



*A*



*Little*

*Book*

*About*



*Love*

**Earle Gray**

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**S**o now faith, hope  
and love abide;  
these three; but the  
greatest of these is  
love.

*1 Corinthians: 13:13. Bible,  
English Standard Version.*

## Sweet Mystery of Life

Ah! Sweet mystery of Life  
At last I've found thee  
Ah! I know at last the secret of it all;  
All the longing, seeking, striving, waiting, yearning  
The burning hopes, the joy and idle tears that fall!  
For 'tis love, and love alone, the world is seeking,  
And 'tis love, and love alone, that can repay!  
'Tis the answer, 'tis the end and all of living  
For it is love alone that rules for aye!  
*From Naughtly Marietta, a 1910 operetta and a 1935 film starring Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy. Libretto by Rita Johnson Young, music by Victor Herbert.*

## A Red, Red Rose

O my Luv's like a red, red rose,  
That's newly sprung in June  
O my Luv's like the melodie  
That's sweetly play'd in tune

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luv am I;  
And I will love thee still, my Dear  
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear,  
And rocks melt wi' the sun:  
I will love thee still, my Dear,  
While the sands o' life shall run:

And fare thee weel, my only Luve!  
And fare thee weel, a while!  
And I will come again, my Luve,  
Tho' it were ten thousand mile!  
*Robert Burns (1759-1796), Scottish poet.*

## **Tucson Memorial, 12 January 2011**

So sudden loss causes us to look backward—but it also forces us to look forward, to reflect on the present and the future, on the manner in which we live our lives and nurture our relationships with those who are still with us. We may ask ourselves if we've shown enough kindness and generosity and compassion to the people in our lives. Perhaps we question whether we are doing right by our children, or our community, and whether our priorities are in order. We recognize our own mortality, and are reminded that in the fleeting time we have on earth, what matters is not wealth, or status, or power, or fame—but rather, how well we have loved, and what small part we have played in bettering the lives of others.

*Barrack Obama (1961 - ), 44th U.S. President, in a memorial address, Tucson, Arizona, January 12, 2011, for victims of a shooting rampage January 8, in which six people were killed and 13 wounded, including U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords, who survived a bullet through her head.*

**Grief** is the price we pay for love.

*Queen Elizabeth II (1926- ). From a message of condolence to the American people following the 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington.*

## **Warriors of the Rainbow**

Learn to be a Warrior of the Rainbow, for it is only by spreading love and joy to others that hate in this world can be changed to understanding and kindness, and war and destruction shall end!

*North American Indian prophecy recorded by William Willoya and Vinson Brown in Warriors of the Rainbow: Strange and Prophetic Dreams of the Indians. Happy Camp, California: Naturegraph Publishers, 1962.*

## **What Really Matters**

As a physician who has been deeply privileged to share the most profound moments of people's lives, including their final moments, let me tell you a secret. People facing death don't think about what degrees they have earned, what positions they have held, or how much wealth they have accumulated. At the end, what really matters is whom you loved and who loved you. The circle of love is everything and is a good measure of a past life. It is the gift of greatest worth.

*Bernadine Healy (1944- ), U.S. physician, director of the U.S. National Institute of Health (1991-1999), later president of the American Heart Association, and a commentator on public health issues. A cardiologist, she is a brain cancer survivor. Commencement speech at Vassar College, 1994.*

## **The lesson of the dying**

I have enjoyed some very intense friendships with people who are dying. They've taught me what matters in life and it's not material things. Love is what matters.

*Marie de Hennezel, French psychologist and psychoanalyst, who counsels the dying. London Sunday Times, October 1, 1995.*

## **Our greatest need**

I have never met a person whose greatest need was anything other than real, unconditional love. You can find it in a simple act of kindness towards someone who needs help. There is no mistaking love. You feel it in your heart. It is the common fibre of life, the flame that heats our soul, supplies passion to our lives, and energizes our spirit. It is our connection to God and to each other.

*Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1926- ), Swiss-born U.S. psychiatrist and author. The Wheel of Life. New York: Scribner.*

## Whence Comes Love?

When it comes, will it come without warning  
Just as I'm picking my nose?  
Will it knock on my door in the morning,  
Or tread in the bus on my toes?  
Will it come like a change in the weather?  
Will its greeting be courteous or rough?  
Will it alter my life altogether?  
O tell me the truth about love.  
*W.H. Auden (1907-73), British poet. Twelve Songs.*

## Love After Death

I wondered if David's refusal to let go of Gillian [his deceased wife in the 1996 film, *To Gillian on Her 37th Birthday*] might be sanity as opposed to insanity. The paradox is that we're raised with the idea that true love is rare. We teach our teenagers to abstain from physical love until they find the partner who matches them emotionally. We send all these messages that love should be a union of souls and intellect. And on the other hand, when there's a death, we say: "Get over it. Move on. There are plenty of fish in the sea." It doesn't add up.

If true love is everything it's cracked up to be, then maybe you should hang on to it even if your spouse or partner isn't physically present. My grandfather died in 1978. My grandmother was in love with him then as she is today at 96 or 97. He's still very much part of her life. You could say, "Gee, that's a long time to keep someone alive." On the other hand, the rest of us should be so lucky.

*David E. Kelly, writer and producer of the film "To Gillian on Her 37th Birthday." New York Times, October 13, 1996.*

## The Things Kids Say

If you want to be loved by somebody who isn't already in your family, it doesn't hurt to be beautiful (Anita, 8)... It isn't always just how you look. Look at me. I'm handsome like any-

thing and I haven't got anybody to marry me yet (Brian, 7)... Beauty is skin deep. But how rich you are can last a long time. (Christine, 9)... Love is the most important thing in the world, but baseball is pretty good, too. (Greg, 8)... I think you're supposed to get shot with an arrow or something, but the rest of it isn't supposed to be so painful. (Manual, 8)... If falling in love is anything like learning to spell, I don't want to do it. It takes too long. (Glenn, 7).

*Statements by children on the subject of love, collected by U.S. National Catholic Reporter columnist Michael J. Farrell. Cited in Quote: The Speaker's Digest, October, 1996.*

## **Where There is No Love**

Little do men perceive what solitude is, and how far it extendeth. For a crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love.

*Francis Bacon (1561-1626), English philosopher, statesman, and lawyer. Essays, 1625.*

## **Remake the World**

Ah Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then  
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

*Edward Fitzgerald (1809-93), English scholar and poet. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.*

## **Night Has a Thousand Eyes**

The night has a thousand eyes,  
And the day but one;  
Yet the light of the bright world dies,  
With the dying sun.  
The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart but one;

Yet the light of a whole day dies,  
When love is done.

*Francis William Bourdillon (1852-1921), British writer. Light, 1878.*

## How I Love Thee

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints — I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life! — and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

*Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61), British poet. Sonnets from the Portuguese.*

## Love's Endorphins

When you do something nice for someone, you'll notice a beautiful feeling of ease and peace. Acts of loving kindness release the emotional equivalent of endorphins, the feel-good chemicals that flood your senses after exercise.

*Richard Carlson, author of Don't Sweat the Small Stuff... and it's all small stuff. Kindness and love are said to literally help heal the heart. Rage and anger can cause surges in adrenaline and cortisol, two of the main hormones that contribute to heart disease. Kindness and feelings of love stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, increase calmness, and reduce levels of cortisol. Quoted by Helen Zelon in "Choosing to Be Kind," Reader's Digest, October, 2001, from Family Circle.*

## Love Breeds Love

If all of us loved and cared for one person each. That is all it takes. Love breeds love. Maybe then we will be able to prevent each other from going insane. Maybe then we will be able to prevent each other from becoming violent, as violence is in our hearts and not in our weapons. Guilt is not the one who pulls the trigger, but in each of us who allows it.

*Yoko Ono (1933- ), Japanese-born U.S. artist and widow of*



*“My God, this is a  
great country!”*

EARLE GRAY

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*Beatles singer John Lennon, in a 1980 letter to the press after Lennon was murdered.*

## **Love the Kids**

Even though your kids will consistently do the opposite of what you tell them, you have to keep loving them just as much. To any question about your response to children's strange behavior, there is really just one answer: give them love. I make a lot of money and have given a lot of it to charities, but I've given all of myself to my wife and kids, and that's the best donation I'll ever make.

*Bill Cosby (1937- ), U.S. actor, author and comedian. Fatherhood. New York: Doubleday, 1986.*

## **Broken Hearts**

Most hearts of any quality are broken on two or three occasions in a lifetime. They mend, of course, and are often stronger than before, but something of the essence of life is lost at every break. *Robertson Davies (1913-95). Canadian novelist and critic. Leaven of Malice. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1954.*

## **Come Live With Me**

Come live with me, and be my love,  
And we will some new pleasures prove  
Of golden sands and crystal brooks  
With silken lines, and silver hooks.

