



O' Henry's " The Gift of The Magi" – An analyses.

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Short Story, Love, Sacrifice, Conflicts, Twist Ending, Irony

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ABSTRACT *In English literature, short stories are greatly readable and admirable. Many writers wrote stories which are short. A short story is a brief work of literature usually written in narrative prose with literary technique. Here I come to analyze the world best known short story – "The gift of the Magi" by O' Henry". This story is about a loving couple who sacrifices their most valuable assets for their loved ones. This story is about love and sacrifice. It is not easy to give up our only asset, mostly where there is nothing besides it, but "LOVE CONQUERS ALL". I want to discuss the conflict between mind and soul, love and sacrifice, struggle and importance of gifts, in this couple's life.*

O' Henry is the pen-name of Mr. William Sidney porter, an American writer. He is well known for his short stories. His stories consist word play, warm characterization and clever twist endings. In "The gift of the Magi" we can face these elements. The story is about poor couple Della and Jim. They are young, hard working and love each other the most.

Christmas is an annual commemoration of the birth of Lord Jesus Christ. Writer says us in the starting of the story that next day will be Christmas and heroine Della wants to give gift to her loved one – Jim.

"One dollar and eighty seven cents, that was all"

This first line of the story indicates poor situation of Della. She saves that money by parsimony, implied from day to day shopping. It is a tradition that on every Christmas one gives gift to the other. We all better know the Santa Claus. Della has nothing but only 1.87 Dollar. She counted her money three times, and cried loudly.

The poor couple was not in beggar condition but \$20 per week was not enough to buy gifts for each other, even once in a year.

O'Henry has put some autobiographical elements in this story, as he had love marriage and he firstly earned much by his own from various jobs. After his embezzlement in bank, he was driven out from bank. Than as a writer his salary was only \$25 per month. He himself faced financial crisis. He wrote about Jim that his ancestor's income was \$30 per week but his was \$20 only.

But next day was Christmas & Della and Jim both were worried to buy gifts for each other separately. Here in the story, in beginning we are aware of only the condition and conflict of Della, thereafter we come to know about Jim.

Della was determined to buy unique gift for Jim, she knew very well that 1.87 dollar was not enough for it. But "Twenty dollar a week doesn't go for. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated".

She wanted to buy a gift anyhow. "Something fine and rare and sterling, something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim". After many seconds Della got an idea. We come to know that poor couple had only two Assets, as O'Henry described as below;

"There were two possessions of James Dillingham young's in which they both took a mighty pride. One had been his watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's, the

other was Della's hair".

Della's hair was long, shiny and beautiful, reached almost below her knee. It was time to make decision for Jim and for him she made it. She sold her hair for \$20 to Mne.Sofronie and than ransacking the stores for gift, finally she found platinum fob chain as gift for Jim.

When she reached home, she was without her long hair but with the gift for Jim. Her inner conflict made her anxious. She thought whether she looked as before in short hair? Or what would be Jim's reaction when he would see the short hair of hers. She looked like schoolboy. She was worried and tried to console herself as,

"If Jim doesn't kill me, before 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?"

Della took a risk. She knew well that Jim loved her hair passionately. But for the sake of Jim's love she was ready to face his anger. She eagerly waited for Jim & when she heard his footsteps, she turned white for just a moment.

"She had a habit of saying little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

We can see from above lines that Della was in great dilemma, she thought that if she might not look beautiful to Jim, than his love for her might become less. She had fear, perhaps his anger, that's why "she looked her reflection in the mirror long, carefully and critically". Many thought buckets came in her mind, she waited for the disaster which would come and she prepared herself for it. Here writer introduced Jim played his role in story.

"He looked thin and very serious, poor fellow, he was only twenty-two and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves".

We come to know more about poor condition of the young couple. Della ran her home with as much parsimony as possible but she couldn't save more pennies and poor Jim had nothing to save as the household was in Della's hand.

When Jim came, "His eyes were fixed upon Della and there was an expression in them that she could not read and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for." Jim simply stared at her. We are also shocked with his behavior. Here is turn of O'Henry's twist ending. Della told

him that she had her hair-cut for money by which she had purchased dandy gift for him. Yet Jim was in trance and he rapidly confirmed whether she had her haircut or not? Alas! He came to know that she had it.

Plot twist ending is a radical change in the expected direction or outcome of a novel, film, television series, comics, video game or other narrative works. It is a common use of narration used to keep the interest of the audience. We know that O'Henry is master of twist ending.

Della told Jim to be good to her because it was Christmas day. She asked Jim whether she liked her without her long hair or not? But Jim was in idiocy, than he came out of his trance and gave Della a package, and said ;

"Don't make any mistake, Dell, about me, 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. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first"

Della unwrapped the package with ecstatic scream of joy than cried. It was her gift, "The combs – the set of combs and hair accessories. She craved for them but she knew that was impossible. Della understood about Jims firstly behavior. She hugged them and told to Jim – "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

Della suddenly remembered that it was her turn to give gift to Jim. She gave it to Jim, "Platinum fob chain" and asked him for his watch.

"Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his hand and smiled."

That was reveled that Jim had sold out his watch to buy gift for Della.

O'Henry wrote "eight dollars a week or a million a year - what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you a wrong answer. The Magi brought valuable gifts but that was not among them."

Della sold her asset - hair and Jim his watch respectively. We are aware that these two things are the only assets of their house. Della's hair would grow but what about Jim's watch? Jim sacrificed his ancestors watch for Della. It was perhaps much harder for him unlike Della. He had no hope to purchase it back but in love and war everything is possible. Both the husband and wife loved each other more than anything else. They felt inner conflicts in their minds. We know about Della but Jim also experienced it more painfully, We imagine it. The couple gives the example of maturity. Love does not need any materialistic form, it just need feelings. But they believe that to express love, one has to give gifts on Christmas.

To sum up we learn that the gifts are were useless for them. It would happen in future that Della's hair would grow faster and Jim would buy his watch back, but its only imagination. At that time their gifts were useless but not priceless and they new their real assets of their love.

O'Henry wrote :-

"Two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who gave gifts these two were the wisest".

This short story became world wide famous. Many films were made on it. In Hindi album song of Pankaj Udhaas "Ahista kar li baatein", featured Sameera Reddy, who sold out her hair to buy helmet for her lover and her lover sold out his bike to buy necklace, helmet was useless for him. In the movie "sajan bina suhaagan" heroine sold out her hair for her father's treatment. We can face comic irony in this story where the expectation of the situation is opposite to the case.

O'Henry's "The gift of the Magi" is not sob-stuff, it is something more than that. It is about loving couple, their love, conflict and sacrifice. We admire them when we read this story, after all 'Love is Life.'

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