

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

Then another came and another, and little Satan's head got quite confused. They were a queer-looking lot of curs and half-breeds from the negro settlement at the edge of the woods, and though Satan had little experience, his instincts told him that all was not as it should be, and had he been human he would have wondered very much how they had escaped the carnage that day. Uneasy, he looked around for Hugo; but Hugo had disappeared. Once or twice Hugo had looked around for Satan, and Satan paying no attention, the mastiff trotted on home in disgust. Just then a powerful yellow cur sprang out of the darkness over the railroad track, and Satan sprang to meet him, and so nearly had the life scared out of him by the snarl and flashing fangs of the new-comer that he hardly had the strength to shrink back

[ 218 ]

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

behind his new friend, the half-breed shepherd.

A strange thing then happened. The other dogs became suddenly quiet, and every eye was on the yellow cur. He sniffed the air once or twice, gave two or three peculiar low growls, and all those dogs except Satan lost the civilization of centuries and went back suddenly to the time when they were wolves and were looking for a leader. The cur was Lobo for that little pack, and after a short parley, he lifted his nose high and started away without looking back, while the other dogs silently trotted after him. With a mystified yelp, Satan ran after them. The cur did not take the turnpike, but jumped the fence into a field, making his way by the rear of houses, from which now and then another dog would slink out and silently

[ 219 ]

### CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

join the band. Every one of them Satan nosed most friendlily, and to his great joy the funeral dog, on the edge of town, leaped into their midst. Ten minutes later the cur stopped in the midst of some woods, as though he would inspect his followers. Plainly, he disapproved of Satan, and Satan kept out of his way. Then he sprang into the turnpike and the band trotted down it, under flying black clouds and shifting bands of brilliant moonlight. Once, a buggy swept past them. A familiar odor struck Satan's nose, and he stopped for a moment to smell the horse's tracks; and right he was, too, for out at her grandmother's Dinnie refused to be comforted, and in that buggy was Uncle Billy going back to town after him.

Snow was falling. It was a great lark for Satan. Once or twice, as he trotted

### CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

along, he had to bark his joy aloud, and each time the big cur gave him such a fierce growl that he feared thereafter to open his jaws. But he was happy for all that, to be running out into the night with such a lot of funny friends and not to know or care where he was going. He got pretty tired presently, for over hill and down hill they went, at that unceasing trot, trot, trot! Satan's tongue began to hang out. Once he stopped to rest, but the loneliness frightened him and he ran on after them with his heart almost bursting. He was about to lie right down and die, when the cur stopped, sniffed the air once or twice, and with those same low growls, led the marauders through a rail fence into the woods, and lay quietly down. How Satan loved that soft, thick grass, all snowy that it was! It was almost as good

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

as his own bed at home. And there they lay—how long, Satan never knew, for he went to sleep and dreamed that he was after a rat in the barn at home; and he yelped in his sleep, which made the cur lift his big yellow head and show his fangs. The moving of the half-breed shepherd and the funeral dog waked him at last, and Satan got up. Half crouching, the cur was leading the way toward the dark, still woods on top of the hill, over which the Star of Bethlehem was lowly sinking, and under which lay a flock of the gentle creatures that seemed to have been almost sacred to the Lord of that Star. They were in sore need of a watchful shepherd now. Satan was stiff and chilled, but he was rested and had had his sleep, and he was just as ready for fun as he always was. He didn't understand that sneaking. Why

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

they didn't all jump and race and bark as he wanted to, he couldn't see; but he was too polite to do otherwise than as they did, and so he sneaked after them; and one would have thought he knew, as well as the rest, the hellish mission on which they were bent.

Out of the woods they went, across a little branch, and there the big cur lay flat again in the grass. A faint bleat came from the hill-side beyond, where Satan could see another woods—and then another bleat, and another. And the cur began to creep again, like a snake in the grass; and the others crept too, and little Satan crept, though it was all a sad mystery to him. Again the cur lay still, but only long enough for Satan to see curious, fat, white shapes above him—and then, with a blood-curdling growl, the big brute

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

dashed forward. Oh, there was fun in them after all! Satan barked joyfully. Those were some new playmates—those fat, white, hairy things up there; and Satan was amazed when, with frightened snorts, they fled in every direction. But this was a new game, perhaps, of which he knew nothing, and as did the rest, so did Satan. He picked out one of the white things and fled barking after it. It was a little fellow that he was after, but little as he was, Satan might never have caught up, had not the sheep got tangled in some brush. Satan danced about him in mad glee, giving him a playful nip at his wool and springing back to give him another nip, and then away again. Plainly, he was not going to bite back, and when the sheep struggled itself tired and sank down in a heap, Satan came close and licked him, and as he was

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

very warm and woolly, he lay down and snuggled up against him for awhile, listening to the turmoil that was going on around him. And as he listened, he got frightened.

