The Magi

Adapted by
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from O. Henry's short story
“The Gift of the Magi”

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Time has passed. Della and Jim, the young couple from O'Henry's classic story, are now elderly. At their yearly Christmas Eve visit to a simple coffee shop, they encounter a melancholy woman. Touched by her sadness, they tell their story in a flashback scene of their first Christmas together when they each sold their most precious possession to buy the other a present. That experience changed forever their idea of buying expensive Christmas gifts. Instead they exchange the most priceless of all, love. About 20 minutes.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The Magi was first presented on December 11, 1992 at Rossmoor Village Clubhouse by the Mobile Theatre, Princeton, NJ. It was under the direction of June Connerton. The following were the members of the original cast:

Wife -- June Connerton
Husband -- Herbert McAneny
Woman -- Lelia Matthews
Della -- Susan Lustig
Jim -- Don Gilpin

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(*2 m, 3w)*

WIFE: An elderly woman, in her 80s.

HUSBAND: An elderly man, in his 80s.

WOMAN: In her mid-30s to late 40s.

DELLA: A young woman in her early 20s.

JIM: A young man, early 20s.

SETTING

A coffee shop on Christmas Eve, in the present, and
Della and Jim's apartment, Christmas Eve, 1932.

THE MAGI

(AT RISE: An elderly HUSBAND and WIFE are sitting in a coffee shop eating Christmas cookies and drinking coffee. They are well-dressed. The wife has long gray hair that is presently in a very elegant-looking bun on top of her head. They are relaxed and content with each other. Even when they bicker, it is clear that they are very much in love. The coffee shop is decorated for the Christmas holiday. He pours her some more coffee, his hand shaking a bit as he does so. A couple of moments pass, then a WOMAN enters. She looks somewhat frazzled -- and somewhat sad. She stands at the doorway looking around for an empty table. There is none. Fighting back tears, she daubs at her eyes with a tissue as she waits for a table.)

WIFE: *(Who is witnessing this.)* Oh look, Jim. There are no empty tables and that woman looks just exhausted. I'm going to ask her to join us.

HUSBAND: Oh no you're not! Remember the last time? That woman? *(Imitating a woman's voice.)* Deetee deetee deetee deetee deetee deetee deetee. Accch, she nearly talked my ear off. She didn't shut up long enough to—

WIFE: So let's make this woman suffer because once upon a time we got a blabbermouth.

HUSBAND: Della, do we have to? In a few hours it will be Christmas Eve….

WIFE: All the more reason to show some compassion, ya ole goat! *(To WOMAN.)* Excuse me. Hello. Hellooo. *(WOMAN looks over.)* You're more than welcome to join my husband and me. There's plenty of room at our table.

(WOMAN smiles, shakes her head no.)

HUSBAND: *(Muttering.)* Old goat she calls me. I'm an ole goat just because I would like to spend a little time alone--

WIFE: Shhhh! *(To WOMAN.)* It's very crowded in here and it doesn't look much like anyone's leaving. Please. I insist.

(WOMAN hesitates, then smiles weakly and starts coming over.)

WIFE: *(Cont'd. Quietly but sternly to HUSBAND.)* Behave yourself!
HUSBAND: *(Braying like a goat.)* Baaaaa!

(WIFE glares at HIM.)

WOMAN: *(Standing at their table.)* Are you sure you don't mind?
WIFE: Not at all. Have a seat. You look exhausted.

(WOMAN takes off her coat and sits down.)

WOMAN: *(Glancing over to HUSBAND.)* Thank you. This is very kind of you.
WIFE: Don't mention it. I'm Della and this is my husband Jim.
HUSBAND: *(Slightly on the grouchy side.)* Hello.
WOMAN: *(Smiles nervously.)* Hello. Oh, I'm Jean.
WIFE: *(After a long, uncomfortable silence.)* So…Merry Christmas!
WOMAN: Oh! Yes. Merry Christmas to you too. *(To JIM.)* And to you.

(HE nods back at HER. Long silence. Then, overcome by tears, she takes out a tissue and starts crying.)

WIFE: *(Glaring back at HUSBAND who's looking at HER with a "Here we go again" expression.)* Are you all right? Is everything all right?
WOMAN: Yes, yes. I'm fine - I'm just fine. Forgive me…I don't usually cry in public. Things have been - this has been a rough year for me - for my family. *(SHE pauses, deciding whether or not to discuss it.)* My husband was recently laid off from work.
WIFE: Oh, I am so sorry.

WOMAN: The company he works for wasn't doing well and had to cut way back.

WIFE: Acch. That happens sometimes.

WOMAN: It all happened so fast. One day, I'm home taking care of our children. Suddenly I'm working two jobs. I hardly see anyone anymore. By the time I get home from work I'm so tired and I can't… Oh, what's the use. *(Pause.)* Doesn't do any good to complain. Thank goodness I have family nearby. They've been a wonderful help. We'll be all right, I know we'll be all right. It's just with the holiday season…you feel more…*(Pause.)* My husband…*(Fighting back tears.)* my husband has been very down. I wanted to get him something nice this year. I wanted him to know just how much he means to the children and me. *(Crying again.)* I wanted to make this Christmas special. So instead the money went for a new radiator in my car. Wasn't exactly what I had in mind. *(Drying her tears, trying to laugh it off.)* Oh well. For all my looking I wasn't able to find anything for him anyway. Maybe next year, right?

WIFE: *(Sympathetically.)* Maybe next year.

HUSBAND: *(Suddenly booming in, startling the two women.)* History repeats itself. We've lived through some pretty rough times. It's one thing to hear about economic difficulties on television or read about it in the history books. It's another thing to experience it firsthand. We've been there too. You just have to keep going. Things will get better.

WIFE: *(Pleased with her husband for participating.)* Things will get better.

WOMAN: *(Smiles weakly and nods.)* So, are you all finished with your Christmas shopping? I think you two are the only ones in here without shopping bags.

WIFE: Oh well, we don't do as much as most people do gift-wise. We pick up a few toys and clothes for the grand-children, give the kids a little cash to buy themselves something nice with. Everyone comes over for the day and we cook a lot and eat a lot and sing a lot and bicker a lot… the presents are not so…important.

WOMAN: Do you two exchange gifts?

End of Freeview

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