

NEW YORKERS

SHORT STORIES

What makes one city different from another city? Is it the buildings, the weather, the people? It is the people who make a city, and to know a city, you must know its people. You must know what makes them laugh and cry, know the small details of their everyday lives.

What kind of people lived in New York at the beginning of the twentieth century? Are New Yorkers different now from a hundred years ago? Cities grow bigger with the years, new buildings are put up and old buildings are pulled down, horses are replaced by cars and buses, fashions change. But people do not change. The New Yorkers in these stories are very different from each other, but the hopes of a tramp are as important as the hopes of a lawyer; the love of a waitress is as exciting as the love of an actress. And we see that people's hopes and fears and dreams do not change with the years.


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Human Interest






New Yorkers

SHORT STORIES

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The Christmas Presents

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. Every day, when she went to the shops, she spent very little money. She bought the cheapest meat, the cheapest vegetables. And when she was tired, she still walked round and round the shops to find the cheapest food. She saved every cent possible.

Della counted the money again. There was no mistake. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And the next day was Christmas.

She couldn't do anything about it. She could only sit down and cry. So she sat there, in the poor little room, and she cried.

Della lived in this poor little room, in New York, with her husband, James Dillingham Young. They also had a bedroom, and a kitchen and a bathroom – all poor little rooms. James Dillingham Young was lucky, because he had a job, but it was not a good job. These rooms took most of his money. Della tried to find work, but times were bad, and there was no work for her. But when Mr James Dillingham Young came



home to his rooms, Mrs James Dillingham Young called him 'Jim' and put her arms round him. And that was good.

Della stopped crying and she washed her face. She stood by the window, and looked out at a grey cat on a grey wall in the grey road. Tomorrow was Christmas Day, and she had only one dollar and eighty-seven cents to buy Jim a Christmas present. Her Jim. She wanted very much to buy him something really fine, something to show how much she loved him.

Suddenly, Della turned round and ran over to look in the glass on the wall. Her eyes were bright.

Now, the James Dillingham Youngs had two very special things. One was Jim's gold watch. It once belonged to his father, and, before that, to his grandfather. The other special thing was Della's hair.

Quickly, Della let down her beautiful, long hair. It fell down her back, and it was almost like a coat around her. Then she put her hair up again, quickly. For a second or two she stood still, and cried a little.

Then she put on her old brown coat, and her old brown hat, turned, and left the room. She went downstairs and out into the road, and her eyes were bright.

She walked along by the shops, and stopped when she came to a door with 'Madame Eloise – Hair' on it.



Quickly, Della let down her beautiful, long hair.



Inside there was a fat woman. She did not look like an 'Eloise'.

'Will you buy my hair?' Della asked.

'I buy hair,' Madame replied. 'Take your hat off, then, and show me your hair.'

The beautiful brown hair fell down.

'Twenty dollars,' Madame said, and she touched the hair with her hand.

'Quick! Cut it off! Give me the money!' Della said. The next two hours went quickly. Della was happy because she was looking round the shops for Jim's present.

At last she found it. It was a gold chain for The Watch. Jim loved his watch, but it had no chain. When Della saw this gold chain, she knew immediately that it was right for Jim. She must have it.

The shop took twenty-one dollars from her for it, and she hurried home with the eighty-seven cents.

When she arrived there, she looked at her very short hair in the glass. 'What can I do with it?' she thought. For the next half an hour she was very busy.

Then she looked again in the glass. Her hair was now in very small curls all over her head. 'Oh, dear. I look like a schoolgirl!' she said to herself. 'What's Jim going to say when he sees me?'

At seven o'clock the dinner was nearly ready and



'Oh dear,' said Della. 'What's Jim going to say when he sees me?'

Della was waiting. 'Oh, I hope he thinks that I'm still beautiful!' she thought.

The door opened and Jim came in and closed it. He looked very thin and he needed a new coat. His eyes were on Della. She could not understand the look on his face, and she was afraid. He was not angry or surprised. He just watched her, with that strange look on his face.

Della ran to him.



'Jim,' she cried. 'Don't look at me like that. I sold my hair because I wanted to give you a present. It will soon be long again. I had to do it, Jim. Say "Happy Christmas", please. I have a wonderful present for you!'

'You've cut off your hair?' asked Jim.

'Yes. I cut it off and sold it,' Della said. 'But don't you love me any more, Jim? I'm still me.'

Jim looked round the room.

'You say your hair has gone?' he said, almost stupidly.

