

# FINDING HIS SOUL



NORMAN  
DUNCAN

DRIFT









[See p. 58

IN A GREAT ILLUMINATION OF THE SPIRIT HE TREMBLED AND  
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FINDING HIS SOUL

BY  
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AUTHOR OF  
"DOCTOR LUKE OF THE LABRADOR"

ILLUSTRATED



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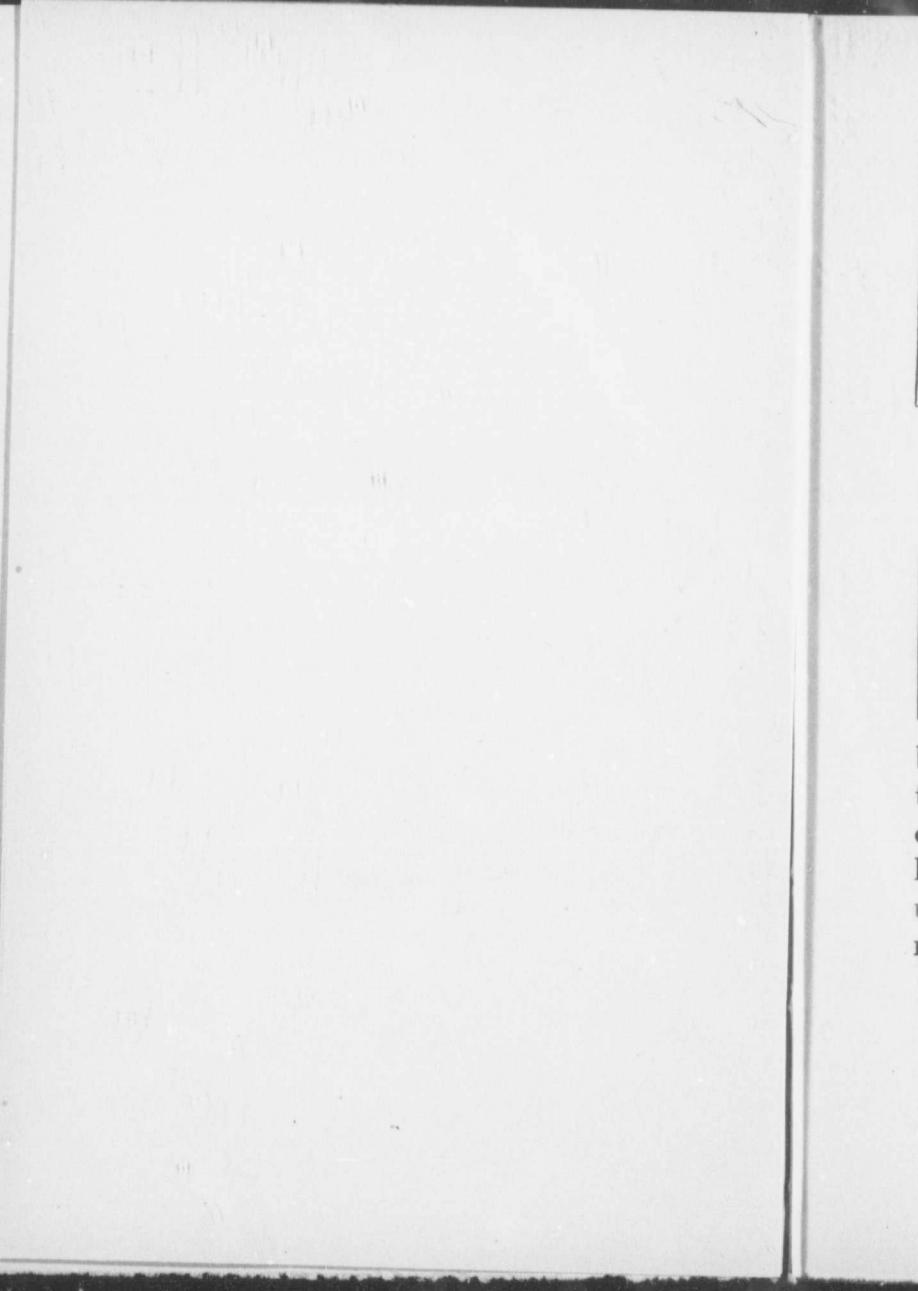
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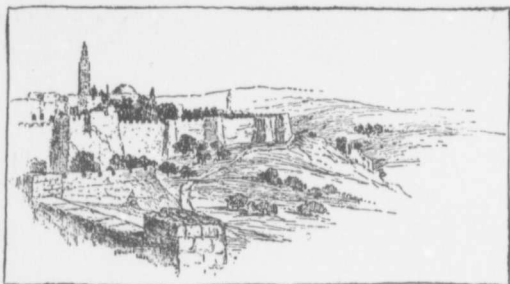
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JAMES FALCONTENT of Groot & McCarthy was, in the most singular fashion to be imagined, struck with ominous amazement. And big James Falcontent had got well past the years of simplicity: he was not easily startled. The Fifth Avenue bus had stopped; Falcontent had glanced up from his musing—a purely commercial calculation, being nothing

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more romantic than some trick of the trade having to do with the sale of boots and shoes. But what Falcontent had then observed—he was gently yawning at the time—nevertheless astounded him beyond recent experience. Moreover, it led him eventually to far-away places and engrossed him in preposterous emotions. Here, indeed, was the first flutter of the wings of Fate. No; it was not a woman. A splendid, high-stepping, modish creature, of impeccable propriety, of gracious, aristocratic demeanor, might mildly have interested James Falcontent in passing. But since the last departure of Matilda—well, since the death of Falcontent's wife, Falcontent had persuaded himself that women were not at all pertinent to his life in the world. No; it was not

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a woman. Nothing of the sort! A church had dumfounded Falcontent.

