

The Lonely Neighbour

Winter had covered the small village of Winterhoven with a thick layer of snow. The sky was gray and heavy, and the trees were coated with sparkling ice crystals. It was almost Christmas, but the festive atmosphere seemed to avoid the house of the old neighbor.

His name was Mr. Van Dijk, and he lived alone in an old, cozy house at the end of the street.

The neighbors had not really spoken to him for years.

They would wave occasionally when they saw him, but otherwise, he seemed forgotten. Inside, Mr. Van Dijk sat in his old, worn chair by the fireplace.

He looked at the snowy landscape outside, but no smile appeared on his face.

His wife had passed away five years ago, and since then, he had little contact with others.

His children lived in a big city and could not visit often.

The smell of freshly baked cookies no longer filled the house as it used to.

Instead, it smelled of wood smoke and old books.

Every evening, he listened to the wind whistling through the chimney.

He remembered the Christmases of years past, when his house was full of laughter and music.

Now, only the soft ticking of the clock and the creaking of the floor could be heard.

On Christmas Eve, he felt especially lonely.

He made a cup of hot chocolate and watched the snowflakes slowly fall.

He thought of the Christmas cards he never sent.

A tear rolled down his cheek as he wondered if anyone cared about him.

Suddenly, he heard soft footsteps outside his house.

He looked out the window and saw a little girl wearing a red hat and carrying a basket full of cookies.

It was Sophie, the daughter of neighbors down the street.

She had heard that Mr. Van Dijk was alone and decided to do something kind.

She knocked gently on the door.

Mr. Van Dijk hesitated but then opened it.

Sophie smiled shyly and handed him the basket.

“For you, Mr. Van Dijk,” she said softly.

He felt a warm glow in his heart that he hadn’t felt in a long time.

She invited him to join her and her family for cookies.

He was surprised but also happy and a little nervous.

Slowly, he stepped outside, his old coat wrapped tightly around him.

The snow crunched under his feet as he walked to Sophie’s house.

Inside, it was warm and cozy, and he was greeted by the friendly laughter of the family.

They gave him a chair by the fireplace and offered him hot chocolate. He looked around and felt something he hadn't felt in years: connection. Sophie told him about the games they played and the songs they sang. He listened, laughed softly, and felt the loneliness slowly fade. After dinner, they helped him decorate a small Christmas tree in the corner. Together, they hung sparkling ornaments and lights. He shared stories of Christmases from his childhood. The family listened attentively and asked questions, curious about his memories. For the first time in years, he felt truly welcome. When it was time to go home, Sophie helped him with his coat. "Mr. Van Dijk, come again tomorrow," she said, giving him a kiss on the hand. He nodded, with tears in his eyes, grateful for the unexpected gesture. That night, he lay in bed thinking of the warm light he had felt. He realized that Christmas wasn't just about presents, but about connection and love. The snow fell gently outside, but inside his heart, it was finally warm. From that day on, he felt less alone. The neighbors began to visit more often and invited him for dinners and games. He learned the names of the children in the street and their favorite games. Every day, he took a walk through the village and waved at people he hadn't known before. His house was once again filled with laughter and stories, just like before. He understood that even a small gesture could make a big difference. On Christmas Eve, he sat by the fireplace again, but this time with a smile. The memory of Sophie and her family warmed him more than the fire ever could. He took an old photo of his wife and smiled softly. "She would be happy," he whispered. The wind still whistled through the chimney outside, but now he felt neither afraid nor lonely. In the silence of the night, he heard the soft laughter of children in the street. His heart filled with joy and gratitude. He realized that loneliness can disappear through kindness and warmth. The village of Winterhoven seemed a little brighter that evening, and the stars sparkled extra brightly in the sky. Mr. Van Dijk closed his eyes and felt happy, knowing he was finally part of the world around him.