*The Bait*

For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love.

*The Canonization.*

*John Donne (1572-1631), English clergyman, poet and author.*

## **The Old Wife**

The love we have in our youth is superficial compared to the love that an old man has for his old wife.

*Will Durant (1885-1981), U.S. historian, on his 90th birthday.*

New York Times, *November 6, 1975. Will and Ariel Durant devoted 40 years to writing their monumental, 10-volume (more than 10,000 pages), The Story of Civilization, published from 1954 to 1967.*

## **The Invention of Love**

When a man is in love for the first time he thinks he invented it.

*Bob (Robert Chambers) Edwards (1864-1922), humorist and publisher. Calgary Eye Opener, November 24, 1917.*

## **Secret of Success**

Success? It is all about being able to extend love to people. Not in a big, capital-letter sense, but in the everyday. Little by little, gesture by gesture, word by word.

*Ralph Fiennes (1962-), British actor, cited in Reader's Digest, February 2002.*

## **Life is a Gift of Love**

Just being alive is being in love. It's a gift, and you don't hang on to gifts too tight.

*Scottish poet and novelist Andrew Greig, from a novel, drawn from his mother's diaries, about RAF pilots during the Second World War, and the people on the ground who supported them. The lines are spoken by a hospitalized pilot who was blinded when his aircraft was shot down. The Clouds Above: A Novel of Love and War. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.*

## **Love is Giving**

Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get — only what you are expected to give, which is everything.

*Katharine Hepburn (1907-2003), U.S. actress. Quoted by Christopher Anderson in An Affair to Remember, a book about the 26-year love affair of Hepburn and Spencer Tracy.*

## **Supreme Happiness**

The supreme happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved.

*Victor Hugo (1802-85), French poet, novelist and playwright. Les Misérables, 1862.*

## **Wisdom and Folly**

Love is the wisdom of the fool and the folly of the wise.

*Samuel Johnson (1709-48), British lexicographer and writer. Johnsonian Miscellanies.*

## **The Greatest Risk**

Do you want me to tell you something really subversive? Love is everything it's cracked up to be. That's why people are so cynical about it... It really is worth fighting for, being brave for, risking everything for. And the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more.

*Eric Jong (1942- ), U.S. writer. How To Save Your Own Life, 1977.*

## **Love's Perception**

As selfishness and complaint pervert and cloud the mind, so love with its joy clears and sharpens the vision. *Helen Keller (1880-1968), blind and deaf U.S. lecturer writer, and academic. My Religion, 1927.*

We come to love not by finding a perfect person but by learning to see an imperfect person perfectly. *Sam Keen (1931- ), U.S. writer, Reader's Digest, January, 1999.*

## **What Intellect Needs**

Some people think only intellect counts: knowing how to solve problems, knowing how to get by, knowing how to identify an advantage and seize it. But the many functions of intellect are

insufficient without courage, love, friendship, empathy, and compassion. We care. It is our curse. It is our blessing.

*Dean R. Koontz (1945-), U.S. writer. Strangers. New York: P.G. Putnam's Sons, 1986.*

## **Roses on the Cuff**

Send two dozen roses to Room 424 and put "Emily, I love you" on the back of the bill.

*Groucho (Julius Henry) Marx (1895-1977), U.S. comedian and film actor. A Night in Casablanca, film, 1946.*

## **Endearing and Enduring**

Believe me, if all those endearing young charms,  
Which I gaze on so fondly today,  
Were to change by tomorrow, and fleet in my arms,  
Like fairy gifts fading away!  
Thou wouldst still be ador'd as this moment thou art,  
Let thy loveliness fade as it will,  
And, around the dear ruin, each wish of my heart  
Would entwine itself verdantly still.

*Thomas Moore (1779-1852), Irish poet, Irish Melodies, 1807.*

## **A Relationship With God**

I'm not a religious person, but I thought: I have to develop a relationship with God right now, otherwise I'm lost. God doesn't make these things happen. It just happens.

