

Christmas Story: *The Lonely Neighbour*

1. It was three days before Christmas when thick snowflakes floated down over the small village of Mariënheem.
2. The streets looked quiet and peaceful, as if they were hidden beneath a soft white blanket.
3. Warm lights glowed in the houses and made the windows shine.
4. The Jansen family lived in a cozy corner house with red shutters and a wreath on the door.
5. Their daughter Lotte, twelve years old, stood by the window and looked outside.
6. She loved winter, especially the mysterious feeling that snow could bring.
7. As she looked across the street, her eyes settled on Mr. De Vries' house.
8. His house was dark, cold, and not decorated for Christmas at all.
9. That surprised Lotte every year, because almost all the neighbours put up cheerful lights.
10. Mr. De Vries rarely went outside and hardly spoke to anyone.
11. Many children in the neighbourhood thought he was strict and a little scary.
12. But Lotte believed that he was simply very lonely.
13. She had once seen him in the supermarket, standing quietly at the end of the line.
14. His eyes looked dull and tired, as if he carried something heavy with him.
15. Lotte wondered why he never seemed to smile.
16. That evening, the Jansens ate dinner by candlelight.
17. Outside, the wind howled and tapped against the windows.
18. During dinner, Lotte asked her parents why Mr. De Vries lived so alone.
19. Her mother explained that his wife had passed away years ago.
20. Since then, he had hardly spoken to anyone.
21. Lotte felt a warm wave of sympathy inside her.
22. Later that evening, she went to her room and looked again at the dark house.
23. An idea slowly began to form in her mind.
24. She wanted to do something for him.

25. Something small, but something that might make a difference.

26. The next morning, a fierce storm hit, causing a power outage in the whole street.

27. Everyone was annoyed—except for Lotte.

28. She immediately thought of Mr. De Vries.

29. “What if he’s sitting alone in the dark?” she wondered.

30. She told her parents she wanted to bring him something warm to drink.

31. Her father frowned, but Lotte remained determined.

32. In the end, they agreed.

33. Lotte filled a thermos with hot chocolate.

34. She took a container of Christmas cookies she had baked the day before.

35. She also grabbed a flashlight, just in case.

36. Outside it was cold and slippery.

37. The snow crunched under her boots as she crossed the street.

38. At Mr. De Vries’ door, she knocked softly.

39. At first, nothing happened.

40. Then she heard shuffling footsteps.

41. The door opened a little and the old face of Mr. De Vries appeared.

42. His eyes widened in surprise.

43. “Hello sir, I brought you some hot chocolate,” Lotte said.

