

GIFT OF THE MAGI

by Jon Jory

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A One Act Play adapted from the story by O. Henry

by Jon Jory

SYNOPSIS: A fresh take on O. Henry's classic story of how a husband and wife handle the challenges of poverty during Christmastime. With the traditional ironic twist, this comedy introduces a couple new characters and a set of carolers to keep your audience intrigued.

(5 females, 2 males, 3 either)

GABE (m).....	(100 lines)
CHLOE (f).....	(150 lines)
FLAME (f).....	(36 lines)
KEVIN (m).....	(23 lines)
MRS. GRIMALDI (f).....	(46 lines)
LAURETTE (f).....	(19 lines)
MADAM CHERNACHEVSKY (f).....	(17 lines)
CAROLERS (m/f)	At least three carolers, any gender. Requires singing. (<i>Non- Speaking.</i>)

DURATION: 30 minutes.

TIME: Present day.

SETTING: Christmastime, New York.

SET

APARTMENT: bed, small table (with drawer), chair

STORE: counter, 2-3 wigs displayed (no brunette), table with drawer

CAFÉ: café table, two chairs

PROPS

- ☐ two scissors
- ☐ newspapers
- ☐ tea pot
- ☐ tea cup
- ☐ five-dollar bill
- ☐ quilt
- ☐ envelope (containing eighteen, one-dollar bills)
- ☐ bike
- ☐ wallet
- ☐ violin case
- ☐ two small Christmas packages in Santa Claus paper
- ☐ Christmas stocking cap
- ☐ Santa hat

AT START: *It's Christmastime, New York. We see a bed and a small table and chair in a fifth-floor walk-up in Brooklyn. We could have walls and a door or an open stage. A group of CAROLERS passes by singing, "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." GABE, a young man, sits in the chair cutting up newspapers to put in his shoe so his feet won't get wet. His wife, CHLOE, pours him a cup of tea.*

CHLOE: Oh Gabe, I hate it when you plug the holes in your shoes with newspaper.

GABE: The *New York Post* is published to keep me dry.

CHLOE: You're really job hunting on Christmas Eve?

GABE: *(Smiling.)* Maybe they'll catch the Christmas spirit.

CHLOE: What's on the agenda?

GABE: Pizza joints.

CHLOE: You don't know anything about pizza!

GABE: I am the maestro of pizza dough. I spin it into animal shapes and maps of South American countries.

CHLOE: *(Testing.)* What's in pizza dough?

GABE: Good will and laughter.

CHLOE: *(Sitting in his lap.)* I love you.

GABE: But I love you more.

CHLOE: You can't love me more than the more I love you.

GABE: Maybe we should love each other just enough.

CHLOE: Actually, I prefer to be loved more than enough.

GABE: Well, that's what you've got.

CHLOE kisses GABE'S forehead and gets up.

GABE: So, what mutts are you walking today?

CHLOE: Two terriers, an Australian collie, and a one-eyed dachshund called Captain Hook.

GABE: That's the whole menu or the first group?

CHLOE: The first group. Then I walk an elderly golden retriever who continually farts. After that two mastiffs and my finale is a bichon frise.

GABE: What's a bichon frise?

CHLOE: It looks like an alarmed powder puff. Then I work the afternoon shift at Wendy's and come home to feed you sugared wheat Chex for dinner.

GABE: Really?

CHLOE: It's either that or a salad made with a slightly yucky head of Romaine lettuce and three radishes.

GABE: Definitely the wheat Chex.

CHLOE: What are we as poor as?

GABE: Church mice?

CHLOE: We're poorer than church mice.

GABE: Church roaches.

CHLOE: Remember. No Christmas presents this year.

GABE: Too bad. I would have given you Wyoming.

CHLOE: Why Wyoming?

GABE: Because you've always wanted to ride a horse.

CHLOE: I'd give you Florida so you could surf.

GABE: Would you mind terribly if I traded it for Idaho?

CHLOE: Really?

GABE: They have the best tattoo artists.

CHLOE: Unexpected. What tattoos would you have?

GABE: Only you. Everywhere in different moods.

CHLOE: Am I so various?

GABE: As clouds transform.

CHLOE ruffles GABE'S hair.

CHLOE: Oh Gabe... Christmas is so tragic.

GABE: Not a bit.

CHLOE: It's disappointment wrapped and bowed.

GABE: Nonsense. We have each other.

