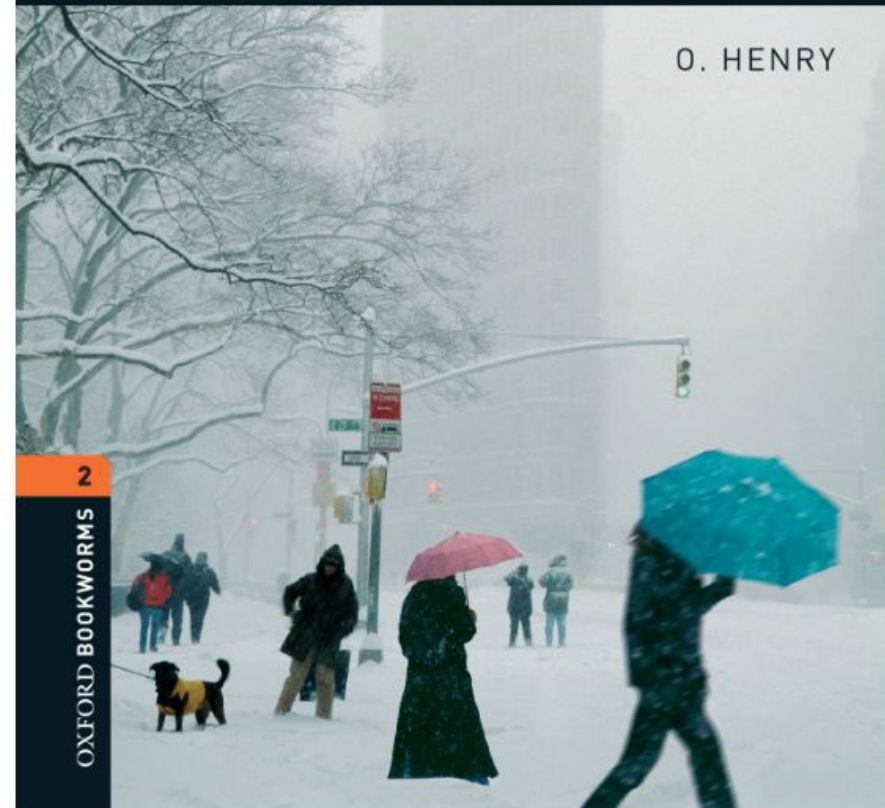




New Yorkers

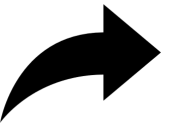
Short Stories

O. HENRY



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OXFORD BOOKWORMS



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.

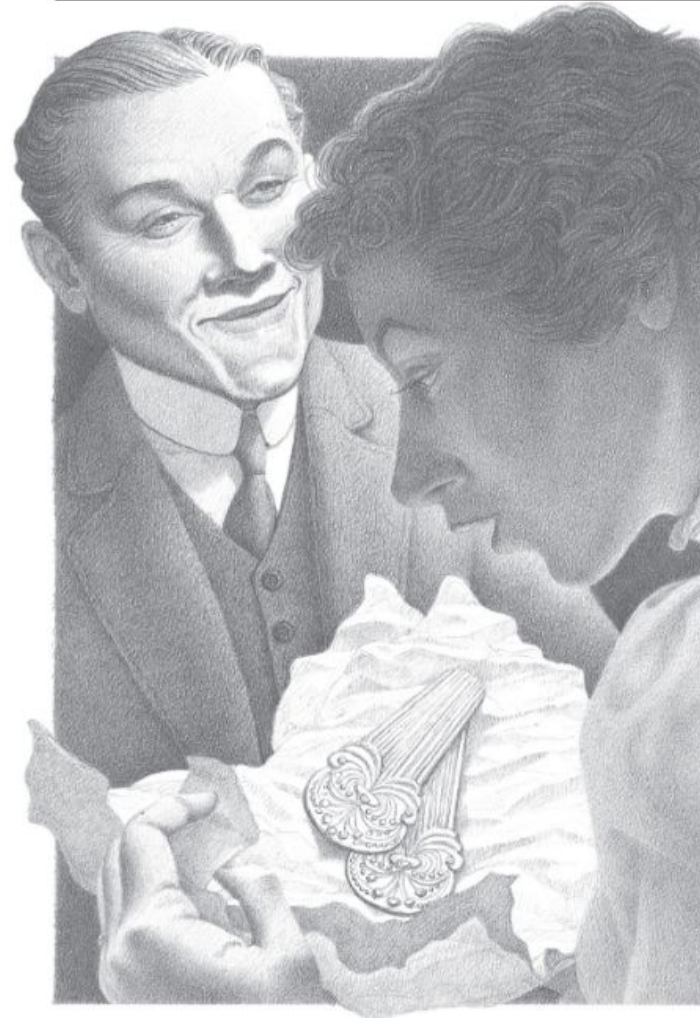
'Yes. I told you. Because I love you! Shall I get the dinner now, Jim?'