Nobody was going in or out; the bronze doors were closed and doubtless locked fast against untimely intrusion.

“Shut down for the week, by George!” Falcontent commented, in astonishment.

It was a gigantic building occupying a great block of what Falcontent called in his business lingo high-class real estate. And it was truly a magnificent edifice. It occurred all at once to Falcontent that a plant of this spaciousness and exquisite exterior, running full time, as it were, only on Sundays, with occasional week-day operations, situated in a neighborhood in which real estate

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values were of such an appalling character that few men could look upon them and live thereafter without horrified envy, must have an enormous patronage to support it. That is to say, a good many people of consequence must still be going to church. And it astonished Falcontent to the very deeps of his knowledge of the world to confront this visible evidence of what he had for a good many years conceived to have become an old-fashioned and generally abandoned habit of piety. Moreover, Falcontent could recall other churches. There were hundreds of them. There were thousands. Good Lord, there must be millions—the country over! And most of them, Falcontent was shocked to remember, were of an extravagant magnitude and ele-

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gance, each according to its community.

What the deuce did people still go to church for, anyhow? Nobody that Falcontent was intimate with ever went to church. But there must still be something in it!

Falcontent began to ponder this odd disclosure when the bus got under way. Thus: Well, anyhow, the young women, God bless 'em! went to church to display their dainty little attractions and to assert each her peculiar interpretation of the fashions of the day. Of course! That was plain enough. It always had been that way. It was tenderly feminine, too—a most engaging weakness of the sex. And the young men—amorous young sparks of the town—followed the young women. A very

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natural and proper thing! It always had been that way. And Falcontent had done it himself—long ago. The delectable business of mating, then, accounted for a good deal. But not for very much. Still, there were the aged. They went to church, of course, for the traditional consolations of religion. Falcontent wondered, flushed with melancholy, whether or not they got what they went for. Probably not. Falcontent did not know. He had heard rumors to the contrary; and these rumors now mightily incensed him. Hang it all, anyhow! There was nothing specific or downright any more. Doubtless the old-fashioned religion, such as Falcontent had known as a boy, was in these days altogether a thing of the past.

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“The devil!” Falcontent thought, out of temper with the times; “they might at least have preserved that institution for a while—for one more generation—if for nothing more than mere sentiment’s sake.”

Deuce take it all!

“Of course the thing had to go to the scrap-heap; but still—for a few more years—”

Other folk went to church, as Falcontent very well knew: men of largest riches, for example, whose hobby was pious behavior in private life, and who voiced with amusing precision in the Sunday-schools the antique platitudes of piety. Falcontent grinned grimly when this crossed his mind with significance. Groot, of Groot & McCarthy, was a man cut from that cloth. But never



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mind Groot! The upkeep of these expensive establishments was not by any means to be accounted for by the piety of Falcontent's unctuous boss. What the deuce *did* keep the churches on their feet? Well, there was just one adequate answer: there must still be a vast body of—of—well, of consumers of religion, so to speak—of paying patrons of religious exercises—whom Falcontent had forgotten, and of whose needs and ancient practices he had continued in surprising ignorance. It was these substantial folk who kept the churches in what was obviously a thriving state of health. Churches in the city, churches in the towns—churches the whole country over! Steeples everywhere, by George! Good Lord, there must be a big bunch

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of people in the country — like that!

They were the real people, too. They were always the real people. No matter what sort of big industry their patronage kept on its feet—*they were the real people!* And every business man knew it.

“These people are not giving something for nothing,” Falcontent reflected, somewhat disturbed by this novelty of truth. “They’re getting *something* out of it.”

That was a business proposition.

“I wonder,” Falcontent puzzled, “what the deuce they *do* get out of it—in these days.”

Falcontent was himself a robust fellow. He was highly efficient: he was a hustler—of the most up-to-date

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and scientifically efficient sort. And he conformed: he was sane according to every notion of the times. In shirts, shoes, hose, cravats, hair-cut, occupation, waist-line, language, habits, interests, antipathies, finger-nails, clean-shaven condition, oaths, charities—in everything a man might be disposed to call in question—Falcontent was of the day and proper beyond quibble. He gave no sign even of the subtle beginnings of peculiarity. He was precisely like everybody else in his world: it would have horrified him—grieved and shamed him—to discover any symptom of significant difference. In brief, Falcontent was in vigorous health. Not an alienist of virtuous reputation could have discovered in him the least divergence from the straight line of normality.

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Nor could a surgeon, with due regard for the ethics of his profession, have found in Falcontent any honest occupation for his knife; nor could a devoted practitioner of internal medicine have supplied a need of Falcontent's hearty body.

Falcontent's soul? Falcontent had no soul. Or rather, to be precise, he had a soul, of course. Everybody has a soul. Nobody doubts that any more: it is not in good taste even to discuss the thing. But Falcontent was not abnormally conscious of having a soul. Nobody in Falcontent's world acknowledged the possession of a soul. Falcontent's soul took care of itself: it did not trouble him. And had such a phantom of his childhood lingered to distress him—to cry out for the bread and water of attention—

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Falcontent would with caution have concealed its aggravating habits from the normal fellows with whom he was accustomed to mingle upon terms of the most normally jovial good-fellowship. Falcontent—*with a troublesome soul?* You should have heard Falcontent laugh! A big, ruddy, big-hearted chap—that was James Falcontent: a clean, kindly, hopeful, energetic, merry fellow, given to no meanness, to no greed, to no unworthy pride, to no dishonor whatsoever.

Big James Falcontent surely stood in no peril of the machinations of mysticism.

But—

“I don’t know,” Falcontent brooded, as the bus sped on up Fifth Avenue, “but that little Jimmie had better start in going to Sunday-school.”

