they served as living proof of their boundless love and care, and that was enough for any couple, today and tomorrow alike, not only for Della and Jim alone. A question which is put in the thought of readers is why each of them or they both don't keep on save enough money for their Christmas gifts next year, why don't they discuss to each other about the gift they intend to give each other. If they were more careful in their decision, they could be happier, the irony of life in the story might not happen.

In my opinion, they want to give each other the accidental gifts. They want to enrich their spiritual life by the love gifts. And one more important thing they want to show is the fierce love and the noble sacrifice they give each other. They can't wait, they are eager to display themselves to another. And Christmas is a good chance. As said above, "Great minds think alike". One tries his/her best to please his/her lover, to glorify other's most precious own thing. Their thoughts and acts are really significant, but it is sorry to say that the result becomes insignificant.

Their valuable gifts turn out to be unacceptable. It is the irony. They both know that how they love each other. However, "actions speak louder than words", says a proverb. And it is their actions and concern for one another's happiness that speaks of how much they love each other. They each sacrifice their greatest worldly treasures in order to get something for the other person that they think will make them happy. In the entire world, "

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. "?? But, they both are willing to sacrifice those possessions for the other's sake. This is the evidence of their love and sacrifice for each other. However, none of them can receive such a love and sacrifice completely and perfectly because their presents become useless, their sacrifices become insignificant. It is obviously that their life is so ironical. As they love and sacrifice for each other so much they make the situation ironical.

In general, " the irony of life" is throughout " the Gifts of the Magi". It is beginning at the poverty of a couple, Jim and Della, but they still harbour a dream of material and spiritual love presents for each other. It is shown at the surprising ending of the story. It is a great success that O. Henry had gained. At the end of the story, O. Henry further said that Jim and Della were " two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house"; he, in fact, wanted to praise their generosity and care-for-each-other.

In other words, the word " foolish" and " unwisely" were used as ironies here: he talked about their stupidity in order to set off their greatness. It was due to their noble thoughts and acts that their gifts became the most treasured and they became the wisest: " But in last word to the wise of these days, let it be said that of all who give gifts these two the wisest. Of all who



give and receive gifts such as they are wisest. They are the magi. ” Through the story, readers seem to accidentally recognize that O.

Henry is very successful in describing the love and care and sacrifice that each of a couple give each other. The irony of life has praised their love and sacrifice. And conversely, it is the eager love and the complete sacrifice for the person they love that make a tragedy, an irony that is peerless in the world. The story comes to an end with a surprisingly ironical result which makes readers extremely amazed and sorry for the best things the couple gives each other. Perhaps it is just the reason of the success of the moving love story. The end