

A BULL LUCK CHRISTMAS

By Sam Davis.

WHEN Jake Lanning fitted up his new saloon in Tonopah with a wealth of interior decorations that seemed better fitted to San Francisco than to a new Nevada mining camp, there were many of the patrons who were unkind enough to make insinuating queries regarding the manner in which Jake had secured the money which paid for it all. Discussions on this subject never reached any definite goal, and it was finally dismissed as a conversational topic.

Jake had announced that he was going to "put all the other joints on the blink" when it came to celebrating Christmas, and he began his decorations several days ahead of the rest.

One afternoon two strangers entered the resort, and when Jake saw some glasses, a flush of crimson suffused his face and spread rapidly to the back of his neck.

"Well, Jake, we are here."

"Yes. Have something."

They declined his proffer of hospitality, and asked him outside.

"We don't want to talk our business affairs in the presence of your customers, Jake, but we have come up here to take a look at that mining property."

"Take ye right to it."

They soon had a raw-boned horse hitched to a buckboard, and started out.

"Better take a pick and shovel, if we need some more ore samples."

"Certainly. I almost forgot about the ore samples."

They drove out into the hills, and it soon became apparent that Jake did not exactly know where he was going.

"See anything of the mine?"

"It must be along here somewhere."

Presently the horse stopped on the brow of a bleak hill, and Jake dropped the reins to wipe the heavy beads of sweat off his face.

"Well, what about it?" queried the two men in the back seat.

"I guess, boys, I may as well make a clean breast of it. There ain't no mine. Only a location, and I've blown the wad."

Jake had been stringing his partners along to put up money on his lying representations for nearly two years, and he had reached the end of the trail. He had put all the money into his saloon, and in palliation of his offense he explained that all mining was a gamble, while a saloon in a Nevada mining camp possessed no elements of financial uncertainty. He argued that his course had been solely dictated by inherent honesty and sound business judgment.

"Your talk is interesting, Jake, but it cuts no ice with us. What we want you to do now is to pick out some nice dry place for a grave, somewhere off the main line of travel, and not too much exposed to the wind. We are going to have you dig your grave right away, and then fill your worthless carcass with lead and bury you with your boots on."

Jake knew his partners too well to open any parley on a question like that. He drove his horse into a hollow, and getting out remarked that the spot where they had stopped was as good as any.

"Get busy!" They handed him the pick and shovel, and when he seemed a little slow covered him with six-shooters.

There was a silence of half an hour as his captors watched him work.

The ground was getting harder, and the poor fellow was weakening at his task.

"Say, fellers, ain't this deep enough? I ain't so blamed particular about the depth."

"We want the grave right. Say about another foot."

"Say, pards, did you ever read in the Bible about the 'Peace on earth, good will to me,' that they teach about this time of year. Would you spoil an orphan's Christmas by treatin' him this way?"

"Cut that stuff, Jake. It won't get ye anywhere with us. You'll have to come across with something better 'n that."

"How does this strike ye?"

As he landed the query he threw up a chunk of rock that glistened with free gold.

"Good boy," shouted his partners, after they had examined the specimen.

"I locate this claim," he yelled.

They pulled him out of the hole and shook his hand warmly.

The way those three men celebrated Christmas was something scandalous, even for Tonopah.

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