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All very well! But little Jimmie might contract a morbid piety. He might become—an angelic child! Oh, Lord! . . . Doubtless, revival meetings were still in the fashion. And some vivid gentleman with a bright brass cornet or a tinkling banjo might catch the poor little devil. . . . Well, how about it? That was all right, wasn't it? Jimmie had to rough it, hadn't he?—as his father had done. Jimmie was going to the public school; he was taking his chances there like a little man—and surviving, too. That kid sure had the stuff in him. . . . But if Jimmie should turn out a parson? . . . Falcontent gulped. Parsons, poets, and pianists: they were the same sort of thing in Falcontent's primitive category of the professions. . . . Well, anyhow, how about *that*?

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That was *Jimmie's* business, wasn't it? What right had Falcontent to butt in? If Jimmie really wanted to be a parson—or a poet—or even a pianist . . . No: Falcontent could not, with any degree of pride listen to suave sermons from Jimmie. Nor could he endure to hear Jimmie read poetry of his own composition; nor could he with fond equanimity observe Jimmie's manipulation of the piano—no matter how astonishingly skilful.

Come to think of it, it was little Jimmie's future—and the good prospect of a business partnership with little Jimmie—that kept James Falcontent the decent, kindly, upright fellow that he was. And not an uncommon sort of thing, either! Falcontent looked forward. Hope was his; also faith.

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"Anyhow," he determined, "little Jimmie has got to take his chance. I took mine."

Having so determined, Falcontent's muse merged into a grinning reminiscence of New England days—long-ago times of top-boots and mufflers and chapped hands and drowsy sermons. Had Falcontent's next neighbor on the right peered over his spectacles and all at once demanded, "What is the chief end of man?" Falcontent would promptly have replied, "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever!" and would have chuckled the most hearty enjoyment of his own cleverness. And had the dainty old lady opposite inquired, "What is sanctification?" Falcontent would have been impelled to make an awkward attempt to answer the appalling old



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question—stumbling, of course, over the very words upon which he had always stubbed the toes of his memory. And had the prim and pretty young person to the left smilingly requested a complete statement of the Fifth Commandment, Falcontent would surely have gained her approval by reciting the Fifth Commandment with twinkling precision. Well, well, those days were long past! And since then Falcontent's attention had not been unduly aggravated in the direction of God. Falcontent had been busy making good. Queer, though, how the old doctrines would persist in a man's memory!

Falcontent had made good. He was city salesman for Groot & McCarthy—Boston, New York, and Philadelphia—earning with conspicu-

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ous merit and spending with conspicuous generosity ten thousand a year.

“It’s Sunday-school for little Jimmie!” he concluded, with a smile, as he jumped off the bus and stepped jauntily to the pavement. “I went.”

Subsequently, Falcontent’s attention was frequently aggravated—and with persistent assiduity—in the direction of those religious mysteries whose very existence he had forgotten in the business of getting on in the world. And Falcontent was delighted to discover that he could enlighten Jimmie—with the same enlightenment that he himself had long ago enjoyed. Almighty queer how those old doctrines just *would* continue in a man’s memory! . . .

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Some six months after his amazing experience on Fifth Avenue, Falconet sat, a broken man, in the street arbor of an obscure French hotel in Cairo. He was alone; he was lonely. Jimmie was dead. Good God, how lonely it was without him—without the faith in his future! . . . And Cairo was an outlandish place. It was the real thing, too: here was no Coney Island plaster and paint. By George, how much like Coney Island the East was! But a man could not here catch the B. R. T. for New York and get there before bedtime. Falconet was astonished and deeply disgruntled to find himself in a corner of the world so detestably foreign and far away and absurd. It was horribly outlandish. Everything was outlandish: the shuffle of the street, soft,

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suspicious; and the mutter of the street, not honest, hearty, but guttural, villainously low-pitched, incomprehensible; and the laughter of the street, gurgling with ridicule; and the veiled women in the carriages, and the painted, plumed women who drove with outriders, and the skirted natives, twirling flirtatious little canes, or daintily fingering strings of glass beads, and the beggars, and the dark faces, the uniforms of the military, the incredible arrogance of the niggers, the ear-rings, camels, cocked red fezzes. . . . And the Continental women, going in and out—swishing, chattering, smeared little creatures! And the Continental men: hairy, smirking, gabbing, posturing, stage-clad caricatures—oh ow! what waists! what mustaches! what hats! Surely

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one might fairly expect some comfort from the mere caravansary contact with Europeans! But—these! . . . It was hot weather, too. Whew! Falcontent was in a summer's-day sweat in the open—and here it was night and coming on late in November! . . . There were none of the shipmates of Falcontent's crossing about. They had begun to avoid Falcontent long before the landing at Alexandria; and Falcontent had taken care to avoid them since the landing. Glimpses of the familiar in the Cairo confusion only annoyed Falcontent the more by creating in his wretched spirit a mirage of that which was altogether familiar—Home. . . . And Falcontent determined that he must have another beastly brandy-and-soda. . . .

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Big Jim Falcontent was a broken man. Dragged from a decent seclusion, stated in clear, straightaway, brief, bald terms, which anybody can understand, Falcontent's trouble was this: he was now fully aware that he had no God. And that was all that was normally the matter with Falcontent. Queer enough, perhaps, but true. No material happening of Falcontent's life could excuse or account for the ghastly collapse of his spirit. Falcontent was an infidel: Falcontent was an atheist. He had so declared himself. It was his best boast. Falcontent had said in his heart, "There is no God." But there are no longer any infidels: the infidels of other times now denounce the social system. Nobody denounces faith. A decent man, being extraordinarily troubled,

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says to himself: "Oh, well, that's all right! I don't know anything about it, anyhow. I'll just have to take my chances with the rest of the boys." The talkative Falcontent found himself without listeners: he was distasteful to his company. Bartenders would not humor his argument; baseball patrons fled his neighborhood—and his approach instantly dispersed every circle of his club-mates.