CHLOE: But you deserve a present of unparalleled value and delight.

GABE: You.

CHLOE: No, you.

GABE: No, you.

CHLOE: No, you.

GABE: Next year.

CHLOE: There's always next year.

GABE: Got to go.

CHLOE: Got to go.

They blow each other kisses and exit in separate directions. The CAROLERS rush back on and sing the last line of "Twelve Days of Christmas." They exit. Lights change.

CHLOE: *(Enters with her neighbor, FLAME.)* Oh Flame, I'm exhausted. I feel like I have feet the size of the Goodyear blimp. I have a sinus infection and all we have for dinner is wheat Chex.

FLAME: You can have half of my yesterday's french fries?

CHLOE: Yesterday's french fries. It should be the title of my biography.

The CAROLERS pass through singing "Silent Night."

CHLOE: But I still love Christmas.

FLAME: I wish I did.

CHLOE: You really don't?

FLAME: I know. It's terrible. I love the Christmases I remember; I just don't like the new ones.

CHLOE: It'll get better. This is just a phase.

FLAME: It's a long phase.

CHLOE: People love you in the subways. You're a diva.

FLAME: Singing opera in the subways?

CHLOE: You turn the Lexington Avenue line into joy central.

FLAME: Yeah. But you know what I want.

CHLOE and FLAME: An orchestra.

FLAME: It's getting harder not to feel second rate.

CHLOE: You're not second rate! Flame, you're not. You're amazing!

FLAME: My fan. What would I do without you? How's Gabe?

CHLOE: Funny and upbeat, but he's been out of work for three weeks and it eats at him.

FLAME: I know what that feels like.

CHLOE: I so want to make Christmas special for him.

FLAME: *(Pulls a five dollar bill out of her pocket.)* Here.

CHLOE: What's this?

FLAME: The five dollars I owe you.

CHLOE: You don't owe me five dollars.

FLAME: Well, you will someday. *(Starts out.)*

CHLOE: Flame!

FLAME: I'm off to sing a little Puccini on the Eighth Avenue subway.
(*Exits completely.*)

CHLOE: She shouldn't do that. But I'm glad she did. (*Walks into the apartment.*) Don't tell me the heat's off again. (*Wraps herself in a quilt from the bed. To the universe above.*) Give me a break! (*Opens a drawer in the table and takes out an envelope.*) Maybe if I count it again it will be more. (*Counts, it's all one-dollar bills.*) One, two, three, four...

The lights change. GABE crosses the stage on his bike. He passes KEVIN, a young well-dressed man, who hails him.

KEVIN: Gabel?

GABE: Yeah?

KEVIN: It's me.

GABE: Kevin?

KEVIN: Yeah.

GABE: Wow. (*Dismounts. Lies bike down.*) I didn't recognize you.

KEVIN: Every guy should own one good suit.

KEVIN and GABE embrace briefly.

KEVIN: How long?

GABE: Not since graduation.

KEVIN: Three years. How can that be?

GABE: I don't know, man, time seems slow to me.

KEVIN: You married Chloe, right?

GABE: I did.

KEVIN: She was the best.

GABE: Still is.

KEVIN: I wish I could steal a slice of her generosity. She was so nice she was hard to believe.

GABE: Still is.

KEVIN: So, what do you do, man?

GABE: This and that.

KEVIN: What this and that?

GABE: I have to piece it together right now.

KEVIN: Oh.

Brief pause.

GABE: You?

KEVIN: Stock trader. My dad had connections. It's crazy, the sky rains money.

GABE: Maybe not on my side of the street.

KEVIN: But you're okay, right?

GABE: Yeah, I'm fine.

KEVIN: Last I heard you were in the travel business.

GABE: Closed. Couldn't compete with the big guys.

KEVIN: Sorry.

GABE: It got old anyway. *(Pause.)* So.

KEVIN: Yeah. Hey, you know that bar we all used to go to?

GABE: The Third Rail?

KEVIN: That's like a block and a half. You got time to do a brew?

GABE: Ummm, not really.

KEVIN: Come on. All the papers you wrote for me, I owe you a dozen.

GABE: I don't know.

The CAROLERS come through singing any carol.

KEVIN: It's Christmas time, man. Enjoy yourself for twenty minutes. I'm buying. Want to hear what happened to Lucy-in-the-sky-with-diamonds?

GABE: *(Remembering.)* No! What happened?

KEVIN: It's a tale of thrills and chills. Takes two beers though.

