

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT

By Dan Neidermyer

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THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

By Dan Neidermyer

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 MEN, 2 WOMEN)

JIM	A newly-wed living in New York City in the 1900's. (71 lines)
DELLA	Jim's new bride, sharing a very small apartment with him. (65 lines)
MR. CROCKERTY	Jim's employer. (9 lines)
MADAME SOFRONIE.....	The proprietor of a hair good shop. (9 lines)
MR. MAYER.....	The owner and sole employee of a pawn shop. (10 lines)

SUGGESTIONS FOR STAGING

FOR FIVE ACTORS:

. . . as written

FOR FOUR ACTORS:

. . . eliminate the character of MR. CROCKERTY. JIM can "tell" the audience what happened with his employer earlier in the day when he asked to "leave work early." JIM can simply use much of the dialogue spoken by Mr. Crockerty and incorporate these speeches into his own re-telling of the events of that Christmas Eve afternoon - - very similar to how he (JIM) tells Della what Mr. Crockerty will say if he (JIM) is late to work on that day - - (see page 7 in the script).

FOR THREE ACTORS:

. . . One male actor can play both MR. CROCKERTY and MR. MAYER with a simple change of his appearance.

FOR TWO ACTORS:

. . . both JIM and DELLA can involve the audience spontaneously in recounting what happened that Christmas Eve afternoon. The dialogue of such characters as Madame Sofronie, Mr. Crockerty, and/or Mr. Mayer can be shortened and "fed" to the audience member spontaneously playing the character. Or JIM and DELLA can "tell" what happened that afternoon, asking the audience members to "act out" what they've just told.

AS A SENIORS' READERS' THEATRE:

This script works quite well for individuals to sit in front of an audience and read. Readers would read only the dialogue of the various characters. There is no need for reading any other stage directions or stage business. The dialogue lends itself to the audience using their imaginations.

All action of the play takes place on Christmas Eve day in Jim and Della's little apartment in New York City during the early 1900's or in the streets and shops nearby. "Scenes" are listed more as a reference for a change of time than for a change of location.

SCENE 1: Jim and Della's apartment

SCENE 2: Jim and Della's apartment

SCENE 3: Jim's place of employment

SCENE 4: Madame Sofronie's hair goods shop

SCENE 5: A pawn shop

SCENE 6: Jim and Della's apartment

SET

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI is written to be staged in any type of facility without a major set. Several small pieces of furniture can suggest Jim and Della's apartment. A sign can suggest Madame Sofronie's hair goods shop, also the pawn shop. Or a director can create and construct a set (or sets) as elaborate as desired and feasible.

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COSTUMES

Appropriate apparel for an impoverished newlywed couple in New York City in the early 1900s. Ditto for Mr. Crockerty, Madame Sofronie, and Mr. Mayer.

PROPS

JIM

Treasured fob (pocket watch)

Two combs wrapped as a gift

DELLA

A purse containing \$1.87 in coins

A chain for a pocket watch wrapped as a gift

BOTH

A small box containing several old and small Christmas decorations

A bow found in the box that is a Christmas tree ornament, but which could also be worn as a hair bow

MR. MAYER

Twenty dollars (cash to give to Jim)

A NOTE ABOUT DELLA'S HAIR

Wigs will greatly aid in the telling of this story. Either Della can wear a wig of long, long hair in the beginning of the production, removing this when she sells her hair, thus revealing her own short hair or vice versa.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE:

Newlyweds DELLA and JIM enter the staging area. Within seconds, both begin speaking, obviously very excited about being newly married and very excited to be married to each other. All appears well. Simultaneously - - (moving throughout the staging area, "greeting" many individuals, perhaps everyone in the audience.)

DELLA: *(Speaking directly to individuals within the audience.)* Hello-

JIM: *(Speaking directly to individuals within the audience.)* Good morning. *(Or "afternoon/evening," depending upon the time of the performance.)*

Having greeted everyone, or as many as possible/feasible - -

DELLA: I'm Della.

JIM: I'm Jim.

DELLA: *(Very proudly, telling the audience.)* Actually, he's Mr. James Dillingham Young.

JIM: Yes, dear, I'm Mr. James Dillingham Young, but I'm "Dillingham" only when my salary is \$30 a week. Lately, my salary has been so meager - - only \$20 a week - - that somehow "Dillingham" no longer seems appropriate. Perhaps I should only be Mr. James D. Young.

DELLA: Nonsense, my love. To me - - rich or poor - - *(SHE gives him a huge and tight hug.)* - - you'll always be my wonderful Jim! What does your weekly salary have to do with our love?

JIM: Everything, Della. My salary determines what I'm able to buy you and all the things I want to give to you. No, shower upon you!

DELLA: *(With a smile and warm graciousness.)* Again, nonsense, my wonderful Jim! Wonderful, wonderful thoughts, yes, my love, yes, yes! But to me, your weekly salary matters little; our being together everything.

