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*Dramatic Publishing*

O. HENRY'S

# The Gift of the Magi

Dramatized by

ANNE COULTER MARTENS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE GIFT OF THE MAGI)

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# The Gift of the Magi

*A Christmas Play in One Act*

FOR TWO MEN\* AND FIVE WOMEN

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## CHARACTERS

DELLA	.....	<i>a young wife</i>
JIM	.....	<i>her husband</i>
MRS. BOYD	.....	<i>a neighbor</i>
MADAME SOFRONIE	.....	<i>a dealer</i>
FELICE	.....	<i>her assistant</i>
MR. HARTMAN (may be played by a woman)	.....	<i>a clerk</i>
NARRATOR	.....	<i>of the story</i>

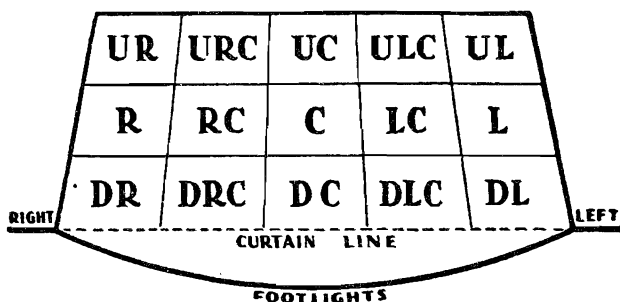
PLACE: *A room in a furnished apartment in New York City.*

TIME: *A little while ago. The day before Christmas.*

NOTE: The part of the Narrator can be played by a woman or a man. The two short scenes, at Madame Sofronie's and the jewelry store, require only a minimum of setting. They can be played under a spotlight in front of the curtains, to the sides of the stage, or at partly opened curtains, backed by a large screen.

\* One of the male roles may be played by a woman.

## CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



### STAGE POSITIONS

*Upstage* means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

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NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

## PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Faded curtains on windows; wall mirror; sofa with pillows; dinette-type table and two chairs; small cupboard; easy chair; coat rack; worn rug and a few cheap pictures.

### *Scene One:*

Remains of breakfast on table, including cups and saucers, pad for coffee pot, etc.; Jim's suit coat, topcoat and hat on rack; Della's worn coat with scarf in pocket on rack; box of coins in cupboard.

### *Scene Two:*

Two chairs, cabinet base and mirror, hand mirror, comb and large pair of scissors on cabinet base, sign reading MME. SOFRONIE, HAIR GOODS OF ALL KINDS.

### *Scene Three:*

Small counter or table with display case for watch chains, small box and paper bag under counter, sign reading ELITE JEWELRY SHOP.

### *Scene Four:*

Table set for dinner (*plates, silverware, etc.*), box with gold watch chain on table.

NARRATOR: Book.

DELLA: Coffee pot, cheap combs for hair, wig, bills in purse.

JIM: Gold pocket watch on worn leather watch fob strap, small box wrapped as a gift and containing set of combs.

MRS. BOYD: Small basket, basket of socks and darning equipment.

HARTMAN: Sales book and pencil.

NOTE: The girl playing the part of Della wears a wig of long hair in the first two scenes. In Scene Three she has removed the wig, but her head is covered with a head scarf. In Scene Four she appears with her own short hair-do.

## PRODUCTION NOTE

Nothing adds more to the polish of a production than the quick picking up of cues. Unless there is a definite reason for a pause, train your actors to come in with their speeches "on the heels," so to speak, of the preceding speeches. When a production lags, audience interest likewise will lag.

It is always advisable during the last week of rehearsals to hold one or more sessions during which the actors merely sit around in a circle and go through lines only with the express purpose of snapping up cues.

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## SCENE ONE

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SCENE: *A room in a furnished apartment in New York City. It is a drably-furnished, unattractive room which is desirable only because the rent is cheap. A door in the L wall, upstage, leads to a corridor and the stairs. In the R wall, at center, a door opens into the kitchen. A small cupboard is against the wall, upstage of the door R. There is a window in the upstage wall, U C, hung with faded curtains. Left of the window is a wall mirror. A sofa at L C faces the audience. There is a small dinette-type table at R C, with chairs upstage and right of it. An easy chair of sorts is D R, and a rack for coats and hats is in the U L corner of the room. A worn rug and a few cheap pictures may be added, if desired.]*

BEFORE RISE OF CURTAIN: *A few strains of soft Christmas music are heard. A spotlight falls on the NARRATOR, who stands on the steps D L leading up to the stage. He has an open book in his hand.]*

NARRATOR [*speaking through music background*]. The Magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. The story I am about to relate is about two foolish children who gave gifts, and had no thought at all of the Magi, but only of each other. It is morning of the day before Christmas, just a little while ago.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: JIM, *an earnest young fellow in his early twenties, is sitting upstage of the table, finishing his breakfast. He is in his shirt sleeves.]*

NARRATOR. This is Mr. James Dillingham Young, known to his wife as Jim . . .

