

THE EMPTY CHAIR

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.

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.

For she was one of his happy next-door neighbors. In spite of the business 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 them.

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 tresses.

He knew well that she had. That day he must have been deaf did he not overhear the bursts of laughter, the bright chatter, the gay voices wafted into his open library window from the window next door.

And he knew himself then for what he was—a poor, lonely, rich old man. He pushed his book away from him and sat back in his chair, the light fading from his countenance.

He pushed his book away from him and sat back in his chair, the light fading from his countenance. He had never looked at it in quite that way. He had always been proud of his station, his birth, his independence, his adamant will, his firm disposition, even his good health.

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Peters and take him back with me. Peters is godfather to my youngest, and I suppose I'm a fool over them, but Peters is worse than I am. A merry Christmas, Raymond, and to—with a curious look—a merry Christmas to your daughter, too!

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