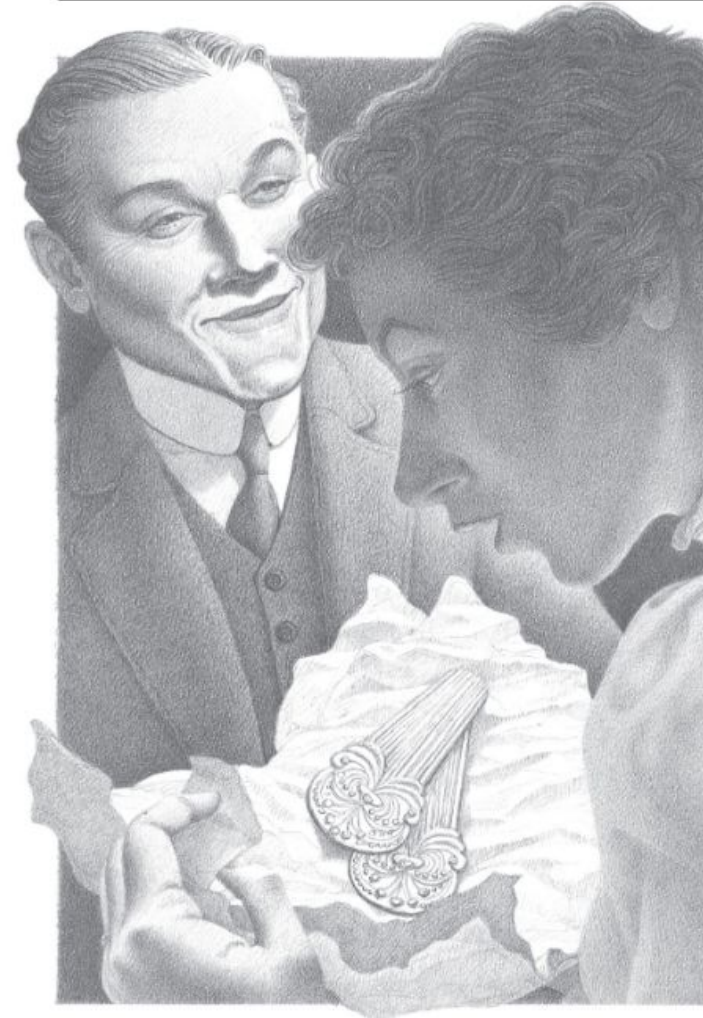
'Yes. I told you. Because I love you! Shall I get the dinner now, Jim?'

Suddenly Jim put his arms round his Della. Then he took something from his pocket and put it on the table.

'I love you, Della,' he said. 'It doesn't matter if your hair is short or long. But if you open that, you'll see why I was unhappy at first.'

Excited, Della pulled off the paper. Then she gave a little scream of happiness. But a second later there were cries of unhappiness.

Because there were The Combs – the combs for her beautiful hair. When she first saw these combs in the shop window, she wanted them. They were beautiful combs, expensive combs, and now they were her combs. But she no longer had her hair!



Della gave a little scream of happiness.



Della picked them up and held them. Her eyes were full of love.

‘But my hair will soon be long again, Jim.’

And then Della remembered. She jumped up and cried, ‘Oh! Oh!’ She ran to get Jim’s beautiful present, and she held it out to him.

‘Isn’t it lovely, Jim? I looked everywhere for it. Now you’ll want to look at your watch a hundred times a day. Give it to me! Give me your watch, Jim! Let’s see it with its new chain.’

But Jim did not do this. He sat down, put his hands behind his head, and he smiled.

‘Della,’ he said. ‘Let’s keep our presents for a time. They’re so nice. You see, I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now, let’s have dinner.’

And this was the story of two young people who were very much in love.



Soapy's Choice



Soapy sat on a seat in Madison Square, New York, and looked up at the sky. A dead leaf fell onto his arm. Winter was coming, and Soapy knew that he must make his plans. He moved unhappily on his seat.

He wanted three months in a nice, warm prison, with food and good friends. This was how he usually spent his winters. And now it was time, because, at night on his seat in the square, three newspapers did not keep out the cold.

So Soapy decided to go to prison, and at once began to try his first plan. It was usually easy. He ate dinner in an expensive restaurant. Then he told them he had no money and they called a policeman. Nice and easy, with no trouble.

So Soapy left his seat, and walked slowly along the street. Soon he came to a bright restaurant on Broadway. Ah! This was all right. He just had to get to a table in the restaurant and sit down. That was all, because, when he sat down, people could only see his coat and his shirt, which were not very old. Nobody