Multiple Choice Questions (English)

1. Where does Mr. Van Dijk live?
 - a) In a large apartment in the city
 - b) In an old house at the end of the street
 - c) With his children
 - d) In a nursing home

2. Why does he feel lonely?
 - a) He has no friends in the village
 - b) His wife passed away and his children live far away
 - c) He doesn't like Christmas
 - d) He has no work

3. Who visits Mr. Van Dijk on Christmas Eve?
 - a) His children
 - b) His neighbors
 - c) Sophie, a girl from the village
 - d) Santa Claus

4. What does Sophie bring?
 - a) Gifts
 - b) A basket full of cookies
 - c) A Christmas tree
 - d) Candles

5. How does Mr. Van Dijk react when Sophie knocks?
 - a) He ignores her
 - b) He opens the door and smiles cautiously
 - c) He gets angry
 - d) He hides

6. What does Mr. Van Dijk learn during Sophie's visit?
 - a) That he must do everything alone
 - b) That Christmas is only about presents
 - c) That kindness and connection are important
 - d) That he should never go outside

7. How does Mr. Van Dijk's life change after Christmas Eve?
 - a) He stays lonely
 - b) He moves to the city
 - c) He feels less alone and neighbors visit more often
 - d) He decides to stay alone

8. What does Mr. Van Dijk do with the Christmas tree?

- a) He puts it in his attic
- b) He decorates it with Sophie's family
- c) He buys one in the store
- d) He throws it away

9. How does Mr. Van Dijk feel at the end of the story?

- a) Sad
- b) Afraid
- c) Happy and connected
- d) Angry

10. What does Sophie's visit symbolize?

- a) Presents
- b) Connection and kindness
- c) Wealth
- d) Tradition

11. Why is Christmas Eve extra difficult for Mr. Van Dijk?

- a) Because it is snowing
- b) Because he is alone and feels lonely
- c) Because he is sick
- d) Because he has to work

12. How do the other neighbors react after Christmas Eve?

- a) They ignore him
- b) They invite him more often and visit him
- c) They move away
- d) They tell him to leave

13. What does Mr. Van Dijk do when he gets home after the visit?

- a) He cries alone
- b) He thinks of the warmth and smiles
- c) He sleeps immediately
- d) He cooks for himself

14. What memory does Mr. Van Dijk recall while decorating the tree?

- a) His childhood Christmas with his wife
- b) His first day of school
- c) His work experience
- d) His vacation

15. Why does he finally feel connected?

- a) Because he received gifts
- b) Because he is part of Sophie's family
- c) Because he became rich
- d) Because it snowed

16. What does Sophie do to help Mr. Van Dijk?

- a) She takes him to the store
- b) She invites him for Christmas and brings cookies
- c) She gives him money
- d) She paints his house

17. What does the snow represent in the story?

- a) It symbolizes cold and loneliness
- b) It is dangerous
- c) It is decoration
- d) It is a gift

18. What happens to Mr. Van Dijk's loneliness?

- a) It disappears after Sophie's visit
- b) It gets worse
- c) It stays the same
- d) He moves away

19. How old is Mr. Van Dijk?

- a) This is not mentioned
- b) 50 years old
- c) 30 years old
- d) 70 years old

20. What is the main theme of the story?

- a) Wealth
- b) Loneliness and connection
- c) Travel
- d) Work

Answers and Explanation (English)

1. b) In an old house at the end of the street – this is clearly described in the story.
2. b) His wife passed away and his children live far away – this is the cause of his loneliness.
3. c) Sophie, a girl from the village – she visits him unexpectedly.
4. b) A basket full of cookies – Sophie brings cookies.
5. b) He opens the door and smiles cautiously – he reacts hesitantly but kindly.
6. c) That kindness and connection are important – he learns that even small gestures matter.
7. c) He feels less alone and neighbors visit more often – his life changes positively.
8. b) He decorates it with Sophie's family – this shows his sense of connection.
9. c) Happy and connected – he finally feels part of the community again.
10. b) Connection and kindness – Sophie's visit symbolizes this.
11. b) Because he is alone and feels lonely – this makes Christmas Eve difficult for him.
12. b) They invite him more often and visit him – he becomes part of the community.
13. b) He thinks of the warmth and smiles – he feels grateful and happy.
14. a) His childhood Christmas with his wife – he recalls warm memories.
15. b) Because he is part of Sophie's family – this gives him a sense of belonging.
16. b) She invites him for Christmas and brings cookies – this helps him out of loneliness.
17. a) It symbolizes cold and loneliness – the snow reflects his feelings.
18. a) It disappears after Sophie's visit – this moment changes everything.
19. a) This is not mentioned – his exact age is not stated in the story.
20. b) Loneliness and connection – this is the central theme of the story.