

***HENRY WALLACE
PHILLIPS***

MR. SCRAGGS

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Mr. Scraggs

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MR. SCRAGGS

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INTRODUCED BY RED SAUNDERS

BY PROXY

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I had met Mr. Scraggs, shaken him by the hand, and, in the shallow sense of the word, knew him. But a man is more than clothes and a bald head. It is also something of a trick to find out more about him—particularly in the cow country. One needs an interpreter. Red furnished the translation. After that, I nurtured Mr. Scraggs's friendship, for the benefit of humanity and philosophy. Saunders and I lay under a bit of Bad Lands, soaking in the spring sun, and enjoying the

first cigarette since breakfast. In regard to things in general, he said:

"Now, there was the time I worked for the Ellis ranch. A ranch is like a man: it has something that belongs to it, that don't belong to no other ranch, same as I have just the same number of eyes and noses and so forth that you drew on your ticket, yet you ain't me no more'n I'm you. This was a kind of sober-minded concern; it was a thoughtful sort of a ranch, where everybody went about his work quiet. I guess it was because the boys was mostly old-timers, given to arguing about why was this and how come that. Argue! Caesar! It was a regular debating society. Wind-river Smith picked up a book in the old man's room that told about the Injuns bein' Jews 'way back before the big high-water, and how one gang of 'em took to the prairie and the other gang to the bad clothes business. Well, he and Chawley Tawmson—'member Chawley and his tooth? And you'd have time to tail-down and burn a steer before Chawley got the next word out—well, they got arguin' about whether this was so, or whether it weren't so. Smithy was for the book, havin' read it, and Chawley scorned it. The argument lasted a month, and as neither one of 'em knew anything about an Injun, except what you can gather from looking at him over a rifle sight, and as the only Jew either one of 'em ever said two words to was the one that sold Windriver a hat that melted in the first rain-storm, and then him and Chawley went to town and made the Hebrew eat what was left of the hat, after refunding the price, you can imagine what a contribution to history I listened to. That's the kind of place the Ellis ranch was, and a nice old farm she was, too.

"I'd been working there about three months, when along come a man that looked like old man Trouble's only son. Of all the sorrowful faces you ever see, his was the longest and thinnest. It made any other human countenance I ever see look like a nigger-minstrel show.

[Illustration: Made any other human countenance I ever see look like a nigger-minstrel show.]

"We was short-handed, as the old man had begun to put up hay and work some of the stock in corrals for the winter, so we took our new brother on. His name was Ezekiel George Washington Scraggs—tuneful number for a cow-outfit!—and his name didn't come anywhere near doin' him justice at that. Ezekiel knew his biz and turned in a day's work right straight along, but when you'd say, 'Nice day, Scraggs?' he'd heave such a sigh you could feel the draft all the way acrost the bull-pen, and only shake his head.

"Up to this time Wind-river had enjoyed a cinch on the mournful act. He'd had a girl sometime durin' the Mexican war, and she'd borrowed Smith's roll and skipped with another man. So, if we crowded Smithy too hard in debate, he used to slip behind that girl and say, 'Oh, well! You fellers will know better when you've had more experience,' although we might have been talkin' about what's best for frost-bite at the time.

"He noticed this new man Scraggs seemed to hold over him a trifle in sadness, and he thought he'd find out why.

"'You appear to me like a man that's seen trouble,' says he.

"'Trouble!' says Scraggs. 'Trouble!' Then he spit out of the door and turned his back deliberate, like there wasn't any

use conversin' on the subject, unless in the presence of an equal.

"Scraggs was a hard man to break into, but Smithy scratched his head and took a brace.

"'I've met with misfortune myself,' says he.

"'Ah?' says Scraggs. 'What's happened to you?' He sounded as if he didn't believe it amounted to much, and Smithy warmed up. He ladled out his woes like a catalogue. How he'd been blew up in mines; squizzled down a mountain on a snow-slide; chawed by a bear; caught under a felled tree; sunk on a Missouri River steamboat, and her afire, so you couldn't tell whether to holler for the life-savers or the fire-engine; shot up by Injuns and personal friends; mistook for a horse-thief by the committee, and much else, closing the list with his right bower. 'And, Mr. Scraggs, I have put my faith in woman, and she done me to the tune of all I had.'

"'Have you?' says Scraggs, still perfectly polite and uninterested. "'Have you?' says he, removin' his pipe and spitting carefully outdoors again. And then he slid the joker a'top of Smithy's play. 'Well, / have been a Mormon,' says he.

"'What?' says all of us.

"'Yessir!' says Mr. Scraggs, getting his feet under him, and with a mournful pride I can't give you the least idea of. 'A Mormon; none of your tinkerin' little Mormonettes. I was ambitious; hence E. G. W. Scraggs as you now behold him. In most countries a man's standin' is regulated by the number of wives he ain't got; in Utah it's just the reverse—and a fair test, too, when you come to think of it. I wanted

to be the head of the hull Mormon kingdom, so I married right and left. Every time I added to the available supply of Mrs. Scraggs, I went up a step in the government. I ain't all the persimmons for personal beauty, so I had to take what was willin' to take me, and they turned out to be mostly black-eyed women with peculiar dispositions. Gentlemen, I was once as lively and happy a little boy as ever did chores on a farm. See me now! This is the result of mixin' women and politics. If I should tell you all the kinds of particular and general devilment (to run 'em alphabetically, as I did to keep track of 'em) that Ann Eliza Scraggs, and Bridget Scraggs, and Belle Scraggs, and Fanny Scraggs, and Honoria and Helen Scraggs, and Isabelle Scraggs, and so on up to zed, raised with me, it would go through any little germs of joy you may have in your constitutions like Sittin' Bull's gang of dog-soldiers through an old ladies' sewing bee. Look at me! For all them years that cussed ambition of mine held me in its deadly toils. I never heard the sound of blessed silence. Trouble! I'm bald as a cake of ice; my nerves is ruined. If the wind makes a noise in the grass like the swish of skirts, I'm a mile up the track before I get my wits back, sweatin' coldly and profusely, like a water-cooler.

