



Fallen Leaves

by
WILL SCOTT

Early from the tree had the Derelict fallen—so long before that he had nearly “lost the feel.” The wind was his only master now, and only to its whip he danced. His place was the gutter and he kept to it.

Aloof, unwelcome, he rotted along the lane of days, cursing the turn at the end for being so far away. No hand was ever grasped in his; no eyes but the stars, the million eyes of God, looked twice on him. When he sneered, bitter at the kick of mankind, he was like a last spark from the fire that burned when the world was young and men were only nearly men. When he laughed he seemed an evil thing, an ungentle reminder, a herald from the Last Civilisation, when sun cools and earth dies; an invitation to the death dance of man. So men thought; but he did not often sneer, and was not evil now. No kinder-hearted derelict was on the lane. Dogs did not shun him, and cats did not go indoors when he came along. Yet there was not a man to look at him. No man could think, or stop to think, that he was once a man.

The rains of chance had washed him to many strange gutters and washed him as swiftly away again, but this village of Lavender Street

was the strangest, at this time, on the Eve of Christmas. Other Christmases he had reposed in towns; in market halls, in empty houses, under a railway bridge. But here he was.

Now he sneered; for somewhere behind the snow, carollers, callous in

along the lane of days, a dust-bin mourned the loss of the shoe and the boot that gave his toes to the snow. He had a battered hat; and a stolen stocking, coarse and holed, served for a collar. But in his pocket were two pennies, hot with a day's grip of his only bank.

“'Appy morn!” he grinned, pulling the stocking tighter about his throat and wiping the gathered snowflakes from his beard. “Christians are awake all right. 'Appy morn!”

He stepped in nearer to a wall's shelter, where an evergreen tree hung over and made a pauper's roof. In five minutes the carollers were unheard, moved off, maybe, to some other place. The Derelict yawned and stretched his frozen arms.

Not a yard behind stood Police-Constable Merridew, erect and official, all white, but with the glint of his official buttons shining through; a symbol of what Santa Claus may become.

“What about it?” he asked.
“Oh, there ain't much about it,” said the Derelict. “Seems as if some-one's havin' a lark with us, don't it? Compliments of the season to yer. You 'aven't got a Ritz about 'ere, 'ave yer?”

He shuffled away along the little street and left Policeman Merridew to sort it out.

CHARACTERS:

The Derelict - - CHRIS WALKER
The Shopkeeper - - JEFF BARLOW
The Policeman - - JACK EAST
Mother Brown - - MAY PRICE

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ignorance, plucked a song from his cradle and flung it at the rot of him.

“Christians, awake!
Salute this happy morn,
Whereon . . .”

He had the face of an ivory image dust-hidden on the shelf of a tired shop—a face as ageless. As near as he knew he was fifty; but he had long ceased to count the milestones beside the road. A looped nail held another man's coat around his bones. Behind,