"What the devil's the matter with Falcontent?"

"Why can't the fellow keep it to himself?"

"Sorry? Why, sure! But in this little old world a man must help *himself*. It don't do Jim Falcontent any good to listen—"

"What the devil does he want to

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blatherskite his damned blasphemy around here for?"

Falcontent's business? Falcontent used to be "some" salesman: he was "some" salesman no longer. And everybody knew it. Groot knew it—and waited with pious patience for the imminent end. Galesworth knew it—remarked it with melancholy: though Galesworth and his wife were waiting with what patience they could command for Falcontent's more remunerative job of selling Groot & McCarthy's shoes in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. And no wonder sales had fallen off! A buyer of shoes cannot with profitable precision look over a line of samples and at the same time indulge an argument rabidly directed against the existence of God. Nor will he attempt the perilous



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acrobatics involved. What has the existence of God to do with a line of shoes? Presently Falcontent himself came eye to eye with the catastrophe of his uselessness. "I'm just three months off from a Bowery lodging-house," he reflected, "and but a few weeks longer from the bread-line and the gutter. That's a devilish queer thing—to happen to me!" But he knew why: it was because he had with resentful conviction said in his own heart, "There is no God." And he would go on saying it—that self-same thing, over and over again.

Being an honest fellow, Falcontent went straightway to Groot for a friendly discussion of a distressful situation.

"Mr. Groot," he began, "I guess I'm all in."

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"I guess so," Groot admitted.

Falcontent started. "You think, then, that—"

"I said," Groot drawled, "that I thought so too. Isn't that clear?"

Mr. Groot was the partner of privately pious inclinations in the shoe-manufacturing firm of Groot & McCarthy.

"If that's so," said Falcontent, "I guess I'm not much use to the firm any more."

"No," Groot agreed, "not much."

"I guess I'd better resign?"

"Huh!" Groot grunted.

"All right," sighed Falcontent, despairing. "It might as well take effect at once."

A dreary silence fell.

"Oh, I don't know," said Groot, looking up from the litter of his office-

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desk. "Maybe it isn't as bad as all that. Hadn't you better try a six months' vacation with pay?"

Falcontent was listlessly grateful. "Thanks," said he. "You're kind. It wouldn't do me any good, though. I'm all in."

"Can't sell shoes any longer?"

"Devil a shoe! I can't do *anything*. I'm in wrong—everywhere."

Groot gave gloomy assent. "I guess that's just about right," said he.

"You see, Mr. Groot," Falcontent began to explain, a blithering loquacity obviously impending, "the trouble with me is—"

"Don't tell me!" Groot ejaculated, alarmed. "I know what's the trouble with you."

"But you *can't* know, Mr. Groot!" Falcontent's voice was rising in mor-

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bid agitation. "I haven't spoken with you—about this."

"No salesman of mine can run himself to hell in this town," Groot declared, thin-lipped, his gray eyes flashing resentfully, "without my knowing pretty much what's the matter with him."

Falcontent flushed. "Well?" he inquired.

"You run over to the Holy Land for a while," said Groot, smiling a little, rubbing his lean hands like a Sunday-school superintendent. "That'll fix you up. It fixed me." He sighed; his eyes sparkled wistfully. "I wish I could go along with you," he added. "I'd—almighty like to."

Falcontent laughed softly. "Holy Land!" he scoffed.

"You want action, don't you?"

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Groot demanded, grimly. "Well, a little visit to the Holy Land will make you or break you. Now—you *go!*"

And here, at last, in an obscure French hotel in Cairo, was Falcontent, bound for the Holy Land, to be made or broken, at the expense of Groot & McCarthy. It was amusing; but Falcontent was not amused. It was not possible for Falcontent in the pass of spiritual exhaustion to which he had come to sustain even a flash of amusement. Falcontent was in a wretched condition; he was thin, weak, untidy, downcast. He was a little the worse of brandy-and-soda, too, of course—nothing to speak of; and he was so very much the worse of Life that his long, vacant face, his lusterless eyes, his listless attitude, all

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the evidences of spiritual fatigue, communicated melancholy even to those surroundings which had determined to be gay in spite of whatever might happen. Falcontent attracted glances—which were averted, repelled. But presently a spare, brown, alert little man—a muscular little fellow, washed by wind and sun, now clad in the fashion of a Continental dandy, with an inverted mustache, to which he was in the habit of giving a quick, defiant twist, at the same time indulging a swashbuckling scowl—sided close to Falcontent, as though casually, and sat down beside him, again casually.

Presently the brown little man flashed a keen eye over Falcontent. He glanced off at once; but his clean, brown eyes presently returned, now

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smiling ingenuously, and he made bold to address the traveler.

“Good evenin’, Mr. Falcontent,” he ventured, politely.

“Who the devil are you?” Falcontent growled.

“Ver’ proper in-qui-ry,” the little man warmly agreed. His smile broadened trustfully. “I was born in Jerusalem. Mr. Amos Awad. It is I.” The announcement was made with a flourish.

“Well, George,” Falcontent drawled—the little man was dark of skin—“will you please tell me how you happened to know my name?”

“You wonder, eh?”

“A con game, George?”