If this was a new game it was certainly a very peculiar one—the wild rush, the bleats of terror, gasps of agony, and the fiendish growls of attack and the sounds of ravenous gluttony. With every hair bristling, Satan rose and sprang from the woods—and stopped with a fierce tingling of the nerves that brought him horror and fascination. One of the white shapes lay still before him. There was a great steaming red splotch on the snow, and a strange odor in the air that made him dizzy; but only for a moment. Another white shape rushed by. A tawny streak followed, and then, in a patch of moonlight, Satan saw

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

the yellow cur with his teeth fastened in the throat of his moaning playmate. Like lightning Satan sprang at the cur, who tossed him ten feet away and went back to his awful work. Again Satan leaped, but just then a shout rose behind him, and the cur leaped too as though a bolt of lightning had crashed over him, and, no longer noticing Satan or sheep, began to quiver with fright and slink away. Another shout rose from another direction—another from another.

“Drive 'em into the barn-yard!” was the cry.

Now and then there was a fearful bang and a howl of death-agony, as some dog tried to break through the encircling men, who yelled and cursed as they closed in on the trembling brutes that slunk together and crept on; for it is said, every sheep-

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

killing dog knows his fate if caught, and will make little effort to escape. With them went Satan, through the barn-yard gate, where they huddled in a corner—a shamed and terrified group. A tall overseer stood at the gate.

“Ten of 'em!” he said grimly.

He had been on the lookout for just such a tragedy, for there had recently been a sheep-killing raid on several farms in that neighborhood, and for several nights he had had a lantern hung out on the edge of the woods to scare the dogs away; but a drunken farm-hand had neglected his duty that Christmas Eve.

“Yassuh, an' dey's jus' sebenteen dead sheep out dar,” said a negro.

“Look at the little one,” said a tall boy who looked like the overseer; and Satan knew that he spoke of him.

### CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

"Go back to the house, son," said the overseer, "and tell your mother to give you a Christmas present I got for you yesterday." With a glad whoop the boy dashed away, and in a moment dashed back with a brand-new .32 Winchester in his hand.

The dark hour before dawn was just breaking on Christmas Day. It was the hour when Satan usually rushed upstairs to see if his little mistress was asleep. If he were only at home now, and if he only had known how his little mistress was weeping for him amid her playthings and his—two new balls and a brass-studded collar with a silver plate on which was his name, Satan Dean; and if Dinnie could have seen him now, her heart would have broken; for the tall boy raised his gun. There was a jet of smoke, a sharp, clean crack, and the funeral dog started on the

### CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

right way at last toward his dead master. Another crack, and the yellow cur leaped from the ground and fell kicking. Another crack and another, and with each crack a dog tumbled, until little Satan sat on his haunches amid the writhing pack, alone. His time was now come. As the rifle was raised, he heard up at the big house the cries of children; the popping of fire-crackers; tooting of horns and whistles and loud shouts of "Christmas Gif', Christmas Gif'!" His little heart beat furiously. Perhaps he knew just what he was doing; perhaps it was the accident of habit; most likely Satan simply wanted to go home—but when that gun rose, Satan rose too, on his haunches, his tongue out, his black eyes steady and his funny little paws hanging loosely—and begged! The boy lowered the gun.

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

"Down, sir!" Satan dropped obediently, but when the gun was lifted again, Satan rose again, and again he begged.

"Down, I tell you!" This time Satan would not down, but sat begging for his life. The boy turned.

"Papa, I can't shoot that dog." Perhaps Satan had reached the stern old overseer's heart. Perhaps he remembered suddenly that it was Christmas. At any rate, he said gruffly:

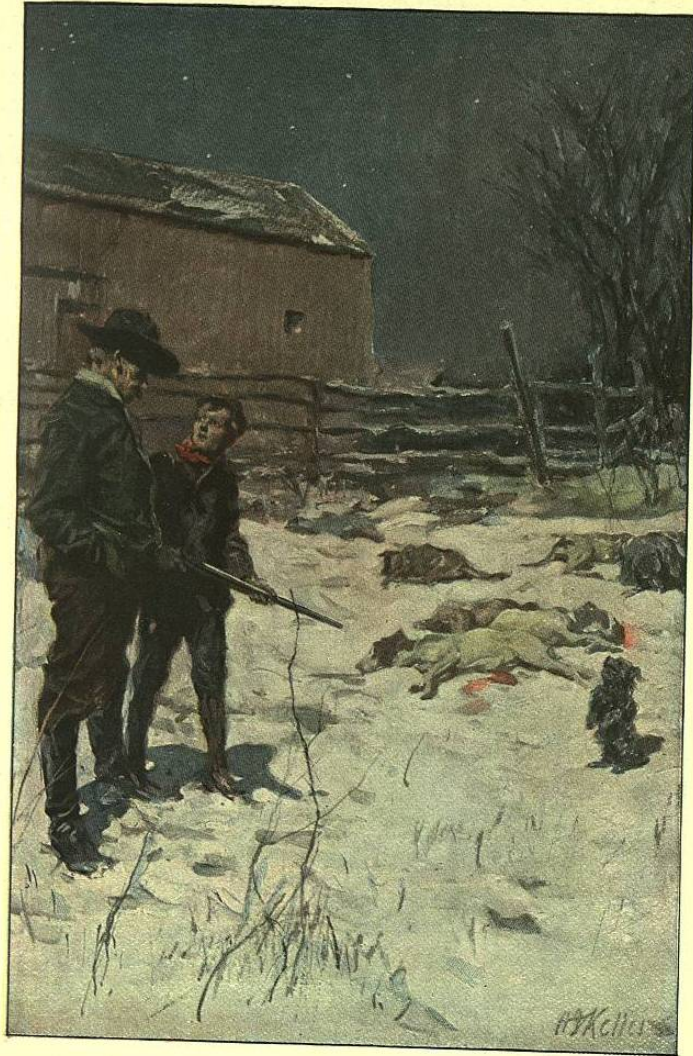
"Well, let him go."

"Come here, sir!" Satan bounded toward the tall boy, frisking and trustful and begged again.

"Go home, sir!"

Satan needed no second command. Without a sound he fled out the barn-yard, and, as he swept under the front gate, a little girl ran out of the front door of the

[ 230 ]



"Papa, I can't shoot that dog."

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

big house and dashed down the steps, shrieking:

"Saty! Saty! Oh, Saty!" But Satan never heard. On he fled, across the crisp fields, leaped the fence and struck the road, lickety-split! for home, while Dinnie dropped sobbing in the snow.

"Hitch up a horse, quick," said Uncle Carey, rushing after Dinnie and taking her up in his arms. Ten minutes later, Uncle Carey and Dinnie, both warmly bundled up, were after flying Satan. They never caught him until they reached the hill on the outskirts of town, where was the kennel of the kind-hearted people who were giving painless death to Satan's four-footed kind, and where they saw him stop and turn from the road. There was divine providence in Satan's flight for one little dog that Christmas morning; for



## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

Uncle Carey saw the old drunkard staggering down the road without his little companion, and a moment later, both he and Dinnie saw Satan nosing a little yellow cur between the palings. Uncle Carey knew the little cur, and while Dinnie was shrieking for Satan, he was saying under his breath:

"Well, I swear!—I swear!—I swear!"  
And while the big man who came to the door was putting Satan into Dinnie's arms, he said sharply:

"Who brought that yellow dog here?"  
The man pointed to the old drunkard's figure turning a corner at the foot of the hill.

"I thought so; I thought so. He sold him to you for—for a drink of whiskey."

The man whistled.

"Bring him out. I'll pay his license."

## CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

So back went Satan and the little cur to Grandmother Dean's—and Dinnie cried when Uncle Carey told her why he was taking the little cur along. With her own hands she put Satan's old collar on the little brute, took him to the kitchen, and fed him first of all. Then she went into the breakfast-room.

"Uncle Billy," she said severely, "didn't I tell you not to let Saty out?"

"Yes, Miss Dinnie," said the old butler.

"Didn't I tell you I was goin' to whoop you if you let Saty out?"

"Yes, Miss Dinnie."

Miss Dinnie pulled forth from her Christmas treasures a toy riding-whip and the old darky's eyes began to roll in mock terror.

"I'm sorry, Uncle Billy, but I des got to whoop you a little."

CHRISTMAS NIGHT WITH SATAN

---

"Let Uncle Billy off, Dinnie," said Uncle Carey, "this is Christmas."

"All wite," said Dinnie, and she turned to Satan.

In his shining new collar and innocent as a cherub, Satan sat on the hearth begging for his breakfast.