44. For a moment, he stayed silent, as if he didn’t know what to say.

45. Then he nodded slowly and opened the door further.

46. The living room was cold and dark.

47. Only a small candle flickered on the table.

48. Lotte set her things down.

49. She spoke softly and kindly.

50. Mr. De Vries listened, still visibly astonished.

51. When he took a sip, she saw a small smile forming on his face.

52. It was perhaps his first smile in a long time.

53. Lotte asked why he never decorated his house for Christmas.

54. He sighed deeply.

55. He told her about his wife, who had loved Christmas more than anything.

56. After she passed away, he could no longer bear to decorate.

57. Lotte felt her heart ache for him.

58. She said his wife surely wouldn't want him to stay sad forever.

59. He nodded slowly.

60. Lotte took a small felt Christmas star from her pocket.

61. She had made it herself at school.

62. She gave him the star and said, "Christmas is light, not sadness."

63. Mr. De Vries looked at the star as if it was something precious.

64. He squeezed his eyes shut and swallowed hard.

65. Lotte felt it was time to leave.

66. She wished him a good evening.

67. When she stepped outside, she felt warm inside.

68. She had done something good.

69. The next morning, the sun shone over the snowy streets.

70. The power had returned.

71. Lotte ran to the window to look outside.

72. And then she saw it.

73. In the window of Mr. De Vries hung the felt star.

74. Right in the middle of the window, as if it had always belonged there.

75. Lotte smiled widely.

76. She even saw him standing outside.

77. He had a small string of lights in his hand.

78. Carefully, he hung it along the gutter.

79. It wasn't a big decoration, but it was beautiful.

80. For the first time in years, he had tried.

81. Lotte waved at him.

82. He looked up.

83. And then something happened that gave her goosebumps.

84. Mr. De Vries smiled.

85. Not a big smile, but a warm one.

86. He nodded at her in thanks.

87. Pride and happiness rushed through her.

88. She knew she had touched something in his heart.

89. Something that had been hidden for a very long time.

90. That evening she told her parents what she had seen.

91. They were quiet and moved.

92. Outside, the lights of the neighbourhood sparkled in the cold air.

93. But one light shone especially bright.

94. The red felt star in Mr. De Vries' window.

95. Christmas felt different that year.

96. Warmer.

97. More honest.

98. And even more beautiful than before.

99. Because sometimes Christmas joy begins with one small gesture.

100. And that gesture had come from Lotte.

20 Multiple-Choice Questions (English)

1. Where does the story take place?
 - A. Amsterdam
 - B. Mariënheem
 - C. Rotterdam
 - D. Utrecht
2. How old is Lotte?
 - A. 10
 - B. 11
 - C. 12
 - D. 13
3. What is missing from Mr. De Vries' house?
 - A. Curtains
 - B. Warm lights
 - C. Christmas decorations
 - D. A mailbox
4. What happens during the storm?
 - A. The phone lines break
 - B. The power goes out
 - C. The snow stops falling
 - D. The shops close early
5. What does Lotte bring to her neighbour?
 - A. Juice
 - B. Hot chocolate
 - C. Water
 - D. Tea
6. What else does she take with her?
 - A. Candy
 - B. Cookies
 - C. Bread
 - D. Cake
7. How does Mr. De Vries react when he opens the door?
 - A. Angry
 - B. Laughing
 - C. Surprised
 - D. Nervous

8. What is the only light in his living room?
 - A. A large lamp
 - B. A fireplace
 - C. A small candle
 - D. A flashlight
9. Why does he no longer decorate his house?
 - A. He doesn't like Christmas
 - B. He is too busy
 - C. His wife passed away
 - D. He moved recently
10. What does Lotte give him?
 - A. A snowball
 - B. A card
 - C. A felt Christmas star
 - D. A picture frame
11. How does he respond to the gift?
 - A. He laughs loudly
 - B. He becomes angry
 - C. He looks touched
 - D. He ignores her
12. Where does he hang the star later?
 - A. On the door
 - B. In the tree
 - C. In the window
 - D. In the kitchen
13. What does Mr. De Vries do the next morning?
 - A. Goes to the bakery
 - B. Hangs up a string of lights
 - C. Washes his car
 - D. Builds a snowman
14. Why does Lotte feel proud?
 - A. She baked cookies
 - B. She cleared snow
 - C. She helped him
 - D. She won a game

15. What does the felt star symbolize?
- A. Luxury
 - B. Light and comfort
 - C. Christmas presents
 - D. A prize
16. How do her parents react to her story?
- A. They laugh loudly
 - B. They get angry
 - C. They are moved
 - D. They send her to her room
17. How does the village feel at the end?
- A. Cold and gloomy
 - B. Warmer and friendlier
 - C. Dark and empty
 - D. Loud and busy
18. What was the first thing Lotte wanted to do when the power went out?
- A. Go outside to play
 - B. Visit her grandmother
 - C. Help Mr. De Vries
 - D. Go to sleep
19. What made Christmas special that year?
- A. Big presents
 - B. Lots of snow
 - C. One small gesture
 - D. A huge party
20. What is the main lesson of the story?
- A. Gifts are the most important
 - B. A small act of kindness can mean a lot
 - C. You should avoid your neighbours
 - D. Christmas is only for children

Answer Key + Explanations (English)

1. **B** – The story clearly states it takes place in Mariënheem.
2. **C** – Lotte is twelve years old.
3. **C** – Her main observation is that he has no Christmas decorations.
4. **B** – The storm causes a power outage.
5. **B** – She fills a thermos with hot chocolate.
6. **B** – She brings homemade Christmas cookies.
7. **C** – He is surprised when he opens the door.
8. **C** – Only a small candle is lit.
9. **C** – He stopped decorating after his wife died.
10. **C** – She gives him a handmade felt Christmas star.
11. **C** – He looks touched and emotional.
12. **C** – He hangs the star in his window.
13. **B** – He carefully hangs a string of lights outside.
14. **C** – She feels proud because she helped him break through his loneliness.
15. **B** – The star represents light, warmth, and comfort.
16. **C** – Her parents are deeply moved by her story.
17. **B** – The ending describes a warmer, friendlier atmosphere.
18. **C** – She immediately thinks of helping him.
19. **C** – One small, loving gesture changed everything.
20. **B** – The story teaches that even a small act of kindness can mean a lot.