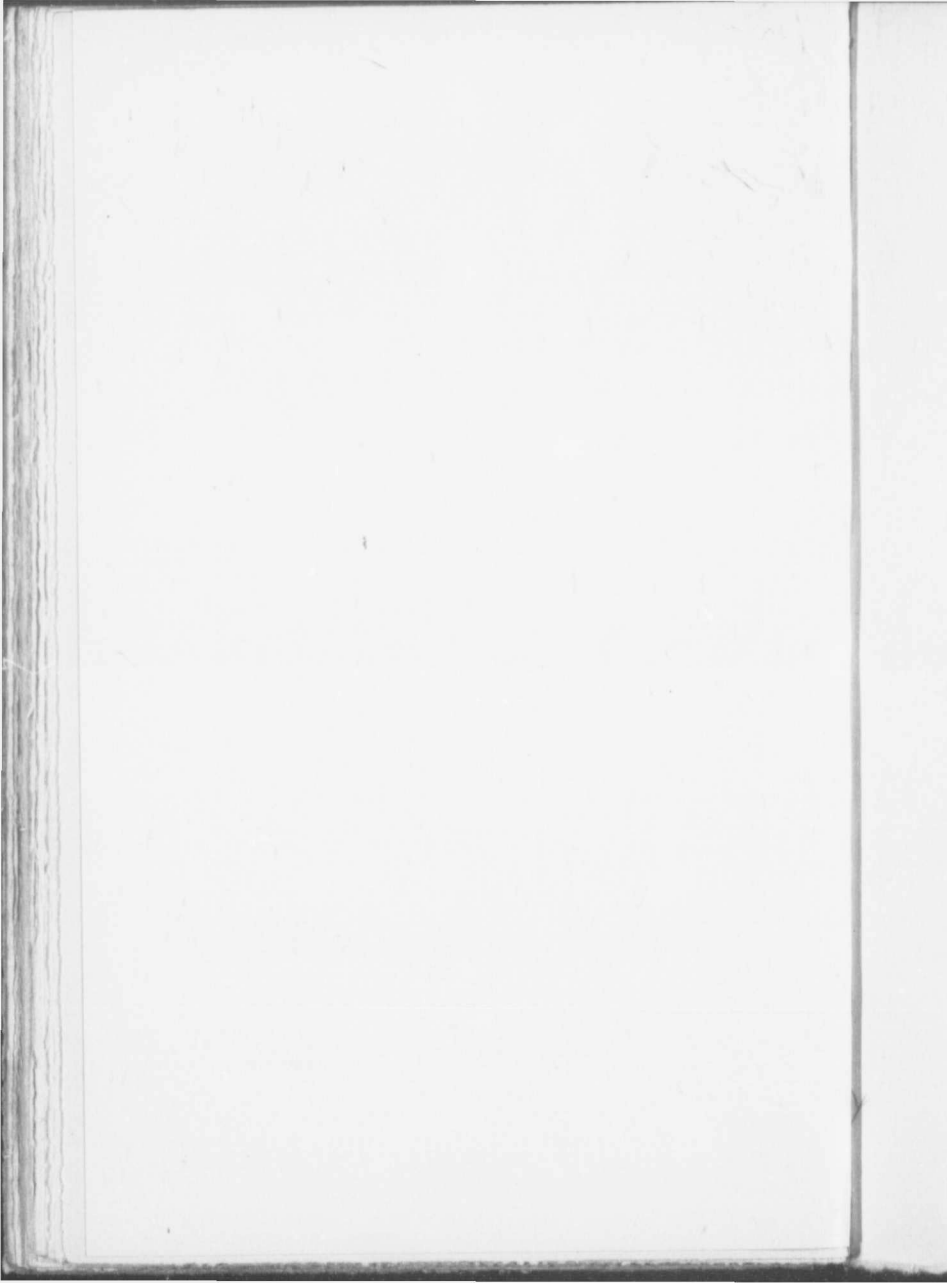
“It is matter business: that is all.”

“Business? What business? You don’t mean to tell me that you’ve got



"I AM DRAGOMAN—WITH MOS' ELEGANT REFERENCES"





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an Oriental gold brick up in your room?"

"Gold brick!" the little man laughed. "Oh, dear me, no! Oh, my dear sir! Here—it is not America. I have the honor to explain," he continued, seriously. "Privilege granted? Ah! Jus' so! I am dragoman. I am jus' brought my party from Palestine. Ver' fine people. I am paid off an' mos' generously dismiss' with mos' elegant references. Egypt? It is not my ver' bes' tour. I am not ver' well acquaint' with Egyptian antiquities. But I am fully acquaint' with Holy Land an' all things pertainin' thereof. Holy Land! By Jove! What ver' good Holy Land dragoman am I! By any chance you go there, Mr. Falcontent? I hope so. I *do* hope so. I hope so in the ver' bottom of my heart. Ah!"

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"Look here, George," Falcontent reproved, "you haven't told me yet how you knew my name."

"Pst!"—scornfully. "It is nothing. The hotel clerk"—contemptuously—"have his little commission for little favor like that."

"Oh, sure. I might have thought of that."

"Ver' simple thing."

"Why didn't you lie about it?"

Dignity galvanized the little man. "It do not compat' with my general behavior truth an' probity," he said, distinctly, "to tell the lie. . . . An' not one single thing is to be gain'—in the end."

"Oh!" Falcontent blankly ejaculated.

Falcontent's surprise was sufficiently apologetic. "You see the

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world, Mr. Falcontent?" the dragoman resumed, again mildly. "I do hope so. Oh, my dear sir! A tour round the world—includin' the Holy Land? No doubt?"

"Well," Falcontent admitted, "I'm resting."

"Ah! Jus' so! I understan'. Overwork — doubtless? A Wall Street panic? Hum! Doubtless so."

"No," Falcontent sighed; "nothing like that."

Wisdom and experience enlightened the little man. He precisely comprehended.

"Oh, my dear sir!" he exclaimed.

"My little boy died," said Falcontent. "It knocked me out. . . . Have a drink?"

The dragoman lifted a delicate, brown hand. "I am mere child in

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such matters, as it were," said he. He was much like a boy jocularly invited to partake in something preposterously beyond his years.

"You won't mind," Falcontent began, "if I—"

Again a lift of the brown hand and a polite little bow. "I shall have the ver' great honor," said the dragoman, renewing the politeness of the bow, "to observe consumption of brandy-an'-sodawithkeensympathyan'relish."