"I ain't got anything to tie to but all them women by the name of Scraggs, and them ties I cut by travelin' fast between daylights. Wisht I could introduce you to Mrs. Scraggs as she inhabits the territory of Utah—you'd understand a power of things that may seem a little misty to you at present. However, I can't do that, nor I wouldn't neither, if I was to be made general superintendent of the whole show for my pains. I'll leave the aggregated Mrs.

Scraggs in the hands of Providence, as bein' the only power capable of handling her. Yet I don't believe in Providence. I don't believe in no Hereafter, nor Heretofore, nor no Now; I don't believe in no East nor West, nor Up nor Down, nor Sideways, Lengthways, 'Cross-the-center, Top, Bottom, or Middle. I have lost my faith in every ram-butted thing a man can hear, see, or touch, includin' everything I've left out. That's me, Joe Bush.' He stopped a minute. 'Trouble—' says he. 'Trouble—I wisht nobody'd mention that word in my hearin' again.'

"Well, he had us gummed fast, all right. Nobody in our outfit could push up against such a world-without-end experience as that.

"But Scraggs was a gentleman; he didn't crowd us because we broke. In fact, now that he'd had his say, he loosened up considerable, and every now and then he'd even smile.

"Then come to us the queerest thing in that whole curiosity-shop of a ranch. Its name was Alexander Fulton. I reckon Aleck was about twenty-one by the almanac, and anywhere's from three to ninety by the way you figure a man. Aleck stood six foot high *as he stood*, but if you ran the tape along his curves he was about six-foot-four.

"He weighed one hundred and twenty pounds, of which twenty-five went to head and fifty to feet. Feet! You never saw such feet. They were the grandest feet that ever wore a man; long and high and wide, and all that feet should be. Chawley said that Alexander had ground plan enough for a company of nigger soldiers. And hung to Aleck's running gear, they reminded you of the swinging jigger in a clock.

They almost make me forget his hands. When Aleck laid a flipper on a cayuse's back, you'd think the critter was blanketed. And then there was his Adam's apple—he had so many special features, it's hard to keep track of them. About a foot of Aleck's protrudin' into air was due to neck. In the center of that neck was an Adam's apple that any man might be proud of.

"His complexion consisted of freckles; when you spoke to him sudden he blushed, and then he looked for all the world like a stormy sunset. His eyes were white, and so was his hair, and so was poor old Aleck—as white a kid as they make 'em, and, beyond guessing, the skeeriest—not relatin' to things, but to people. How he come to drift out into our country was a story all by itself. He was disappointed in love—he *had* to be. One look at him and you'd know why. So he sailed out to the wild West, where he was about as useful as a trimmed nighty. We always stood between Aleck and the old man, until the boy got so he'd make straight once out of a possible five.

[Illustration: He was disappointed in love—he *had* to be.]

"First off, he was still; then, findin' himself in a confidential crowd, and bustin' to let us know, his trouble, he told us all about it. He'd never spoke to the girl, it seems, more'n to say, 'How-d'ye-do, ma'am,' and blush, and sit on his hat, and make curious moves with them hands and feet; but there come another feller along, and Alexander quit.

"'You got away?' says Scraggs. 'Permit me to congratulate you, sir!' And he took hold of as much of Aleck's right wing as he could gather, and shook it hard. 'Alas!' says he, 'how different is the tale I have to tell.'

"'But I didn't want to come away!' stutters Alexander.

"'Didn't want to?' cries Scraggs, letting the pipe fall out of his mouth. Then he turns to me and taps his brow with his finger, casting a pitying eye on Aleck.

"As time went on Aleck got worse and worse. He had a case of ingrowing affection; it cut his weight down to ninety pounds. With him leaving himself at that rate, you could take pencil and paper and figure to the minute when Alexander Fulton was booked to cross the big divide. And we liked the kid. In spite of his magnificent feet, and his homeliness, and his thumb-handsidedness, I got to feel sort of as if he was my boy—though if ever I have a boy like Aleck, I put in my vote for marriage being a failure, and everything lost, honor and all. Probably it was more as if he was a puppy-dog, or some other little critter that couldn't take care of itself. Anyhow, we got worked up about the matter, and talked it over considerable when he was out of hearing. It come to this: there was no earthly use in trying to get Aleck to go back and make a play at the girl. He'd ha' fell dead at the thought of it. That left nothing but to bring the girl to Aleck. You see, we thought if we told the young woman that here was a decent honest man—hurrying over the rest of the description—just evaporating for love of her, that she might be persuaded to come out and marry him. We weren't going to let our pardner slip away without an effort anyhow. We couldn't do no less than try. Then come the problem of who was the proper party to act as messenger. The rest of us, without bothering him by taking him into our confidence, decided that Scraggs was the