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 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



could see his trousers. He thought about the meal – not too expensive, but good.

But when Soapy went into the restaurant, the waiter saw Soapy's dirty old trousers and terrible shoes.

Strong hands turned him round and helped him out into the street again.

So now he had to think of something different. Soapy walked away from Broadway and soon he found himself on Sixth Avenue. He stopped in front of a shop window and looked at it. It was nice and bright, and everybody in the street could see him. Slowly and carefully he picked up a stone and threw it at the window. The glass broke with a loud noise. People ran round the corner and Soapy was happy, because the man in front was a policeman. Soapy did not move. He stood there with his hands in his pockets, and he smiled. 'I'll soon be in prison now,' he thought.

The policeman came up to Soapy. 'Who did that?' he asked.

'Perhaps I did,' Soapy replied.

But the policeman knew that people who break windows do not stop to talk to policemen. They run away. And just then the policeman saw another man, who was running to catch a bus. So the policeman ran after him. Soapy watched for a minute. Then he walked away. No luck again! He began to feel cross.



Strong hands turned Soapy round and helped him out into the street again.

But on the opposite side of the road he saw a little restaurant. 'Ah, that'll be all right,' he thought, and he went in. This time nobody looked at his trousers and his shoes. He enjoyed his meal, and then he looked up at the waiter, smiled and said, 'I haven't got any



money, you know. Now, call the police. And do it quickly. I'm tired!

'No police for you!' the waiter answered. 'Hey! Jo!'

Another waiter came, and together they threw Soapy out into the cold street. Soapy lay there, very angry. With difficulty, he stood up. His nice warm prison was still far away, and Soapy was very unhappy. He felt worse because a policeman, who was standing near, laughed and walked away.

Soapy moved on, but he walked for a long time before he tried again. This time it looked easy.

A nice young woman was standing in front of a shop window. Not very far away there was also a policeman. Soapy moved nearer to the young woman. He saw that the policeman was watching him. Then he said to the young woman, with a smile, 'Why don't you come with me, my dear? I can give you a good time.'

The young woman moved away a little and looked more carefully into the shop window. Soapy looked at the policeman. Yes, he was still watching. Then he spoke to the young woman again. In a minute she would call the policeman. Soapy could almost see the prison doors. Suddenly, the young woman took hold of his arm.

'OK,' she said happily. 'If you buy me a drink. Let's

go before that policeman sees us.'

And poor Soapy walked away with the young woman, who still held on to his arm. He was very unhappy.

At the next corner he ran away from the woman. Suddenly he was afraid. 'I'm never going to get to prison,' he thought.

Slowly, he walked on and came to a street with a lot of theatres. There were a lot of people there, rich people in their best clothes. Soapy had to do something to get to prison. He did not want to spend another night on his seat in Madison Square. What could he do? Then he saw a policeman near him, so he began to sing and shout and make a lot of noise. This time they must send him to prison. But the policeman turned his back to Soapy and said to a man who was standing near, 'He's had too much to drink, but he's not dangerous. We'll leave him alone tonight.'

What was the matter with the police? Soapy was really unhappy now, but he stopped making a noise. How could he get to prison? The wind was cold, and he pulled his thin coat around him.

But, just then, inside a shop, he saw a man with an expensive umbrella. The man put his umbrella down near the door, and took out a cigarette. Soapy went into the shop, picked up the umbrella, and, slowly, he



'We'll leave him alone tonight,' said the policeman.

began to walk away. The man came quickly after him. 'That's my umbrella,' he said.