DELLA [*calling from offstage R*]. Jim . . .



JIM. Yes?

DELLA [*offstage*]. How about another cup of coffee?

[*DELLA comes in R with the coffee pot. She is a sweet and lovely girl whose crowning glory is her long hair, which is pinned and held in place with a couple of cheap combs.*  
NOTE: *It is probably necessary that DELLA wear a long-haired wig. An alternative is a long hair piece which matches the color of her own hair and is securely fastened to it. She wears a simple, inexpensive dress.*]

NARRATOR. Mrs. James Dillingham Young, whose name is Della . . . [*Leaves steps as spotlight fades.*]

JIM. Maybe half a cup. [*Takes out a gold pocket watch on a worn leather fob strap and looks at it.*] No, make it a cup. I still have a few minutes.

DELLA [*as she pours coffee for him and for herself*]. It's going to be a nice day, but cold.

JIM. You have to expect that, this time of year. [*Puts watch back in his pocket.*]

DELLA. Do you think you'll get off early this afternoon? [*Sets coffee pot down on a pad, sits right of table and sips her coffee.*]

JIM. Not a chance. In my office, the day before Christmas is just the same as any other day.

DELLA. It doesn't matter. I'm just glad you have the job.

JIM [*in a discouraged tone*]. Such as it is. [*Looks around room.*] I thought by now I'd be able to give you something better than this.

DELLA [*reprovingly*]. Jim . . .

JIM. A cheap furnished apartment—third floor walk-up.

DELLA. Don't talk like that! [*Gets up, adjusting a comb in her hair.*]

JIM. No. Talking doesn't help much. [*Sighs.*]

DELLA [*suddenly anxious, moving back of his chair*]. Jim, is anything wrong?

JIM. Guess I'm just feeling a little blue this morning.

DELLA [*brightly, giving his back a pat*]. Let's have none of that. Tomorrow's Christmas!

JIM [*after a pause*]. Maybe that's the reason. I hoped things would be so much better for us. A pretty girl like you . . .

DELLA [*still standing behind his chair*]. A lucky girl like me. [*Rests her cheek on his hair.*]

JIM. Maybe some day, Della . . .

DELLA. Who cares about some day? We have today.

JIM. Planning to do anything special?

DELLA [*casually*]. Oh, take a little walk, I guess. [*Moves L C.*]

Jim, tonight let's go shopping for a Christmas tree. A little one. We can make our own decorations.

JIM. Trees are expensive this year.

DELLA. Not if we wait till late tonight. We can get a left-over one for almost nothing.

JIM [*smiling at her*]. All right, we'll try.

DELLA [*carefully*]. I just may take a little stroll along Broadway this morning.

JIM [*rising, crossing to rack U L for his suit coat*]. Window shopping?

DELLA [*teasingly, moving C*]. I might even buy a Christmas present for someone.

JIM. Anyone I know? [*Comes to her, putting on coat.*]

DELLA [*smiling*]. You've met him. [*Puts up her hand as he starts to speak.*] Don't ask me any more questions.

JIM. My boss will be asking questions if I don't get started. [*Takes out his watch again and looks at it.*]

DELLA [*amused*]. James Dillingham Young!

JIM [*in mock alarm*]. Now what did I do?

DELLA. I think you're forever taking that watch out of your pocket just because you're so proud of it.

JIM. And why shouldn't I be? It belonged to my father and my grandfather before me.

DELLA. I know. And it *is* a perfectly grand watch.

JIM. The very best.

DELLA. Except for that shabby old leather strap.

JIM [*looking at strap*]. Nothing wrong with this strap. Quite a bit of wear still left in it.

DELLA. I guess so. [*Getting his overcoat from rack U L.*] Does the watch still keep perfect time?

JIM [*putting watch in his pocket*]. Absolutely! [*DELLA has come C and helps him on with coat. He looks at her.*] Say! [*Touches her hair.*] Those old combs sure don't amount to much.

DELLA. I put my hair up in such a hurry this morning. [*Turns to mirror to adjust a comb.*] The combs do very nicely if I put them in just right. [*Turns from mirror.*] There!

JIM [*with mock formality*]. Mrs. Young, have I ever told you that you have very beautiful hair? [*Gets hat from rack.*]

DELLA. Over and over, you've told me, Mr. Young. [*JIM moves to her at mirror, taking out his watch. DELLA laughs.*] There you go again!