JIM: *(Turning to explain to the audience.)* Della and I - - we've just been recently married. So, we're really newly - -

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DELLA: *(To the audience; with sincere joy.)* - - weds! And this - - *(Moving about the staging area.)* - - this is our first apartment, Jim's and mine.

JIM: *(With a twinge of shameful embarrassment.)* Not much of an apartment, Della. No rug - -

NOTE: As JIM describes each aspect of the apartment, DELLA whispers her feelings. SHE sounds sincere, gracious, understanding, and - - above all - - honest and loving. JIM'S description continues as if uninterrupted by Della's whispers.

DELLA: No matter.

JIM: - - old, torn, faded, and tattered curtains - -

DELLA: No matter.

JIM: - - very little furniture - -

DELLA: How much more do we really need?

JIM: - - an old sofa that some other family long ago discarded as worthless - -

DELLA: But still useful for us.

JIM: - - and two rickety chairs rather desperately in need of upholstery - -

DELLA: But still very, very comfortable.

JIM: I feel so badly, Della, that I can't give you more.

DELLA: As I said before, "How much more do we really need?"

JIM: What you might not feel we need, Della, but what I feel I want to give you. *(Quickly describes what he'd like to give his lovely bride.)* A golden chandelier . . . gleams over a long mahogany table . . . which is holding a shiny polished silver tea service . . . on top of a very dainty Belgian lace tablecloth.

DELLA: My funny, silly Jim, a candle will do what a golden chandelier does. And a polished silver tea service only brings so much work polishing and polishing to keep it so shiny and shining - -

JIM: But - - if I had my way - - your hands would never do such work!

DELLA: But how - - ?

JIM: Servants!

DELLA: Servants?

JIM: Yes, lots and lots of servants; in every room of our huge house, if you need.

DELLA: (*His desire to give her so much totally overwhelms her.*) Not even the King and Queen of England can boast such luxurious grandness!

JIM: Ah, my love, if I were but able to provide you even half of what my love desires to give you, you would have more than any king or queen on earth ever dared to treasure!

DELLA: (*Moving about the apartment.*) But Jim, my wonderful Jim, your love has already provided me more than any king or queen on earth could desire!

JIM: What!?

DELLA: This apartment - - little though it might be, Jim - - this is our home - - yours and mine - - and with our love - - yours for me, mine for you - - our love makes this apartment very beautiful.

JIM: But I want to do so much more for you.

DELLA: Your wonderful love, Jim - - what more could I ever want? (*She complements her sincere expression of love with another huge and tight hug.*)

JIM: (*With a smile.*) You almost make me believe that, dear, dear Della - -

DELLA: (*Whispering while hugging.*) It's true.

JIM: (*Pulling himself from the hug.*) Then someday - - (*Pulling his pocket watch from his pocket.*) - - Oh, dear! It's almost time for me to leave for work!

DELLA: Not for at least an hour!

JIM: I mustn't be late. I can't be late, especially not today; the day before Christmas.

DELLA: (*Musing.*) Christmas. Tonight's Christmas Eve. (*Looking around the apartment.*) And we haven't even decorated this little apartment. We've been so busy these last few months. We simply haven't had the time.

JIM: The truth, Della: we've had no money to buy decorations.

DELLA: We've got a few. Let's put them up, Jim. Now!

JIM: Now?

DELLA: Yes. (*Hurrying to the side of the staging area.*) Of course!

JIM: (*Checking his fob again.*) I've got to get to work.

DELLA: (*Searching for a box of decorations.*) Not for an hour.

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JIM: You're right. With the few decorations we've got, our entire apartment will be decorated - - with fifty minutes left over for me just to stand around and look at the decorations!

DELLA: *(Finding a box of decorations.)* Ah, here it is, Jim, the box with our Christmas decorations.

JIM: *(Looking into the box.)* What shall we put where?

DELLA: *(Pulling out of the box a small Christmas tree ornament.)* For our tree.

JIM: What tree?

DELLA: The tree in our imagination

JIM: *(Picking out a beautiful bow, another Christmas tree ornament.)* And this beautiful bow - -

DELLA: *(Quickly.)* That's for the tree too.

JIM: No, no, my dear. Such a beautiful bow's made only for one purpose - - *(Holding the bow up close to her hair.)* - - adorning your lovely hair. *(Placing the bow in her hair.)* Such beautiful hair, Della, such long, beautiful hair! *(Pointing at the bow now in her hair.)* Now made even more beautiful!

Both JIM and DELLA laugh, they're having so much fun. Then - - quite spontaneously - - as they pull several small Christmas decorations from the box and move about the staging area, they begin singing a traditional Christmas carol: "Deck the Halls" (or any carol desired, even an original Christmas song written for this purpose).

