



## - The Empty Chair -

### CHRISTMAS STORY

Gordon Raymond stepped out to where his carriage waited for him. He was a stately old man, richly clad, his general appearance that of one accustomed to ease and elegance. His footman stood with hand upon the open door of the vehicle, and he paused halfway down the steps to bow courteously to a young girl who looked at him with a smile and nodded as she passed.

Gordon Raymond's face did not relax, his eyes did not brighten, though the countenance upturned to his would have gladdened the heart of any man not a misanthrope. Its very fairness and freshness and unspoiled youth would have served as passports to immediate favor. Ordinarily, even Gordon Raymond could not resist it; ordinarily, it gave him a distinct sense of pleasure. But not to-day. There was a heavy cloud upon his spirits—due, indeed, partially, if not wholly, to the pretty girl herself.

For she was one of his happy next-door neighbors. In spite of the crustiness which the years had brought to a lonely old man, he had found himself unable to resist the brightness of the three young sisters who made their home next to his dwelling-place—feeling but too well the difference between those two words. Because of the very gaiety and light-heartedness of the trio he had, during the first few months of their proximity, ignored them; during those first few months he had withdrawn into his shell, doing his best to remain insensible and unmoved by their bright 'good-mornings' and cheerful 'good-days.' But he would have had to be more than human to resist. Try as he might he could not. Try as he would, he felt that he dared not; that he was shutting out the only bit of pleasure that had come to him in years. He bent, he thawed, he yielded, and so strong grew the craving for human sympathy that where he had avoided he now sought them. The older one with the gray eyes, and the next one with the yellow hair, and the youngest one with the pretty smile—this was the way he arranged them in his mental category.

It was the youngest one with the pretty smile who paused to flash that pretty smile up at him, her face shining like a white rose from her soft brown furs. She was merrier than the other two, and now as she passed and smiled she held up a great bunch of holly in her gloved hand, and put her dainty head on one side with a gay and roguish look, as if to challenge him to speech, and as if to say to him, 'And where is your holly?' And where are you going at this hour on Christmas Eve, instead of staying at home? Have you no merry Christmas to prepare for, to look forward to?



#### NO ROOM

No room for Him who poised the suns in space.  
A village inn rejects both Him and thee.  
Fare further, weary one, and thou wilt see  
A hollow in yon rocks, a sheltered place—  
Oh! haste thee, for the night draws on apace,  
And ere the dawn the olden prophecy  
Will be fulfilled; thou wilt a mother be,  
And Virgin still. O Mary full of grace!  
And He, thy Babe, upon the straw will lie;  
And kindly beasts with fragrant breath the air  
Will warm, nor grudge Him shelter from the cold.  
But I, with heart all chill and bare, shall I  
Contemn this haven He hath found, or dare  
Cast stone to smite the Bethlehemites of old?

—Irish Monthly.