'Oh, is it?' Soapy replied. 'Then why don't you call a policeman? I took it, and you say it's your umbrella. Go on, then. Call a policeman! Look! There's one on the corner.'

The umbrella man looked unhappy. 'Well, you know, perhaps I've made a mistake. I took it from a restaurant this morning. If it's yours, well, I'm very sorry . . .'

'Of course it's my umbrella,' Soapy said.

The policeman looked at them – and the umbrella man walked away. The policeman went to help a beautiful young girl to cross the road.

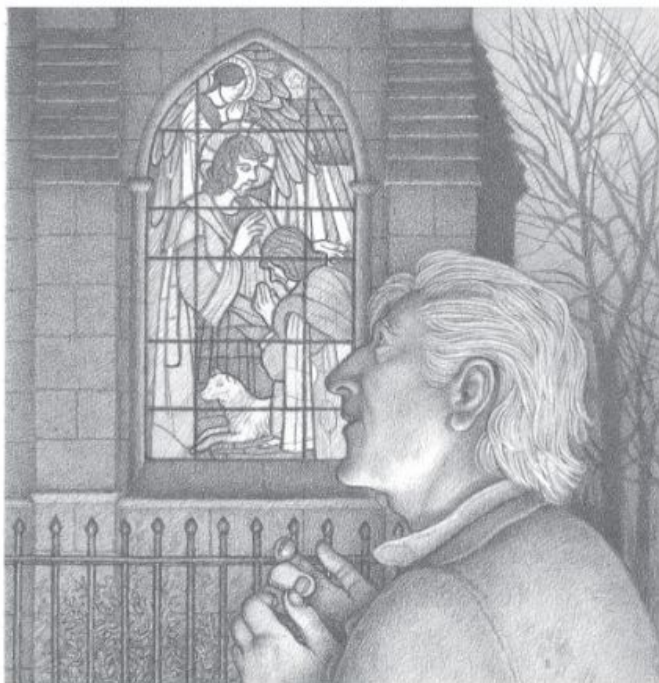
Soapy was really angry now. He threw the umbrella away and said many bad things about policemen. Just because he wanted to go to prison, they did not want to send him there. He could do nothing wrong!

He began to walk back to Madison Square and home – his seat.

But on a quiet corner, Soapy suddenly stopped. Here, in the middle of the city, was a beautiful old church. Through one purple window he could see a soft light, and sweet music was coming from inside the church. The moon was high in the sky and everything was quiet. For a few seconds it was like a country church and Soapy remembered other, happier days. He thought of the days when he had a mother, and friends, and beautiful things in his life.

Then he thought about his life now – the empty days, the dead plans. And then a wonderful thing happened. Soapy decided to change his life and be a new man. 'Tomorrow,' he said to himself, 'I'll go into town and find work. My life will be good again. I'll be somebody important. Everything will be different. I'll . . .'

Soapy felt a hand on his arm. He jumped and looked



For a few seconds Soapy remembered other, happier days.

round quickly – into the face of a policeman!

‘What are you doing here?’ asked the policeman.

‘Nothing,’ Soapy answered.

‘Then come with me,’ the policeman said.

‘Three months in prison,’ they told Soapy the next day.



A Walk in Amnesia

That morning my wife and I said our usual goodbyes. She left her second cup of tea, and she followed me to the front door. She did this every day. She took from my coat a hair which was not there, and she told me to be careful. She always did this. I closed the door, and she went back to her tea.

I am a lawyer and I work very hard. My friend, Doctor Volney, told me not to work so hard. ‘You’ll be ill,’ he said. ‘A lot of people who work too hard get very tired, and suddenly they forget who they are. They can’t remember anything. It’s called amnesia. You need a change and a rest.’

‘But I *do* rest,’ I replied. ‘On Thursday nights my wife and I play a game of cards, and on Sundays she reads me her weekly letter from her mother.’

That morning, when I was walking to work, I thought about Doctor Volney’s words. I was feeling very well, and pleased with life.

When I woke up, I was on a train and feeling very