GABE: I owe it to myself to hear what happened to Lucy. She stole my car once.

KEVIN: Oh, I remember.

GABE rights his bike and they begin to exit.

KEVIN: It all started with a prophetic parrot.

KEVIN and GABE are gone. Lights change back to CHLOE at the table.

CHLOE: No matter how many times I count it, it's not enough.

SFX: a knock.

CHLOE: Who is it?

MRS. GRIMALDI: It's Mrs. Grimaldi.

CHLOE: Come in.

MRS. GRIMALDI: How's my favorite GenZ?

CHLOE: I live beyond classification, Mrs. G.

MRS. GRIMALDI: So, I made a tuna noodle casserole, and Herbie said he was not eating another casserole 'til he was seventy, so it's yours.

CHLOE: I thought he was seventy?

MRS. GRIMALDI: For several years. You're making a face?

CHLOE: I can't keep accepting food from you, Reba.

MRS. GRIMALDI: I should throw it out?

CHLOE: But—

MRS. GRIMALDI: It's Christmastime, take the casserole and enjoy.

CHLOE: *(Laughing.)* Fine. How do you get such a nice crust?

MRS. GRIMALDI: I pray for it. You got a lotta money here. You runnin' a poker game?

CHLOE: It's not a lot of money, it's all ones except for one five.

MRS. GRIMALDI: I used to like it when there was money. Now it's all credit cards. There's no sense of accomplishment. I once held in these very hands a thousand-dollar bill. No really, I think they stopped makin' them in '46, but they were around until the late 50s. My hands shook. From outta my vast treasure trove of the experience of this and that, I'm gonna guess you been saving up to buy your hubby a Christmas present, but you can't cut it, am I right?

CHLOE: *(Puts her head in her hands.)* Oh, Mrs. Grimaldi.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Now, now, now. Take my hanky. What's wrong with your generation is they've only experienced Kleenex. How much you got?

CHLOE: Twenty-three dollars, but I have to put fifteen toward the rent. Our card is maxed out. We're a mess.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Forget the rent. It's a mea culpa for not keepin' it up better.

CHLOE: I can't do that.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Do what I tell you and stop talkin’.

CHLOE: But...

MRS. GRIMALDI: Shhhh. So, what’s on the menu?

CHLOE: What do you mean?

MRS. GRIMALDI: For the gift.

CHLOE: It’s a sad story.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Perfect. My hobby is enjoying other people’s desperation.

CHLOE: It is not.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Little do you know. What? I’m waiting here.

CHLOE: The pawn shop’s got everything. Last week it was my mom’s tortoise shell hair clips she got from her mom.

MRS. GRIMALDI: That’s terrible.

CHLOE: I know. The last six months everything that could go wrong went wrong.

MRS. GRIMALDI: I had a year like that. 1987, if you can believe that. I spit on 1987. Patooiie! (*Spits.*)

CHLOE: Anyway, the last thing Gabe has is his great grandfather’s watch. It’s this “walking Liberty coin” wristwatch from the thirties. It had like a real silver watchband but that went last summer. Now the watch has no band and it sits in the dresser.

MRS. GRIMALDI: That’s not right.

CHLOE: I know. He loves that watch. He works so hard, but nothing’s been working out. I wanted more than anything to get him the original band.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Which costs?

CHLOE: Over a hundred.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Well, as Grandpa used to say, “Desperate times, desperate measures.” Up.

CHLOE: Why?

MRS. GRIMALDI: Up, up, up.

CHLOE rises.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Turn around.

CHLOE turns around.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Problem solved.

CHLOE: What? How? What are you talking about?

MRS. GRIMALDI: There are people who buy hair.

CHLOE: They do?

MRS. GRIMALDI: What planet are you living on? From your hair they make wigs, extensions, I don't know what all.

CHLOE: In Brooklyn?

MRS. GRIMALDI: All over. I read in my AARP magazine there's some kind of temple in India asks visitors to shave their heads and they dump it in these giant vats from which they make wigs, from the sales of which they feed thousands of the poor every day. I know all this because back in the eighties I sold my golden locks for eighty dollars and bought the very sofa you sit on when you visit. Now, I'm guessing you get a lot more now. You got like twenty-five inches there—you're a gold mine. Back then there were places in the city on 25th Street. You check it out.

CHLOE: But Gabe loves my hair.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Newsflash, it grows back.

CHLOE: But...

