

## An Unexpected Christmas

On the last school day before the Christmas holidays, thick, soft snowflakes fell like little feathers from the sky, slowly turning the streets white as everyone hurried home to do their Christmas shopping and drink hot chocolate.

Lotte walked along the sidewalk with a cheerful skip, her scarf whipping through the winter air like a dancing snake, her cheeks glowing red from the cold and the excitement of the holidays.

She thought happily about how the Christmas tree would already be twinkling at home, and how the smell of cinnamon cookies would spread warmly through the room like love spreading through a family.

But on her way, she saw something that made her slow down, as if her feet were stuck in the snow: on a bench in the park sat a man, alone, deeply wrapped in a worn coat, with a gaze that seemed caught somewhere between memory and loss.

No one seemed to notice him, though he sat there as if waiting for something that would never return, and that image lingered in Lotte's mind like a melody you can't forget.

When she arrived home, the contrast struck her even more: the warm light, the decorated tree, her mother's laughter as she baked pancakes, and the sound of her father placing wood on the fire.

Yet she couldn't stop thinking about the man on the bench, which made her curious, perhaps even a little worried.

She told her parents what she had seen, and her mother looked thoughtful, as if a small piece of understanding clicked into place that Lotte did not yet comprehend.

That evening, while the snow continued to fall outside like confetti from a festive sky, Lotte decided she would return the next day to talk to the man, because no one should be alone at Christmas.

The next morning, she carefully poured a cup of hot chocolate into a thermos and wrapped two homemade cookies in a napkin, intending to bring a little warmth to the lonely man.

With her thick coat zipped up and her hat pulled over her ears, she entered the park, where the trees stood like white guardians along the path.

The man was there again, his breath visible in the cold air, his eyes focused on something beyond the wintry horizon.

Lotte walked slowly toward him, her shoes crunching in the snow like a fireplace crackling in a silent room.

"Good morning," she said softly, as if afraid to disturb a fragile thought.

The man looked up, surprised, and in his eyes was a weary kindness, as if he had long stopped expecting anyone to speak to him.

"I thought maybe you could use something warm," Lotte said, offering the thermos, her heart beating fast with excitement and something like hope.

The man smiled, slowly but genuinely, and drank gratefully, as if the chocolate was more

than a drink, perhaps a sign that he still belonged to the world.

They talked, at first cautiously like two strangers walking across a slippery bridge, but then more easily, as if they had known each other much longer.

He told her that he had once been a carpenter who made beautiful wooden toy trains for children, but that he had lost his wife, and the house that had once been filled with light and laughter now felt quiet and empty.

Lotte felt her throat burn with sympathy, and also with the desire to give him back a little of what he had lost.

She asked if he would like to join her family for Christmas, and his eyes filled with a mixture of disbelief and hesitant joy.

“Are you sure?” he asked hoarsely, but Lotte nodded, determined like a candle that refuses to go out in the wind.

Together they walked to her house, their footsteps side by side in the fresh snow, like two different stories slowly becoming one.

Her parents welcomed him warmly, as if his arrival was not a surprise but a missing piece that fit perfectly.

At the table, they laughed, played games, and the man — who turned out to be named Pieter — told stories about the past, about little trains with lights and the smell of fresh wood.

It seemed as if the house became a little brighter, as if the Christmas tree glowed more because a new warmth had been let in.

After dinner, they sang Christmas carols, and although Pieter’s voice was hoarse, he carried a strength only people with many memories possess.

Lotte noticed her parents exchanging a glance that said this might be the most beautiful Christmas in years.

When Pieter later that evening stood to leave, everyone felt that it was not right to send him back into the cold alone.

Without many words, Lotte’s parents offered him a bed to sleep in, and his eyes sparkled as if he had seen a star up close for the first time.

That night, he slept under a warm blanket, a blanket woven not just of fabric but also of trust and humanity.

The next morning, the house smelled of fresh bread and oranges, and Pieter came downstairs with a smile lighter than the snow outside.

He said he had never had such an unexpected Christmas, but perhaps it had been the most beautiful, because he did not have to be alone.

Lotte felt her heart fill like a nativity scene with light, warmth, and something that seemed like a miracle.

From that day on, Pieter visited more often, not only at Christmas but in spring, summer, and even on ordinary weekdays when nothing seemed special.

He made wooden trains for Lotte and her friends, and slowly the sparkle returned to his life like snow melting in sunlight.

And every year, when Christmas approached and the snow began to fall again, Lotte thought of the day she had approached him with a simple thermos of hot chocolate that meant more than words could carry.

Thus, one unexpected Christmas became the beginning of something new and something great, showing that small gestures can change worlds.

And to this day, Lotte tells that story, not to show what she did, but to remind everyone that no one should ever be forgotten, especially at Christmas.

Because sometimes, the greatest gift you can give is not a box with a ribbon, but attention, warmth, and a place at the table.

And so this story ends, not with fireworks or golden stars, but with one simple conclusion shining like winter light: an unexpected Christmas can be the beginning of a whole new future.

