

**ONE NIGHT IN
BETHLEHEM: A
CHRISTMAS STORY**

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One Night in Bethlehem: A Christmas Story by W. J. Dawson

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Her pure face full of peace, and on her bosom lay a little Child, lifting his tiny hands towards the light, and smiling.

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BETHLEHEM

A CHRISTMAS STORY

BY

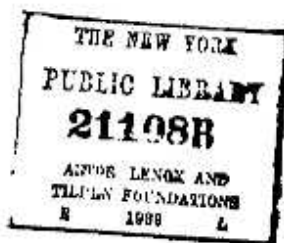
W. J. DAWSON



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ONE NIGHT IN BETHLEHEM

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ONE NIGHT IN BETHLEHEM

I



LARIC sat upon a gray rock at the roadside, gazing vacantly upon the golden splendour of Jerusalem, and meditated on his melancholy lot, and its growing hopelessness. The last rays of the setting sun made the Temple walls a hill of flame, and a biting wind had begun to blow. It would be a hard night for poor travellers like himself, and he was very weary. His feet were bound in rags, his cloak was thin, and the wind set his old wounds aching. Throngs of people passed him, eyeing him askance, as they well might, for he looked like a robber. He received their glances of fear and contempt with equal unconcern, for he had long ago ceased to expect from the world anything but hardness. At that moment his whole mind was concerned with the important question whether or not he should enter the great city. His hand, fumbling secretly in his rags, counted the few copper coins which were all his wealth, and he reluctantly admitted that the city was not for him.

This admission set him thinking of the past.

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The various scenes of his life passed before him with a certain agonised distinctness, and he wondered how he could have sunk so low. Not that the various stages of his downfall were not intelligible: they were only too intelligible. He had reviewed them a thousand times before, had recognised their inevitable sequence, and yet had always ended with the same dull wonder that they should have happened to him of all men. He sometimes had a sense that they were all part of a cruel dream, and that he would wake presently to find himself once more standing victorious beneath a multitude of eyes in the great Arena, a man flattered by the plaudits of the crowd, distinguished by the adoration of proud eyes, remarked even by the Emperor himself.

For Alaric was a gladiator who had fallen on evil times. Long ago—so long he did not care to count the years—he had come from his Helvetian forests, in all his pride of youth, and had flung himself into the tumultuous life of Rome. He had challenged successfully the greatest boxers of his time. He had become famous. His statue, done in bronze, had stood close to the great gateway of the Arena. The statue stood there still for all he knew, and yet here he sat beside the road, clad in rags, lame, and with a few copper coins the sole barrier between himself and famine.

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