*Actor Christopher Reeve (1952-2004), paralyzed from a 1994 horse-riding accident, describes how he found spiritual strength and resolve to overcome great physical disability and devote his life to raising funds for medical research. He describes how he ends each day when an aide "pushes on my stomach with his fist in order to force stool down through the intestines and out onto plastic sheets placed beneath me." The spiral cord injury had left him in such terrible condition that he considered ending his life, until his wife, Dana Morosini, told him: "You're*

*still you. And I love you.* "Still Me. New York: Random House, 1998.

## **Love and Alzheimer's**

There are those who would say that we shouldn't infantilize Alzheimer's patients, but the reality is they should get the kind of attention they need. The kind of care we are giving is often just the opposite of what they need... For most of these people we do little more than house, feed and clean them. Can you imagine the results if babies were given no more attention than that.

*Barry Reisberg, a professor of psychiatry at New York School of Medicine and a leading expert in psychogeriatrics, says Alzheimer's patients regress in an exact reverse of infant and child development, ultimately becoming as helpless as a newborn infant. He says that patients who receive appropriate love, care and attention "do almost unbelievably well, especially in the most severe stage." Quoted by Anne Marie Owens in "A second childhood that begins in old age," Toronto National Post, August 18, 1999.*

## **Reach into Heaven**

Love is something far more than desire for sexual intercourse; it is the principal means of escape from the loneliness which afflicts most men and women throughout the greater part of their lives... Love should be a tree whose roots are deep in the earth, but whose branches extend into heaven.

*Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), English philosopher and mathematician. Marriage and Morals, 1929.*

## **Love is Blind**

But love is blind, and lovers cannot see,  
The pretty follies that themselves commit.  
*Shakespeare (1564-1616), The Merchant of Venice.*

## **The Love Word**

One word

Frees us of all the weight and pain of life

That word is love.

*Sophocles (496?-406? BC), Greek playwright. Oedipus at Colonus, 401 BC.*

## **Thinking of Tolstoy**

One can't live on love alone; and I am so stupid that I can do nothing but think of him.

*Sophie Tolstoy, wife of Count Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1828-1910), Russian writer, philosopher, moralist, and mystic. The Diary of Tolstoy's Wife, 1860-1891. London: Gollancz, 1928.*

## **Love and Hamsters**

The world's tragedy is that men love women, women love children, and children love hamsters.

*Joanna Trollope (1943-), British writer, London Observer, May 7, 2000.*

## **God's Love Command**

To believe in God for me is to feel that there is a God, not a dead one, or a stuffed one, but a living one, who with irresistible force urges us toward more loving.

*Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), Dutch painter. Cited in Biography, November, 1997.*

## **Love Conquers All**

Love conquers all things; let us too surrender to Love. *Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro), (70-19 BC), Roman poet. Eclogues.*

## **Flirting Wives**

The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public.

*Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Irish playwright, poet and wit. The Importance of Being Earnest, 1895.*

## **Stage Love**

On stage I have to make love to 25,000 different people, then I go home alone.

*Janis Joplin (1943-70), U.S. rock singer. Quoted in The Wit and Wisdom of Rock and Roll, 1983.*

## **Love Makes All Possible**

Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of trouble, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility; for it thinks all things are lawful for itself, and all things possible.

*Thomas a Kempis (1379-1471), German monk and religious writer. The Imitation of Christ, 1415.*

## **No Burden too Heavy**

I saw a very small girl walking up a hill carrying an infant boy on her shoulders and I said to her, "This boy is too heavy for you." "Not at all," replied the girl, "he's my brother." *A story from India, told by Mahatma Ghandi and others.*

## **Jenny Kissed Me**

Jenny kissed when we met,  
Jumping from the chair she sat in;  
Time, you thief, who love to get  
Sweets into your list, put that in!  
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,  
Say that health and wealth have missed me.  
Say I'm growing old, but add,  
Jenny kissed me.

*James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), English essayist and poet.*

## **John Anderson My Jo (Jo: dear)**

John Anderson my jo, John,  
When we were first Acquaint  
Your locks were like the raven  
Your bonny brow was bent;  
But now your brow is bald, John,  
Your locks are like the snow,  
But blessings on frosty head  
John Anderson my Jo

John Anderson my jo, John  
We clamb the hill the gither'  
And many a cheerful day John,  
We've had wi' ane anither:  
Now we must totter down, John  
And hand in hand we'll go;  
And sleep the gither at the foot,  
John Anderson my Jo.

*Robert Burns.*

## **Good Advice**

General Mark Wayne Clark was once asked what he considered the best advice he had ever received. "To marry

the girl I married,” he replied. “And who gave you that advice?” he was asked. “She did.”