Falcontent almost laughed. "Where did you learn your English, old man?" he asked, interested.

"In New York, sir."

"Oh, shucks!"

"An' the Moody Institute — for some small time."

"You didn't learn that kind of talk anywhere *near* New York!"

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“Ah! I understand. Oh, my, no!” the dragoman protested, quickly. “The polish,” he explained, “is acquire’ by myself from readin’ great works of literature an’ mos’ modern theology.”

Falcontent warmed to the little man. Awad was in health: he had the color and sure power and the limpid peace of the open places. He was companionable—possibly in a mercenary way; but what matter? He would listen. In those days Falcontent found his most engaging form of entertainment in elucidating a seditious philosophy of the universe. And into the waiting ear of the dragoman he now poured the tale of little Jimmie’s death. The boy was dead and buried; there had been typhoid fever

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—and a long fight, through which, it seemed, Falcontent had entreated the Almighty to spare the lad. But the lad was dead; as, according to the unrelenting mysteries, many another man's young son had died before him. Falcontent was alone; he was stricken—ruined. But the death of children? They vanish in multitudes and leave all places vacant and desolate. It is nothing out of the way. Falcontent's was a commonplace sorrow: the world renews the like of it every day. But the brown little man listened, with many a pitying "Tsc, tsc, tsc!" and many a muttered "How ver' sad!" to encourage a complete disclosure. He was alive to more than the tale: he was like a physician—alert, intent, analytical, discovering from Falcontent's mawkish and hardly coherent

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recital the deeper springs of Falcontent's pitiable state.

Falcontent was in rebellion. Ha! That was the trouble. But why rebel? A laughable thing—thus to rebel! A preposterous and hurtful perversity! Why not yield—presently? Why not say, "Thy will be done!"—and cultivate some form of faith? It seemed to the brown little dragoman to be a brave and sensible sort of behavior.

"Ver' sad!" he sighed, at the end.

"Sad?" Falcontent snarled.

"The Lord gives," the dragoman quoted, apparently with sincere conviction, "an' the Lord takes away."

Falcontent leaned forward in disreputable anger. "You mean to tell me," he flared, his voice risen, "that the Lord *took* him — deliberately? That the Lord put that poor little



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fellow through weeks of useless agony—and then killed him?"

"Hush!"

Falcontent would not be quieted. His eyes were flushed with rage; his nostrils flared; his teeth were bared. "You call that Design?" he cried. "Design—hell! That was *Chance*. There *is* no God!"

Ha! Was it so? Awad needed nothing more. It was an old problem. He gripped Falcontent's forearm to restrain him. "Sh-h!" he commanded. "It is too loud for be polite. You have shame yourself. An' me—your dragoman!" Falcontent's resentment failed. He had not the strength to sustain rage: he was able only to continue in sulky rebellion. He was listless now once more; he stared vacantly upon the scornful comment

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his outburst—though in English—had aroused. “Listen!” the dragoman went on, his voice low, his words clear-cut, his way authoritative. “You go the Holy Land by present intention. I know that much. It is for the cure. Some friend say, ‘Go an’ be heal.’ I understan’. Many peoples—many, oh, many, many peoples come to Holy Land to be cure’ of sorrow. Ver’ commonplace to happen. But mos’ dangerous practice. I have see’ cure; I have also see’ ruin. Now I am deep student of ver’ mos’ new an’ modern theology. Ver’ good. I prescribe. Privilege granted? Listen! We go to Jerusalem. True; but by way of Mount Sinai. By way of Suez, the Monastery of St. Catherine, Akaba, El-Ma’an, Petra. I make no bones, sir. It is a long desert

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journey: ver' harsh journey—includin' dangers proceedin' from robbers' habitations. But mos' excellent health is thereby to be gain'. Ver' good. Quite satisfy? I prepare, then, my outfit of men an' animals at once. . . . Mm-m?"

It was an appealing suggestion. Falcontent was moved to carry his sorrow to an exceeding desolation. And he was sensible, too, of the physical advantage. There was surely bodily cure—the cure of physical folly—to be found on the caravan route.

"That listens all right, George, said he. "But what do you get out of this?"

"Surely," the dragoman replied, with a shrug, "I have honor to arrange contract with reasonable profit devolving upon me. . . . Expense, as

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it were, Mr. Falcontent—no object? Mm-m? Doubtless not?”

“Oh, anything reasonable, George,” said Falcontent. “But I don’t want to be stung.”

“Ver’ reasonable, Mr. Falcontent. No sting in contract of Mr. Amos Awad. I do so assure you upon honor.”

Falcontent came to a quick decision. “All right, George,” said he, with spirit. “I’ll go. And we’ll get to work and arrange the terms of that little contract right now.”

Falcontent rode into Jerusalem near the close of day—the day before Christmas. Awad had proved a faithful, companionable fellow; he had been solicitous concerning Falcontent’s first pains of travel—he had

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been grim, businesslike, vastly determined in respect to the way and the hours of riding. There had been no discussion of Falcontent's perplexities. There had been entertainment: Awad had told many engaging stories to relieve the monotony of the sand—such Eastern tales as are told, in various forms, names varying, incidents differing somewhat from the Occidental traditions, but the moral unchanged, to while away time and weariness in all the deserts of the East. And Falcontent had indeed matched his sorrow against an exceeding desolation: a land, however, unable to wrench any complaint against Fate from its lean dwellers. Falcontent was himself now lean and brown with weeks of desert travel. His eyes were clean and quick and sure. It

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had been a short ride that day; he tingled with muscular exaltation. He was toned; it was a physically rehabilitated Falcontent. He was in appetite; he could sleep. . . . Sell shoes? Well, rather! By Jove—Falcontent would sure show old man Groot that he had “come back”! And he had not yet even seen the Holy Places! It would sure be a laugh on Groot!

