



FRECKLES

By
Gene Stratton-
Porter

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& CO.

branches of a small tree, he remembered that he had neither thanked them nor said goodby. Would the Bird Woman and the angel come again? No other women that he had ever known would. But were they like any other women he had ever known? He thought of the Bird Woman's unruffled face and the angel's revolver practice, and presently he was not so sure that they would not come back.

What were the people out in the big world like? His knowledge was so very limited. There had been people at the home who exchanged a stilted, perfunctory sort of kindness for their salaries. The visitors that called on receiving days he had divided into three classes—the kind that came with a tear in the eye and hypocrisy in every feature of their faces; the kind that came in silks and jewels and handed out to those poor, little mother-hungry souls worn toys that their children no longer cared for, in exactly the same spirit in which they pitched biscuits to the monkeys at the "zoo," and for the same reason—to see how they would take them and be amused by what they would do; and the third class, that he considered real people, who made him feel they cared that he was there and would have been glad to see him elsewhere.

Now, here was another class that had met him as a son and brother. With them he could for the only time in his life forget the lost hand that every day tortured him with a new pang. What sort of people were they and where did they belong among the classes he knew? He had to give it up because he had never known others like them, but how he loved them!

Out in the world where he was soon going were the majority like them or were they of the hypocrite and bun-throwing classes? Freckles did not know, but he reached the ultimate conclusion that people like the Bird Woman, the angel, McLean and the Duncans were very rare, hence their exceeding preciousness.

He had forgotten the excitement of the morning and the passing of time when distant voices aroused him, and he softly lifted his head. Nearer and nearer they came, and as the heavy wagons rumbled down the east trail he could hear them plainly. The gang were shouting themselves hoarse for the Limberlost guard. Freckles didn't feel that he deserved it. He would have given much to be able to go out to the men and explain how it was, but only to McLean could he tell his story.

At the sight of Freckles the men threw up their hats and cheered. McLean shook hands with him warmly, but big Duncan gathered him into his arms and hugged him like a bear and choked over a few words of praise. The gang drove in and finished felling the tree.

When the last wagon rolled away McLean sat down on the stump and Freckles told the story he was aching to tell. The boss could scarcely believe his senses. Also he was greatly disappointed.

"I have been almost praying all the way over, Freckles," he said, "that you would have some evidence by which we could arrest those fellows and get them out of our way, but this will never do. We can't mix those women up in it. They have helped you save me the tree and my wages as well. Going about the country as she does, the Bird Woman could never be expected to testify against them."

"No, indeed; nor the angel either, sir," said Freckles.

"The angel?" queried the astonished McLean.

The boss listened in silence while Freckles told of the coming and christening of the angel.

"I know her father well," said McLean at last, "and I have often seen her. You are right, she is a beautiful young girl. I do not understand why her father risks such a jewel in this place."

"He's daring it because she is such a jewel, sir," said Freckles eagerly. "Why, she's trusting a rattlesnake to rattle before it strikes her, and, of course, she thinks she can trust mankind as well. The man isn't made that wouldn't lay down the life of him for her. She don't need any care. Her face and the pretty ways of her are all the protection she would need in a band of howling savages."

"Did you say she handled one of the revolvers?" asked McLean.

"She scared all the breath out of me body," admitted Freckles. "Seems that her father has taught her to shoot. The Bird Woman told her distinctly to lie low and blaze away high, just to help scare them. The spunky little thing followed them right out into the west road, spitting lead like hail and clipping all about the heads and heels of them."

"Now, will they come back?" asked McLean.

"Of course," said Freckles. "At least Black Jack will. Wessner might not have the pluck. And the next time—Freckles hesitated.

"It will just be a question of who shoots first and straightest." "Then the only thing for me to do is to double the guard and get the gang here the first minute possible. As soon as I feel that we have the rarest of the stuff out below we will come. The fact is in many cases until it is felled it's hard to tell what a tree will prove to be. It won't do to leave you here longer alone. Jack has been shooting twenty years to your one, and it stands to reason that you are so much for him. Which of the gang would you like best to have with you?"

"No one, sir," said Freckles emphatically. "Next time is where I run. I won't try to fight them alone. I'll just be getting wind of them and then make tracks for you. I'll need to come like lightning, and Duncan has no extra horse, so I'm thinking you'd best get me one, or perhaps a wheel would be better. I used to do extra work for the home doctor, and he would let me take his bicycle to ride about the place. And at times the head nurse would lend me his for an hour. A wheel would cost less and be faster than a horse and would take less care."

As they walked up to the cabin together McLean insisted on another guard, but Freckles was stubbornly set on fighting his battle alone. He made one mental condition. If the Bird Woman was going to give up the Little Chicken series he would yield to the second guard solely for the sake of her work and the presence of the angel in the Limberlost.

With McLean it was a case of letting his sober, better judgment be overridden by the boy he was growing so to love that he could not bear to cross him, and to have Freckles keep his trust and win alone meant to him more than any money he might lose.