*Mark Wayne Clark (1896-1984), U.S. general, commander of American Ground Forces in Europe during the Second World War.*

# The Gift of the Magi

By O. Henry

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. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

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 \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was

being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. 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 pierglass in an \$8 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.

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.

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

pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. 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 all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, 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. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown 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.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mne. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings.

Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

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. 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. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 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.

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

“If Jim doesn't kill me,” she said to herself, “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?”

At 7 the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying a little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. 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.

Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. 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. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again—you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously.

“You say your hair is gone?” he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

“You needn’t look for it,” said Della. “It’s sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It’s Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered,” she went on with sudden serious sweetness, “but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?”

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

“Don’t make any mistake, Dell,” he said, “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.”

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled

rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: “My hair grows so fast, Jim!”

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, “Oh, oh!” Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

“Isn’t it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You’ll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it.”

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

“Dell,” said he, “let’s put our Christmas presents away and keep ‘em a while. They’re too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on.”

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. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of 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 give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

## O. Henry: the life of a troubled talent

The Gift of the Magi is the best known of some 600 short stories by O. Henry, the pen name of William Sidney [later changed to Sydney] Porter.



Some were stories of adventure in Central and South America but most were poignant stories of everyday life, noted for their surprise endings. But there was little in the stories that could match Porter's own troubled and turbulent life.

He was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, 1862, the son of a physician. His mother died when he was three; he was raised by his maternal grandmother and schooled at his aunt's elementary school. Always an avid reader, he completed high school at 17, worked at his uncle's drug store, and two years later was licenced as a

pharmacist. The next year he moved to Texas. He worked first on a sheep ranch before moving to Austin.

During the next dozen years he worked as a pharmacist, draftsman, bank teller and bookkeeper, and a reporter for the *Houston Post*. He led an active social life at Austin, a member of musical group where he sang and played the guitar and mandolin. He began writing and selling short stories. He published a magazine of humour and satire, *The Rolling Stone*, which reached a circulation of 1,500, but soon failed and folded. He eloped and married a 17-year-old girl with tuberculosis, Athol Estes, the daughter of a wealthy Austin family. Athol gave birth to a son who died hours later and then a daughter, Margaret.

Porter and his family were living in Houston when he was charged with embezzlement related to his earlier job as teller and bookkeeper at the First National Bank in Austin. The bank has been described as having been “operated informally,” while “Porter had trouble keeping track of his books.” Doubt has been expressed whether Porter was guilty of embezzlement or error but he appeared to lack evidence to mount a defence, perhaps because of confused affairs at an “informal bank.”

The day before he was to stand trial, he fled to Honduras, where he lived for eight months and wrote one of his better known stories, *Cabbage and Kings*, later the title of his first published collection of stories. In *Cabbages and Kings*, he coined the term “banana republic,” which soon became the universal label for small and unstable South American countries.

On news that his wife was dying, Porter returned to Austin, was convicted of embezzlement, and served more

than three years in jail. He worked as the jail's pharmacist and wrote 14 short stories to support his daughter, Margaret. He kept his prison identity secret, assuming his pseudonym, O. Henry, possibly named after a warder, Orrin Henry, or an abbreviation of Eteinne-Ossian Henry, a French pharmacist whose work was included in the prison's pharmaceutical reference book.

Released from prison, he moved to New York, where for eight years he did his most prolific writing, turning out 381 published short stories. A fast writer, for three years he wrote a short story every week for the *New York World*, while also writing for magazines. He wrote *The Gift of the Magi* in 1906. He also began to drink heavily, and became an alcoholic. He married a childhood sweetheart, but she left him two years later.

His final years have been described by David Wallechinsky and Irving Wallace in *The People's Almanac*:

“O. Henry had to be guarded and made to write,’ observed Upton Sinclair. ‘He could not write anything bad, it seemed, but it was agony for him to write at all.’ Magazine editors would send assistants to sober him up, watch over him, and compel him to meet publishing deadlines. His last years were spent roaming the streets of New York, drinking heavily and writing sporadically, but writing incomparably well.”

Porter died in 1910 of cirrhosis of the liver, complicated by diabetes and an enlarged heart. He was 48. It was a tragic end to a gifted by troubled talent. In 1927 his daughter, Margaret, aged 36, was buried beside her father in Asheville, North Carolina.