

NOTES

UNIT: III (supplementary-L:2)

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI O.Henry

KEY NOTES: INTRODUCTION:

O. Henry is the pen name of the American short story writer William Sydney Porter. He was born in North Carolina. He worked in Texas as a bank clerk and a journalist. His short stories are noted for their skilled construction with 'twist' endings.

"The gift of the Magi" is one of the most popular and moving stories of O. Henry. The story tells us that any gift of love, however unwisely given or received, is the greatest and the wisest. In this story, with its all pervasive irony, a poor but devoted couple. Jim and Della, sacrificed their precious possession to purchase Christmas gift for each other.

SUMMARY

Governmen Della counted her savings. All she had was one dollar and eighty-seven cents. This she had saved in pennies one or two after hard bargaining with the grocer or the vegetable man or the butcher. This amount was all she had. And the next day was Christmas. Della sat on the shabby couch and cried.

James Dillingham (Jim) and his wife, Della lived in a poor furnished flat at \$ 5 per week. His letter box below in the entrance hall was broken and no letter would go into it. Their electric calling bell would not ring when pressed. The word "Dillingham" in the name plate looked blurred. Sometime before James Dillingham used to earn \$ 30 per week. Now his income had been reduced to \$ 20 per week. It was a hard life for them. But Jim and Della loved each other much.

Della stopped crying and attended to her look in the mirror. Many a happy hour she had spent planning to buy a fine and rare Christmas gift for her Jim.

But all she had now was only \$ 1.87. Suddenly she stood before the mirror. She pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Della looked at her beautiful hair in the mirror. Her hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knees and covered her like a garment. She did her hair up again. Gradually a tear or two fell on the worn out carpet. Then quickly she put on her old brown jacket and hat and ran out to the street. She went direct to the shop of Mrs. Sofronie, a dealer in hair goods. Della went to Mrs. Sofronie, and asked her if she would buy her hair. Mrs. Sofronie had a look at Della's hair and was ready to pay twenty dollars for the hair. So, Della sold it. The next two hours Della passed her time searching for a precious gift for Jim. Her heart was full of excitement. At last Della found her gift. It was a platinum watch chain. She thought it was made for Jim's watch. They took twenty one dollars for it. But it would be the right gift to Jim, it would replace the old and ugly leather strap.

Back at home Della felt a little nervous. With the help of the curling irons she curled her shortened hair. But she was sure, Jim would say that she looked like a Coney Island Chorus girl. But she consoled herself that she could not have done anything with only a dollar and eighty-seven cents.

At 7 o'clock Della made the coffee and cooked the chops. It was time for Jim to return. Jim was never late. She doubled the fob chain in her hand and waited sitting on the corner of the table near the door. Then she heard the footsteps. She grew a little frightened. She prayed to god, "Please God, make him think I am still pretty." She was afraid Jim's love for her might diminish. Then the door opened and Jim stepped in. He was a thin and serious looking fellow. He looked poorly. He was only twenty-two.

Jim's eye fell on her hair. He remained transfixed with a strange kind of expression. He kept staring at her fixedly. Della went to him and said not to look at her that way. She added that she had no money to buy a Christmas present for him and so she had sold her hair. She told him that her hair grows fast. She pleaded with him to say 'Marry-Christmas' to her and see the gift. She had bought for him. Jim seemed to be in a trance. He simply asked, "you've cut off your hair?" Then he looked around the room as if he could not understand what Della was telling him. Della again told him that she had sold her hair to buy a gift for him and that she should not look around for it. She said she sold her hair because she loved him so much. Her hairs might be counted but her love for him could not be counted, she said. Then, Jim suddenly seemed to come out of his trance. He embraced Della. Jim Drew a package from his

overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table. He said his love for his Dell would never grow less merely for a 'haircut or for anything.' He said she would understand the reason of his initial behaviour if she opened the package he had brought.

Della quickly opened the package. She made an ecstatic scream of joy, but immediately began to cry and wail. Jim comforted her. It was so because Jim had brought for her the set of tortoise shell combs, side and back that Delta so much used to admire in a Broadway shop window. She never hoped she would ever possess them. They were now hers. But she had no hair. Still she hugged them at her bosom and said. My hair grows fast, Jim. But instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the cough and put his hands under the back of his head. Then he lovingly said that they should put their Christmas presents away for the time being. They were too nice to use just at the present. He then said he had sold his watch to buy the comb.

The writer concludes the gift such as these are the wisest of the gifts.

- WORD NOTES:1. Magi the three wise men from the East who brought offerings to the infant Jesus.
- Parsimony carefulness in the use of money. 2.
- 3. Instigate - compels us to conclude.
- 4. Predominates – greater in quantity.
- 5. Subsiding - passing from a superior stage to an inferior stage.
- Coax persuade. 6.
- 7. Appertaining - fixed.
- 8. Modest - simple looking.
- 9. Agile - quick moving
- 10. Slender - lean and thin.
- 11. Queen of Sheba – the famous queen of a South Arabian Kingdom who visited Solomon, gave him many gifts and became his mistress. She is known for her beauty and also of the jewels she possessed.
- 12. Depreciate – belittle, reduce the value of
- 13. King Solomon – the famous king of the Hebrews who succeeded David. He is famous for his great wealth and wisdom
- 14. Cascade – waterfall

- Practised hand a hand which has done this thing very often, expert 15. hand
- 16. Ransacking – search thoroughly throwing things here and there
- chaste pure, not of very complicated design 17.
- Intoxication feeling of uncontrollable joy 18.
- 19. Prudence – discretion, caution
- 20. Truant – a student who keeps away from school without permission
- Wriggled off moved off by making a twisting movement 21.
- 22. Enfolded – embraced
- 23. Discreet – careful
- 24. Illuminated – clarified, explained
- 25. Ecstatic – great feeling of joy
- 26. Hysterical – uncontrollable
- 27. Tresses – hair (poetic)
- 28. Singed – burnt
- 29. Dandy – beautiful
- 30. Babe in the manger – refers to infant Jesus