Falcontent could laugh—now. But his mirth was hard, a mere reflex, without feeling. It was mirth without sure foundation. There was no spiritual health in it. At the first touch of adversity the laughter might turn to jeering cachinnation. Life was a grim experience: a man was born, lived, died. “To-morrow we die!” Falcontent stood no longer in confusion between Design and Chance. He had

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settled that question for good and all. And what a fool he had been to trouble about it at all! How shall a man surely know? Falcontent laughed to think of the hurtful folly of his brooding. . . . God? There was no God. There were many gods: gods of all peoples—a vast variety. There were many superstitions; there was much bowing down. . . . A flash of agitated uncertainty passed over Falcontent when he reflected that his was the only generation of all the generations of men (as he fancied) by whom the worship of God had been generally abandoned. . . . But why not? “The old order changeth.” The times were new. . . . “God of our fathers!” How the old teachings persisted in a man’s imagination! Falcontent could recall the psalm—and the nasal singing. It

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aggravated him to remember. He concerned his thoughts with the road. . . . It was crisp weather; it was much like a harvest evening — at home. Light lingered upon the city. It was a city lying soft and half revealed in a mist of twilight.

“Jerusalem!” Falcontent thought. “Well—I’m damned! Jim Falcontent, of Groot & McCarthy—in Jerusalem!”

Falcontent was subconsciously disappointed to find no glory of heavenly light upon the flat roofs, and no glow of peace and beneficence upon the countenances of the sinister-appearing inhabitants. He had, like a child—it was a legacy of childhood—looked for some continued manifestation of the story of the Divine residence.

“Nice town, Awad?” he inquired.



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“Ver’ modern city, accordin’ Eastern standards,” the dragoman replied, with a flirt of his dainty mustache. “Ver’ human peoples live here. Disappoint’, eh?” he ran on. “Jus’ so. Ver’ much like all tourist’ excep’ ver’ old people. You think to see pearly gates an’ golden streets, eh? Ha, ha! Oh, dear me, no! Ver’ human city of present day. Ver’ up-to-date town. Always was, I take it. Possibly so in time of King Solomon. An’ in days of King David—doubtless so? Why not? Mm-m?”

It occurred to Falcontent for the first time with significant conviction that Jerusalem was a reality; that the city had been real from generation to generation—here situated—near by—and that the happenings recorded were realities like the events of pro-

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fane history—of the American Revolution.

But—

“Garden of Gethsemane still around here?” he yawned.

“Oh yes. Ver’ close by the city. Carriage an’ all fees suppli’ by terms of my contract.”

“Got a fence around it?” Falcontent joked.

“Oh yes.”

“What!” Falcontent exclaimed.

“Not what you call precisely picket fence,” the dragoman replied. “Much more substantial. A ver’ solid wall.”

“Sure they got the right spot fenced in?”

“My habit truth an’ probity compel me say I personally ver’ much doubt. Right place? What matter? Pst!”

What *did* it matter?

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"Haven't moved the Mount of Olives, have they?"

"Oh, my *dear* sir!" Awad laughed. "Impossible job for to perform. An' Palestine antiquities, my dear sir, not for sale for decorate landscape of the American millionaire."

"Calvary?"

"Same ol' place, sir," the dragoman replied, gravely, "but naturally ver' much change'. Ver' well authenticate', too, accordin' by latest authorities. Which thing I am ver' happy to state—with perfect truth, at last."

Falcontent rode on in silence. It was dark in the city. There were no details: there was the mystery of dim-lit habitations—of narrow streets—of shuffling forms. . . . And this was Jerusalem! There was actually such a place! Falcontent all at once real-

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ized the existence of the city as a physical fact. It had a place in history—not wholly in legend. It was of old time. It was real. . . . The American Revolution and the Civil War were legendary conflicts in Falcontent's consciousness until he had with amazed understanding set foot on the battle-fields and stared about! . . . And Gethsemane was near by. Precise location? Pst! What matter? There had been a Garden of Gethsemane! The Mount of Olives, too: it was a remarkable hill—now within reach, like Grant's Tomb at home. And Calvary! There had been a place called Calvary! . . . Falcontent was profoundly moved by his proximity to these places which now at last were real. Falcontent was shocked; his unbelief in the tradition—was it

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tradition?—of the Divine Presence upon earth was disturbed. A presence in Jerusalem—roundabout: here and beyond. . . . Falcontent began to whistle a snatch from “The Queen of the Great White Way.” It was incongruous; he could not bear to continue. . . . There had been a Teacher: that was true—it was as true as Grant and Lincoln and Washington—and the teaching was not yet forgotten in the world. Falcontent knew it all well enough—the life and philosophy which somewhere near by these very places had had their origin. . . . To relieve the agitation of these disclosures Falcontent tried once more the topical song from “The Queen of the Great White Way.” It was impossible.

“Cold?” Awad inquired.

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“No,” Falcontent answered. “I’m not cold. I’m shivering, though. That’s funny, isn’t it?”

“Well, no,” said Awad. “Ver’ commonplace thing to happen. I should not have be surprise’ if, on the other hand, you have swear ver’ harshly.”

Falcontent had experienced—and had thereby been horrified—a curious impulse to blaspheme.

“That’s queer,” he drawled now.

“Ver’ commonplace thing,” the dragoman repeated. He shrugged. “I recommend, if I be permit’,” he went on, impassively, “a hot bath, food, an’ perusal of Holy Scriptures for historical data. I am great believer in original sources. Let us say, Gospel accordin’ St. Luke—chapter two, especially. It is Christmas Eve. To-night — accordin’ by itinerary —

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we visit Bethlehem. Carriage an' all fees my pleasure to provide accordin' by terms of my contract."

