

### A Whole Man.

A sensitive man has no business on the desert. He will get prodded everywhere. If he take offense at rough banter, Lord help him when he gets into a mining camp. If he wear his heart upon his sleeve let him steer clear of the Mexican towns and their pretty *sonoritas*. If he would know any peace let him keep away from the cattle range, for the cowboys' jests are as keen and cutting as the spurs at their heels.

Frank Robbins was beginning to find out some of these things. But if you gave him a whole decade he would not find them all out.

"What the boy wants is toughening," said Mart Selby.

Mart was big and tough, and he saw no good reason why anybody but a child or a woman should be tender.

"He's a young colt that wants a Mexican bit shoved into his mouth, and then to be ridden through the cactus."

At Lucin's ranch the boys joked and irritated Robbins, but it did not seem to toughen him. They cared nothing for whiskey that didn't stretch as it went down, and when he put water in his they called him a perfect lady and laughed loudly.

"Stand their joshing," said Mart to Robbins, "and you'll get along better. They always make it hot for a man that don't josh back."

"Oh, I don't mind it," replied Robbins, badly overdoing his effort to look unconcerned.

It had been the same everywhere he had been in the West. He was one of those men who are never anything but tenderfeet. He simply would not take men as he found them, though they were perfectly willing to take him so. And the absurd ideas that had lodgment in his head! Chief among these were that he must have a friend—a chum—who should be a man after his own heart. He had been looking for such a man for two years. He picked him out occasionally, but he never found him to suit. This one was not truthful, and the other was not nice in his speech. There was something lacking in each one.

"What I want is a whole man," he sighed, "I never could take up with any of these half made fellows. But it is not so easy. Even when I find a man that is temperate and intellectual he turns out to be selfish. What would I not give for a whole man for a friend and companion—a whole man."

He would not take up with Mart Selby, though Mart saw that "the young fellow" sorely needed a friend and helper, particularly one who would toughen him. He kept on looking for his made to order man, but he never seemed to hit upon him. Few such men as he was looking for are to be found within a thousand miles of Lucin's. In fact, at Lucin's you would be at a loss to discover a single man who did not like to take observations of old Ashby's cloth and paper ceiling through the bottom of a whiskey glass, and if you heard a voice, I will give you my word of honor it was no cherub's.

One day the boys outdid all their other little meanness to Robbins by getting him hopelessly drunk. Of course it was no killing matter; but he had never been drunk before and he took it

very seriously and resolved to leave camp next day.

Mart did not like this. His heart had warmed toward the "young fellow," and he hated to see him leave the place. Finally he resolved to go with him.

They agreed between them that they would not go on the range again. They would go prospecting for gold.

And thus it was that they came to make the journey over the desert toward Dead Horse Gulch. Now, as everybody in that country knows, the wealth of Dead Horse Gulch is great, but it is very hard to reach. Minors who have lived out the awful heat of the alkali plain that lies all around the buttes wherein the gulch makes its gash, have come back with full belts, but none of them have ever gone a second time.

In suggesting this journey Mart Selby had a double object. First, he wanted to toughen "the young fellow," and next, he wanted to enrich them both. Mart knew that Robbins had come out west to make enough money to marry a nice girl who lived in Delaware, and he knew, too, that "the young fellow" had found money making very slow work.

From Lucin's to the great alkali plain that lay before the buttes in which the gold was hidden was a long and toilsome journey. But the real work only began with the crossing of the alkali desert.

White and naked lay the dead land before their aching eyes. The eye of heaven shone down with most unrelenting fierceness. No breath of air was stirring, and the whole world was to them as dumb as death.

Mart had counted on the journey being a hard one, but not so hard as this. He had not dreamed that the water would give out so soon, nor that the horses would sink down and die as they did.

Still they staggered on, their forms, bent under their heavy burdens, standing out sharp and raw above the white earth, on which their clearly defined shadows fell with inky blackness.

In that cloudless, mistless air distance seemed set at naught, for they travelled on and on toward the buttes, and yet they seemed to grow no nearer.

It was toward evening that they reached a rocky islet in the sea of alkali, and there, after a very bad meal of hardtack, they fell asleep, Robbins dreaming of clear, cold water, drawn from marble fountains in crystal goblets. The young man was the first to awake. The sun was beginning to shoot his fiery needles over the mountains. Robbins lifted his hand to rub his eyes.

"R-r-z-z-z!"

Then a tongue of flame darted toward him and struck him on the palm of the hand.

"My God," he groaned, "it's a rattlesnake, and he's bitten me!"

His voice seemed to awaken a hundred echoes, and to these responded a hundred rattles.

Selby sat up in his blanket and stared at him stupidly. As he made the movement, a rattlesnake struck him in the face and another, at his side, would have done the same had he

not thrown himself out of reach of his deadly fangs.

The rattles sounded on every side. The two men ran back to a stretch of sand beyond the rocks and gazed at each other wildly.

"Hold still," demanded Mart. "Let me look at your bite."

He grasped the boy's hand.

"Thank God, it's not in the vein!"

He seized his knife and quickly hollowed out a piece of flesh.

"There, hold your hand down and let the blood run free, while I tie this cord around your arm."

He twisted the stout cord until it cut into the arm.

"Now, the whisky," he gasped.

"No," said Robbins, "let me cut the poison out of your wound."

Mart held still a moment while this was done.

"Now, the whisky—quick!" cried Robbins.

But Selby did not look for the bringing forth of the flask with any light of hope in his eyes.

"It is yours," he said quietly. "There is only enough for one, and barely that."

"Then it is yours, Mart."

"No—yours."

"But you are the worse bitten. Your face is already beginning to swell. Drink it."

There was anguish in the tone, as there was heroism in the words; but it was heroism of a weakly sort. He held out the bottle at arm's length, while he turned his face away.

"No, by God! It's your's boy!" came in firmer and more commanding tones from Mart Selby. "You have a mother and a sweetheart back in the States. And I—I have nobody. There was somebody once, but there ain't no body now—nobody at all."

In the face of this fearful temptation Robbins felt himself weakening. He grew less strong of resolution with each tick of the watch in his pocket, heard so plainly in the desert stillness. What a coward he felt himself; but—how sweet was life.

Was there not help to be had from some other source? He could not take this. The drinking of that liquid was the drinking of Selby's life, and that life meant much to him now. Here was the whole man!

His eyes swept the hopeless plain. He looked for the "dust" of a traveller, but he saw none. The heat of the day was growing. He thought he felt the poison pulsing through his veins.

"No—No," he said, sinking down upon the sand. And there was a pitiable weakness in his tones.

Selby took the bottle from his hand. As he did so a shade of fear rose to Robbins' face. Selby saw it and smiled. The swollen face made the smile grotesque; but, none the less, it was the smile of a god. He came forward and knelt beside the crouching form of Robbins, who was lying on his face, with his eyes shut, begged him not to think of him, but of himself. But the tone was growing weaker.

The other said no word, but, lifting his friend's head, he uncorked the bottle and held it to his lips. A look of remonstrance came over Robbins' face, and he raised his hand to push away the bottle. Just then he glanced