JIM [*putting it back hastily*]. Good-by, dear, sweet, beautiful Mrs. Young! [*Puts his arm around her and kisses her lightly.*]

DELLA [*following him to door U L*]. Don't be late.

JIM. I won't. [*Goes out U L. DELLA looks after him a moment, then hurries to small cupboard, takes out a little box and dumps its contents on table: several quarters and some small change. She sits down, right of table, and counts it half aloud.*]

DELLA. Twenty-five—fifty—seventy-five—one dollar. [*Piles up these quarters.*] A dollar twenty-five—thirty-five—forty—fifty—fifty-five—fifty-six—fifty-seven . . . [*As she counts pennies, her voice is no longer audible until she finishes.*] . . . eighty-five—eighty-six—eighty-seven. [*Looks on table. There is no more money to count.*] Oh, no! It has to be more than a dollar eighty-seven! What kind of Christmas present will that buy? [*Starts over again.*] Twenty-five—fifty—[*Stands up, discouraged.*] That's all. [*Walks to sofa, half in tears.*] That's absolutely all! [*Flings herself down on sofa and buries her head on a pillow. There is a knock on door U L. DELLA sits up quickly, dabbing at her*

eyes and trying to put up her hair, which has come partly down.] Oh, my goodness!

[MRS. BOYD comes in U L before DELLA has a chance to answer. She has a small basket on her arm. She is a well-meaning woman, older than DELLA, and rather beaten down by poverty. She wears a house dress and a worn-looking sweater.]

MRS. BOYD. Good morning! [*As DELLA hesitates.*] I'm your neighbor across the hall. We moved in yesterday.

DELLA [*getting up, fussing with her hair*]. Oh, yes! I—please excuse the way I look.

MRS. BOYD [*coming left of sofa*]. If you'll excuse the way I walked in. Mrs. Boyd's the name.

DELLA. I'm Della Young.

MRS. BOYD. Saw your husband go downstairs. Nice-looking young fellow.

DELLA. Oh, yes! [*Laughs.*] I mean, thank you. Won't you sit down?

MRS. BOYD. Just for a minute. I came over to ask if you'd loan me a carrot for stew. With moving in, and all, we're short a few things.

DELLA. Of course. A nice hot stew is good in the winter.

MRS. BOYD. Filling, too. And cheap. [*Sits on sofa.*]

DELLA. Yes. [*Moves to table, puts change back into little box.*] You save a couple of pennies here, a nickel there— [*Whirls around, speaking bitterly.*] And what does it all amount to?

MRS. BOYD. Well, now——

DELLA. A dollar and eighty-seven cents! That's all. And tomorrow's Christmas.

MRS. BOYD [*soberly*]. I know.

DELLA. I wanted to get Jim something nice . . .

MRS. BOYD. It's discouraging, isn't it?

DELLA. What can a person buy for a dollar and eighty-seven cents? [*Turns away, a little sob in her voice, and puts box back in cupboard.*]

MRS. BOYD [*rising*]. Look, child, you're young. There'll be other Christmases, God willing.

DELLA [*turning*]. I shouldn't have told you my troubles.

MRS. BOYD. Come, now, pin up that pretty hair of yours and just make the best of things.

DELLA [*going to window U C*]. What things?

MRS. BOYD. Well, now——

DELLA [*looking out*]. A third floor apartment in a run-down building. A gray back yard and a gray board fence. Even an old gray cat walking the fence. Is that what you mean?

MRS. BOYD. Things have a way of working out——

DELLA [*turning, interrupting*]. Things only work out when you *do* something about them!

MRS. BOYD. Well, now——

DELLA [*coming C*]. But what *can* I do? I feel so helpless. And Jim tries so hard. He gets so worried and discouraged.

MRS. BOYD. Does he?

DELLA. Only because of me. He thinks he should be able to give me more than——this. [*Indicates room.*]

MRS. BOYD. It's not too bad. [*Sits on sofa again.*]

DELLA. I don't really mind living here. And I don't mind looking out at the gray back yard. But I do mind not having enough money to buy Jim a real Christmas present!

MRS. BOYD. They say it's the thought that counts. Some nice handkerchiefs, maybe.

DELLA. No! [*After a pause, during which she moves up to window again.*] I had something very special in mind.

MRS. BOYD. Special?

DELLA [*facing downstage*]. Something he'd be so proud of! [*Turns away with a sigh.*] I was silly to think that a few pennies and nickels and dimes would ever amount to enough money! [*Glances over at cupboard.*]

MRS. BOYD. A new bride, are you?

DELLA [*moving down to sofa*]. It's our first Christmas together.

MRS. BOYD. Well, now! [*Getting up.*] Mind if I help myself to that carrot?