

“Jim, darling,” she said, “don’t look at me that way. I cut off my hair and sold it because I had to buy you a Christmas present. My hair will grow back. You don’t mind, do you? I just had to do it. My hair grows very fast. Say
5 ‘Merry Christmas!’ Jim, and let’s be happy. You don’t know what a nice... what a beautiful, nice gift I have for you!”

“You cut off your hair?” asked Jim. It was as if he thought and thought about it, but still didn’t understand.

10 “I cut it off and sold it,” said Della. “Don’t you still like me? I’m me without my hair, aren’t I?”

Jim looked around the room.

“You say your hair is gone?” he said. He sounded like a child.

15 “Don’t look for it,” said Della. “I sold it, I tell you. It’s gone. It’s Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, because I did it for you. Maybe you can count the hairs on my head,” she said, very sweetly, “but nobody can count my love for you. Shall I make dinner, Jim?”

20 Suddenly, Jim woke up. He hugged his Della. Now, let’s look at another place in the room. Eight dollars a week or a

million a year—what is the difference? Even mathematicians or scholars do not know the answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but this answer was not one of them. I will explain at the end of this story.

(6)

Jim took a package from his coat pocket and threw it on
5 the table.

“Don’t make a mistake about me, Dell,” he said. “I will never lose my love for you, even if you cut your hair. But open that package, and you will understand the reason I was not able to speak.”
10

Della opened the package with her white fingers. First, she screamed with joy. But then, sadly, she cried and cried and cried. Jim had to work very hard to comfort her.

Why? Because his present was The Combs—the set of
5 side and back combs that Della saw in a shop window and wanted very much. Beautiful combs, made with very fine

A quarter of a mile from the Eagle House was an old mill. This may be one of the most interesting places in the area. This very old mill was no longer a mill. Josiah Rankin liked to say, “This is the only church in the United States, sir, with an overshot-wheel; and it’s the only mill in the world, sir, with a pipe organ.” The guests of the Eagle House went to church at the mill every Sunday. The preacher said, “Christians are like flour, because they are ground by experience and suffering.”

(2)

Every year, around the beginning of autumn, a man named Abram Strong came to the Eagle House. For a long time, he was an honored and beloved guest. The people of Lakelands called him “Father Abram,” because his hair was so white, his face was so strong and kind, his laugh was so joyful, and his black clothes and broad hat looked like a priest’s. Even new guests, after just three or four days, called