The next morning McLean brought the wheel, and Freckles took it down to the trail to test it. It was new, chainless, with as little as possible to catch in hurried riding, and in every way the best of its kind. Freckles



"IT WILL JUST BE A QUESTION OF WHO SHOTS FIRST."

went skimming around the trail on it on a preliminary trip before he locked it in his case and started his minute examination of his line on foot. He glanced around his room as he left it. On the moss in front of his prettiest seat lay the angel's hat.

He went and picked it up, oh, so carefully, gazing at it with hungry eyes, but touching it only to carry it over to his case, where he hung it on the shining handle bar of the new wheel and locked it in among his treasures. Then he went out to the trail with a new look on his face. He was not in the least afraid of anything that morning. He felt he was the veriest Daniel, and all his lions seemed weak and harmless.

Black Jack was not a man to give up his purpose or to have the hat swept from his head by a bullet and bear it meekly. Moreover, Wessner would cling to his revenge.

When Freckles gained his room he tenderly laid the hat upon his bookshelf and, to wear off his awkwardness, mounted his wheel and went spinning about the line again.

"Weel, I be drawn out!" exclaimed Mrs. Duncan an hour later.

Freckles stood before her, holding the angel's hat.

"I've been thinking this long time that ye or Duncan would see that sun-bonnets weren't a braw enough for a woman of my standing, and ye're a guid laddie to bring me this beautiful hat."

She turned it about, examining the weave of the straw and the foliage trimmings, passing her rough fingers over the satin ties delightedly. As she held it up, admiring it, Freckles' astonished eyes saw a new side of Sarah Duncan. She was jesting, but under the jest the fact loomed strong that there was something in her soul crying out after that bit of feminine finery. He resolved that when he reached the city he would send her as fine a hat as the angel's if it took \$50 to do it.

She lingeringly handed it back to him.

"It's unco guid of ye to think of me," she said lightly, "but I mair question your taste a wee. D'ye no think ye had best return this and get a woman with half her hair gray a little plainer headdress? Seems like that's far ower gay for me. I'm no' saying that it's



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The age limit is from 18 to 55, on date of examination. The maximum age limit is waived in cases of persons honorably discharged from the United States military or naval service. An applicant must have his actual domicile in the territory (county) supplied by a postoffice in the county for which the examination is announced. The examination is open to all male citizens of the United States who can comply with the requirements. Application form 1344 and full information concerning the requirements of the examination can be secured from the secretary of the local examining board or from the postmasters at places named above, or from the U. S. Civil Service commission at Washington, D. C.

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Freckles, a plucky walf who guards the Limberlost timber leases and dreams of angels.

The Swamp Angel, in whom Freckles' sweetest dream materializes.

McLean, a member of a lumber company, who befriends Freckles.

Mrs. Duncan, who gives mother love and a home to Freckles.

Duncan, head teamster of McLean's timber gang.

The Bird Woman, who is collecting camera studies of birds for a book.

Lord and Lady O'More, who come from Ireland in quest of a lost relative.

The Man of Affairs, brusque of manner, but big of heart.

Wessner, a timber thief who wants rascality made easy.

Black Jack, a villain to whom thought of repentance comes too late.

CHAPTER X.

FRECKLES WINS HONOR.

WHEN the men reached the trail Freckles yelled at the top of his voice: "Head them off on the south, boys! Fire from the south!"

As he had hoped, Jack and Wessner instantly plunged into the swale. A storm of lead spattered after them. They crossed the swale, running low, with not even one backward glance, and entered the wood beyond the corduroy.

Then the little party gathered at the tree.

"I'd better fix this saw so they can't be using it if they come back," said Freckles, taking out his hatchet and making the saw teeth fly.

"Now we have to get out of here without being seen," said the Bird Woman to the angel. "It won't do for me to make enemies of these men, for I am liable to meet them about my work any day."

"You can do it by driving straight north on this road," said Freckles. "I will go ahead and cut the wires for you. The swale is almost dry. You will only be sinking a few inches at most. In a few rods you will strike a cornfield. I will take down the fence and let you into that. Follow the furrows and drive straight across it until you come to the other side. Be following the fence south until you come to a road through the woods east of it. Then take that road and follow east until you reach the pike. You will come out on your way back to town and two miles north of anywhere they are likely to be. Don't for your lives ever let it out that you did this," he earnestly cautioned, "for it's black enemies you would be making."

Freckles snapped the wires, and they drove through. The angel leaned from the carriage and held out his revolver. Freckles looked into her face and lost his breath. Her eyes were black and her face a deeper rose than usual. He felt that his own was white as death.

"Did I shoot high enough?" she asked sweetly. "I really forgot about lying down."

Freckles winced. Did the child know how near she had gone? Surely she could not. Or was it possible that she had the nerve and skill to fire like that purposely?

"I will send the first reliable man I meet for McLean," said the Bird Woman, meeting up the line. "If I don't gather one when we reach town we will send a messenger. If it wasn't for having the gang see me I would go myself."

Round eyed, Freckles watched the Bird Woman and the angel drive away. After they were out of sight and he was safely hidden among the