When, late that Christmas Eve, the little dragoman knocked on the door of Falcontent's room in a hotel by the Jaffa Gate, Falcontent had gathered a deal of historical data from the original sources. . . .

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch on their flocks by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour,*

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*which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will toward men. And it came to pass that as the angels were going away from them into heaven the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see the thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. . . .* And Falcontent had perused the tragedy from that beginning to its heroic end. It was all familiar, to be sure—had continued in Falcontent's memory since those old New England days; but was now new with reality and meaning.



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"I'm tired," Falcontent protested to the dragoman. "I guess we'd better put the Bethlehem trip off."

"Ha!" the dragoman ejaculated. "We go," he announced, calmly. "It is my greatest ambition to serve my gentlemen. I fail—never! We go. I am flat in it."

Falcontent was presently rattling over the road to Bethlehem. It was a clear night. There were stars—brilliantly shining. A moon was imminent. A shadowy country—waste like a wilderness in the night—was on either side. The road lay white and dusty. It was an old road—an old, old way of going and coming. It had felt the imprint of dusty feet these many long-forgotten years. . . . The world was surely very old: that which persisted from generation to

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generation was of value—new things doubtful. . . . Falcontent was cold. But the night was warm. Yet Falcontent shivered; his hands trembled—teeth clicked together. He was hardly able to command this nervous spasm. . . . There came, by and by, dark, winding streets, rough, narrow. The horses stumbled. . . . There was the Church of the Nativity: it was like a fortification. There was a narrow door—there were wide, cathedral spaces—there was the light of candles—there were ecclesiastical robes—there was incense—there were many voices distantly chanting—there was the wonder of some mystical ceremony by which Falcontent was shaken from his hold on the commonplaces of life. . . . And Falcontent stared and listened, transported so far from

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Broadway by the vision and music of these mysteries that Broadway was no longer within his recollection, save as a blurred, contrasting horror.

Thereafter Falcontent stood for a long time midway of a narrow stone stair—gazing awed now into the Grotto of the Nativity. It was a small space. The yellow light of many candles illuminated it. . . . Many people knelt below in adoration: these were Russian pilgrims—folk of a race cruelly oppressed; yet their countenances gave no sign of oppression, but were clean of guile and fear and suspicion, and all manner of trouble. Peace was upon all them that adored: such peace—Falcontent reflected in the terms of other times—as the world can neither give nor take away. . . . And so it had been;

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a faith continuing from generation to generation, comforting, inspiring, peace-bringing, giving hope and courage—the integrity of its essentials preserved, after all, against the cocksure philosophies of these new days.

“Ver’ much regret,” the dragoman whispered in Falcontent’s ear. “Accordin’ my Bethlehem itinerary, it is time for visit Field of Shepherds.”

Falcontent started.

“Oh, we’ll cut that out!” he whispered, hastily. “I guess I better get back to the hotel.”

But Falcontent followed a rocky pathway, leading down, leading on, inclining toward the stars, to a hill, near by some ancient ruins, below which a field lay in a mist of moonlight. . . . Falcontent was cold; but yet it was a warm night. It was not

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the cold. He was afraid; he trembled—and was afraid. . . . Awad withdrew. Falcontent stood alone. . . . It is related of Saul of Tarsus, as Falcontent then singularly recalled, that, being on the road to Damascus, *there shined round about him a light from heaven, and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice, saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* And the narrative continues: *And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me do? . . .* No light from heaven shined round about James Falcontent, of Groot & McCarthy; but yet he trembled and was astonished—in a great illumination of the spirit. It was

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a simple thing: it concerned only the realities of Falcontent's experience. . . . *And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour. . . .* And it was true! Salvation had proceeded from that Birth: all liberty in the world, as Falcontent knew the world, and the ages of its spinning—every simple kindness—all pure aspiration—every good deed—all true forms of love and virtue and high courage and justice. . . . And the God of Falcontent's fathers was the only God Falcontent knew anything about.

There was a peal of bells; the ringing came liquid-sweet through the moonlight from the Church of the Nativity on the hills of Bethlehem.

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"Amos!" Falcontent called.

"Sir? I am here."

"What they ringing the bells for?"

"It is Christmas mornin', sir."

Falcontent stood staring into the mist of moonlight below. "I guess you better leave me alone for a little while, Amos," he said, presently, without turning. "I—want to be alone." After that Falcontent lifted his face to the sky and prayed. It should astonish no one. Many a good man has done the like of it since the world began. . . .

Well, what miracle? What amazing transformation? Falcontent looked fit: that was true. The same old Falcontent!—the Falcontent of his heartiest days. Back in New York now, still a bit lean and brown with

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desert travel. To the eye—to the ear—to the heart of his intimates—he was the same man he had been at his best. He was selling shoes for Groot & McCarthy, too, in vast quantities, in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. There were some little omissions of behavior, to be sure, as he went about. They were not obtrusive: they earned—they deserved—no comment. A big, ruddy, big-hearted man—that was James Falcontent: a clean, kindly, hopeful, energetic, merry fellow, given to no meanness, to no greed, to no unworthy pride, to no dishonor whatsoever. And he was sane according to every goodly notion of the times. It would have alarmed him—shamed and grieved him—to discover any symptom of peculiarity. Not an alienist



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of virtuous reputation could have discovered in Falcontent the least divergence from the straight line of normality. Nor could a surgeon with due regard for the ethics of his profession have found in Falcontent any honest employment for his knife; nor could a devoted practitioner of internal medicine have supplied a need of Falcontent's hearty body. Falcontent was a robust fellow. Falcontent was in vigorous health. What need had Falcontent of a physician or a surgeon?

Falcontent's soul? Oh yes, Falcontent had a soul—and had in some way established peace with it!



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