### Multiple-Choice Questions

1. What was happening on the last school day before the Christmas holidays?
  - a) The sun was shining brightly.
  - b) Thick, soft snowflakes were falling.
  - c) It was raining heavily.
  - d) Children were swimming.
2. How did Lotte feel as she walked to school?
  - a) Sad and lonely
  - b) Tired and bored
  - c) Happy and excited
  - d) Angry
3. What caught Lotte's attention on her way home?
  - a) A new toy store
  - b) A man sitting alone on a park bench
  - c) A dog running in the snow
  - d) A Christmas tree
4. How was the man on the bench dressed?
  - a) In a warm red coat
  - b) In a suit and tie
  - c) In a worn, old coat
  - d) In pajamas
5. What did Lotte decide to do the next day?
  - a) Ignore the man
  - b) Invite him home for Christmas
  - c) Call the police
  - d) Write him a letter
6. What did Lotte bring to the man?
  - a) A toy
  - b) A thermos of hot chocolate and cookies
  - c) A blanket
  - d) A Christmas card
7. How did the man react when Lotte offered him hot chocolate?
  - a) He ignored her
  - b) He smiled and drank it gratefully
  - c) He laughed
  - d) He ran away

8. What did Pieter tell Lotte about his past?
  - a) He had been a pilot
  - b) He had been a carpenter who made toy trains
  - c) He had never worked
  - d) He was a teacher
9. Why did Pieter feel lonely?
  - a) He moved to a new city
  - b) He lost his wife and his house felt empty
  - c) He didn't like children
  - d) He had no friends
10. How did Lotte convince Pieter to join her family?
  - a) She threatened him
  - b) She offered him money
  - c) She asked politely, and he agreed
  - d) She asked him to deliver gifts
11. How did Lotte's parents react to Pieter?
  - a) They were suspicious
  - b) They welcomed him warmly
  - c) They asked him to leave
  - d) They ignored him
12. What happened after dinner?
  - a) They went outside to shovel snow
  - b) They sang Christmas carols
  - c) Pieter left immediately
  - d) They watched TV
13. How did Pieter feel about this unexpected Christmas?
  - a) Sad and disappointed
  - b) Happy and grateful
  - c) Confused
  - d) Angry
14. What did Pieter do after that Christmas?
  - a) He never visited again
  - b) He visited often, making wooden trains for Lotte
  - c) He moved to another city
  - d) He gave all his gifts away

15. What was the main lesson of the story?

- a) Christmas is only about gifts
- b) Small gestures and kindness can make a big difference
- c) Always stay alone at Christmas
- d) Winter is cold and long

16. What does the story suggest is the greatest gift you can give?

- a) A big Christmas tree
- b) Expensive presents
- c) Attention, warmth, and a place at the table
- d) Chocolate

17. How did the snow contribute to the story?

- a) It made walking difficult
- b) It created a magical and festive atmosphere
- c) It blocked the roads
- d) It melted quickly

18. How did Lotte feel when she saw the man on the bench the first time?

- a) Scared and anxious
- b) Curious and a little worried
- c) Excited and playful
- d) Angry

19. Why did Pieter's eyes sparkle when he stayed at Lotte's house?

- a) He was happy to see the Christmas tree
- b) He was seeing a star for the first time metaphorically
- c) He was cold
- d) He was tired

20. What does the story show about human connection?

- a) It is less important than gifts
- b) It can turn loneliness into joy
- c) It only matters for children
- d) It is impossible in winter

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## Answer Key with Explanations

1. **b) Thick, soft snowflakes were falling** – The story opens describing snow covering the streets.
2. **c) Happy and excited** – Lotte is skipping joyfully and excited for Christmas.
3. **b) A man sitting alone on a park bench** – Lotte notices the lonely man in the park.
4. **c) In a worn, old coat** – He is described as wearing a tattered coat.
5. **b) Invite him home for Christmas** – Lotte decides to bring him warmth and company.
6. **b) A thermos of hot chocolate and cookies** – Lotte prepared hot chocolate and cookies for him.
7. **b) He smiled and drank it gratefully** – Pieter accepts the gesture happily.
8. **b) He had been a carpenter who made toy trains** – Pieter tells Lotte about his past as a carpenter.
9. **b) He lost his wife and his house felt empty** – His loneliness is due to his wife's passing.
10. **c) She asked politely, and he agreed** – Lotte invites him gently, and he agrees.
11. **b) They welcomed him warmly** – Lotte's parents are kind and accepting.
12. **b) They sang Christmas carols** – After dinner, they sing together.
13. **b) Happy and grateful** – Pieter feels joy and gratitude for the unexpected Christmas.
14. **b) He visited often, making wooden trains for Lotte** – He continues to visit, sharing his skills.
15. **b) Small gestures and kindness can make a big difference** – The story emphasizes acts of love.
16. **c) Attention, warmth, and a place at the table** – The true gift is human connection.
17. **b) It created a magical and festive atmosphere** – Snow enhances the Christmas feeling.
18. **b) Curious and a little worried** – Lotte is concerned about the lonely man.
19. **b) He was seeing a star for the first time metaphorically** – Staying at Lotte's home symbolizes hope and warmth.

20. **b) It can turn loneliness into joy** – The story shows that connection transforms lives.