MRS. GRIMALDI: Here's the deal, let him run his fingers through what you got for a Christmas present or chop it off and get that boy an all-time major present.

CHLOE: I'll look like a billiard ball.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Okay, I'm me and you're you. But if I was you, I'd chop it. Wouldn't think twice. Eat some casserole. There's nothing like casserole to steady the mind. It's a turn on when you change things up. Tootles. *(Exits.)*

CHLOE: *(Looking in an imaginary mirror.)* I just don't have the features to do without hair. I'll be plain as a cake without icing.

The door opens. MRS. GRIMALDI pokes her head in.

MRS. GRIMALDI: Chop it!

CHLOE: *(Half laughing.)* Stop it!

MRS. GRIMALDI exits.

CHLOE: Chloe Moira Killkenny, daughter of Alana, granddaughter of Bridgett from the county Clare, cut off your damn hair!

CHLOE turns around and exits. The lights change. GABE enters talking to himself. Behind this speech, furniture is cleared. To one side a store counter is set up and on it two or three wigs are displayed. None are brunette. LAURETTE, a sales-woman who is well dressed, enters and stands behind the store counter.

GABE: I'm a birdbrain, a pinhead, a schlub, a bubblebrain, a ratbag! What is the matter with me? Why did I insist on paying the check? He's a stocktrader! He throws hundred-dollar bills over his left shoulder for good luck. Who did I think I was? Actually, that's the point! I didn't want him to know I was dead broke, and I paid for the privilege! I'm a moron, a yo-yo, a woodenhead! Now what Gabriel, you ostrich brain? What have I done? *(Pulls out his wallet.)* Three, four, a five. Nine dollars. *(Examines his pants pockets.)* And 25, 50, 80 cents. Nine dollars and eighty cents. What can I buy for Chloe for ten dollars? A photo-cube, a name-a-star-kit, a coffee mug! I'm an idiot! You can't buy someone you love more than life itself a photo-cube for Christmas! She sold her antique Russian tortoise shell hair clips to pay our rent and I'm going to give her a keychain?

GABE exits. CHLOE enters.

CHLOE: Okay, I can do this. I can cut off my hair. Whack, whack, whack. Gabe absolutely loves me spiritually as well as physically... maybe. So, you can do this. I can't do this. You can do this. I wish I had Swedish Fish.

CHLOE goes to LAURETTE at the store counter.

LAURETTE: Welcome to Hair-is-Life. I am your hair guide; shall we go on the journey?

CHLOE: *(Confused.)* I'm sorry, what journey?

LAURETTE: From the external to the internal. The voyage.

CHLOE: Oh. *(She has to ask.)* Do you buy hair?

LAURETTE: Perhaps you are asking the wrong question.

CHLOE: I am?

LAURETTE: We make change not only possible but necessary. So what you mean is, "I am ready."

CHLOE: Ready for what?

LAURETTE: (*Slightly irritated.*) Change.

CHLOE: But do you buy hair?

LAURETTE: Of course, we buy hair. But we sell change.

CHLOE: But you buy hair?

LAURETTE: (*Grim.*) Yes, we buy hair.

CHLOE: (*Relieved.*) Cool.

LAURETTE: But we don't buy your hair.

CHLOE: Why not?

LAURETTE: Because you're a brunette and nobody wants to be brunette. Brunette is a place people escape from. Brunette is a prison sentence, a punishment, it is the hell of the commonplace.

CHLOE: But you buy hair and it's nice hair and I have a lot of it. And I need to sell the hair and you buy hair.

LAURETTE: All right... what's your name?

CHLOE: Chloe.

LAURETTE: All right, Chloe, we'll buy your hair.

CHLOE: Great! I can't tell you how relieved I am! I have to buy my husband an Edwardian or Victorian silver watchband because he is the sweetest, most interesting, most loyal, most well, sexy... husband of all of New York and...

LAURETTE: Ten dollars.

CHLOE: Ten dollars? Surely you don't mean ten dollars. Where can I buy a Victorian silver watchband for ten dollars?

LAURETTE: I haven't the faintest.

CHLOE: Then why would you buy it at all?

LAURETTE: Because the owner, Mrs. Wickenham Mayberry Chrysalis Jones, New York's leading socialite has a foundation called The Ugly Hair Foundation when she buys anyone's useless, hateful brunette hair to get it off the street and out of sight.

CHLOE: That's awful!

LAURETTE: Take it or leave it.

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