Laughingly completing the carol and having danced about the small apartment, simply having a most enjoyable time, JIM once again looks at his tob.

JIM: I really must be going, Della. My boss will never understand why I was late to work. "Sorry, Mr. Crockerty, I tried to get to work this morning, I really did. But my beautiful wife - - you should see her, Mr. Crockerty - - so beautiful is she, especially her long brown (*Or auburn or black, depending upon the color of the actress' hair.*) hair which flows - - no, cascades - - down her back while framing her very lovely dancing blue eyes and her exquisite china face. You see, Mr. Crockerty, my wife and I were dancing and singing, decorating our tiny apartment and making a Merry Christmas for ourselves." (*Now becoming a most cantankerous MR. CROCKERTY.*) "What about our customers, Mr. Young?" Mr. Crockerty will bellow, "They too want a Merry Christmas." Then he'll snap, "Couldn't you have looked more closely at that precious fob of yours?" (*JIM taps his pocket watch as if he were MR. CROCKERTY himself.*)

DELLA: (*Pointing toward Jim's pocket watch.*) Such a beautiful pocket watch to be making such a harsh demand upon you, Jim.

JIM: (*Lovingly admiring his fob.*) Yes, my dear, such a beautiful watch, a very prized possession, my most wonderful possession. And next to you - - what I cherish most in life.

DELLA: (*Laughingly agreeing.*) So you've told me - - often.

JIM: (*Continuing to admire the fob.*) This fob belonged to my father and to his father before him.

DELLA: And now to you, a family heirloom indeed.

JIM: And someday handed down to our son.

DELLA: (*Wistfully.*) Someday.

JIM: (*Rushing toward the door.*) But now, I've got to go to work. (*Turning to kiss DELLA goodbye.*) Goodbye, Della, dear. See you this evening. (*While exiting.*) Merry Christmas!

DELLA: (*Smiling; happily.*) Merry Christmas, Jim.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

Now alone, DELLA'S smile slips from her pretty countenance. She becomes sad, repeating slowly - -

DELLA: Merry Christmas . . . Jim . . . dear.

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DELLA now crosses to her "secret hiding place" in the apartment. She locates and removes her purse, lovingly fingering the purse, opening, then dumping its contents onto a table: money - - lots of coins: nickels, dimes, mostly pennies.

DELLA counts the money, her fingers quickly moving the pennies to one side of the table.

DELLA: \$1.50 . . . \$1.55 . . . \$1.60 . . . \$1.70 . . . \$1.75 . . .
76 . . . 77 . . . 78 . . . 79 . . . 80 . . . 81 . . . 82 . . . 83 . . . 84 . . . 85 .
. . . 86 . . . 87 - - (*Becoming rather discouraged.*) - - \$1.87. Only
\$1.87! What will \$1.87 buy? Maybe I've miscounted. (*She quickly counts the money again, her fingers moving through the coins as if she is hoping this time to find even more coins, but no -*
-) \$1.87. Still only \$1.87.

DELLA leaves the money, then moves about the room, feeling quite badly, expressing her sadness.

DELLA: What kind of Christmas present can I possibly buy for Jim with only \$1.87? I wanted to find my wonderful Jim the most beautiful gift, only the finest of gifts for my wonderful Jim. But with only \$1.87 - -

DELLA begins crying, sobbing gently, rehearsing the last several months through her sobs.

DELLA: I've been saving every penny I possibly could for months. "Please, Mr. Vegetable Man, could I have those tomatoes? They're quite bruised. Surely you'll sell them to me for less." "Please, Mr. Grocer, only a pint of milk today, I'm trying to save my pennies." And pennies I've saved, sixty of them. But what will sixty pennies buy? Two bruised tomatoes. A pint of milk, a bit of almost-spoiled meat, several spongy potatoes, but no—no beautiful Christmas gift for my wonderful Jim.

DELLA crosses back to the table, reluctantly counting her money again, but with the same result:

DELLA: \$1.87 . . . only \$1.87. And it's Christmas Eve . . . (*Moving to the apartment's window, looking out, observing the afternoon's weather.*) Getting dark outside . . . soon the shops will be closed. No matter. What could I possibly buy with \$1.87 even if the shops remained open all Christmas Eve? (*As she is looking out the window, her fingers - - without her even being aware of their actions - - are twirling loose strands of her hair.*) . . . Look at all those people down there, out on the streets, happy people, rushing about, buying presents for their loved ones, doing what I most want to be doing - -

Suddenly, and for the first time, DELLA "feels" the hair she's been twirling and twisting between her fingers. A thought obviously crosses her mind. Then:

DELLA: I wonder?

Her countenance, her attitude changing, she rushes back to the table, quickly pushes the \$1.87 into her purse, finds and puts on her coat, and hurriedly leaves the apartment all this busy action without even a sound. Or was she quietly humming a carol as she hurried about the apartment?

DELLA exits the staging area.

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