

PERUSAL SCRIPT

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

by

Matthew Ivan Bennett

based on the story by O. Henry

Part 1 of Episode 9 “YULETIDE” in the **RADIO HOUR** Series



Newport, Maine

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THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

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CAST OF CHARACTERS - 1F 2M (No doubling)

O. Henry - Narrator

Della - A young newlywed woman

Jim - A young newlywed man

Period Costumes or contemporary clothes

Radio Station setting

Sound Effects required (can be Foley, recorded, or a mix of both. Music required.)

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THE GIFT OF THE MAGI by Matthew Ivan Bennett. Episode 9 in the RADIO HOUR Series. 2M 1F (No doubling) Period Costumes or contemporary clothes. Radio Station setting. SFX essential. Staged Radio Drama, Radio Broadcast, Fully-Staged Production, or Virtual Theatre. 13 minutes. RadioWest and Plan-B Theatre Company bring you O. Henry's classic Christmas story "The Gift of the Magi." Originally published in 1905, it is a straightforward adaptation of the beloved classic adapted for radio. It's the story of a young couple - a man and wife each willing to make deep sacrifices, to show their love at Christmas by giving the perfect Christmas gift to the other. As Part 1 of YULETIDE, it was a co-production between Salt Lake City's Plan-B Theatre Company and the University of Utah's Public Radio station KUER's Radio West. **ORDER #3243.1**

MATTHEW IVAN BENNETT is a resident of Plan-B Theatre, listed by American Theater magazine as one of 14 companies nationwide exemplifying social action and civic engagement. At Plan-B, he's premiered several stage and radio plays, including an adaptation of "*Frankenstein*" that won a Utah Broadcasters Association award, and "*Eric(a)*"—which won Best Drama at the United Solo festival in New York. He received the Holland New Voices award from the Great Plains Theatre Commons, has twice been a finalist in screenwriting at Austin Film Festival, and in 2016 was an O'Neill finalist. His short plays have appeared at Chicago's Circle Theatre, Rising Sun in New York, Monkeyman in Toronto, and the Source Festival in DC. Matt is a member of the Dramatists' Guild.

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

F/X: *Coins being counted.*

O. HENRY: *(narrating throughout)* One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas. There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl.

(DELLA howling)

F/X: *Flopping.*

So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs—

(DELLA sobbing)

Sniffles—

(DELLA sniffing)

And smiles—

(DELLA becomes manic)

With sniffles predominating.

(DELLA weeps)

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at eight dollars per week. A floorboard that squeaked.

F/X: *Wood creaking.*

A radiator that banged as if part of a parade.

F/X: *Radiator knocking.*

A letter-box into which no letter would go—

F/X: *Rusty letter-box...*

An electric doorbell from which no mortal finger could coax a ring.

F/X: *Dead button...*

Also, notice the card there, bearing the name “Mr. James Dillingham Young”? The “Dillingham” was flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid thirty dollars per week. Now, with the income shrunk to twenty dollars, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming mideponymous “D.”

F/X: *Door; Footsteps. (all in memory)*

But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called—

DELLA: *(in memory)* Jim! *(tackling him; kissing him repeatedly: mwah, mwah, mwah)*

O. HENRY: And greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

(DELLA composing herself)

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag.

F/X: *Makeup (powdering); Motor car passing (faint.)*

She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray background. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only one eighty-seven to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him.

DELLA: Hmm...

O. HENRY: Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim. There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an eight-dollar flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art

(DELLA issues a sigh of resolve)

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

F/X: *Hair falling (surreal)*

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride.

F/X: *Ticking...*

One was Jim's gold watch, which had been his father's—

F/X: *Ticking (louder)...*

And grandfather's.

F/X: *Ticking (even louder)...*

The other was Della's hair.

F/X: *Hair brushing...*

Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor with a silver mop—

F/X: *Mopping... (fantasy)*

All his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed —

F/X: *Pocket watch.*

Just to see him pluck at his beard from envy. So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her.

F/X: *Hair wrapping...*

And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute—

(DELLA whimpering)

And stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet. On went her old brown jacket—

F/X: *Jacket...*

On went her old brown hat.

F/X: *Hat...*

With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

F/X: *Door; Stairs; Street (time passing.)*

Where she stopped the sign read:

DELLA: Madam Safronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds.

F/X: *Stairs.*

O. HENRY: One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting.

(DELLA panting...)

Madam, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the “Safronie.”

DELLA: Will you buy my hair?

O. HENRY: Asked Della. “I buy hair,” said Madame. “Take yer hat off and let’s have a sight at the looks of it.”

F/X: *Hair falling (surreal.)*

Down rippled the brown cascade. “Twenty dollars,” said Madame, lifting the mass with a practiced hand.

DELLA: Give it to me quick.

O. HENRY: Said Della.

F/X: *Scissors...*

(DELLA sniffing...)

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim’s present.

F/X: *Shop bell.*

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch.

F/X: *Ticking.*

As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim’s. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both.

F/X: *Cash register.*

Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the eighty-seven cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

F/X: *Door.*

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons—

F/X: *Drawer.*

And lighted the gas—

F/X: *Match; Gas pilot.*

And went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task. Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

DELLA: If Jim doesn't kill me—

O. HENRY: She said to herself—

DELLA: Before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! What could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?!

THREE AND A HALF more pages to the end of the script.