



# FRECKLES

By  
Gene Stratton-  
Porter

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& CO.

heads, took on strength in the first opening aster, and glowed and burned in the ironwort.

Compellingly beautiful was the Limberlost, but cruel withal; far back in there bleached the uncollined bones of her victims, and she had missed cradling him, oh, so narrowly!

Below the turtle log, a dripping silver gray head, with shining eyes, was cautiously lifted, and Freckles' hand slid around to his revolver. Higher and higher came the head; a long, heavy, fur coated body rose, now half, now three-fourths out of the water. Freckles looked at his shaking hand and doubted, but he gathered his forces, the shot rang out, and the otter lay still. He hurried down and tried to lift it. He could scarcely muster strength to carry it to the bridge. The consciousness that he really could not go farther with it made Freckles realize the fact that he was well up to the limit of human endurance. He could bear it little, if any, longer. Every hour the face of the angel wavered before him, and behind it the awful distorted image of Black Jack, as he swore to the punishment he would mete out to her.

Freckles stopped when he came to the first guard, and telling him of his luck, asked him to go for the otter and carry it up to the cabin, as he was anxious to meet McLean. Freckles passed the second guard without seeing him, and hurried up to the boss. He stood silent under the eyes of McLean. The boss was dumfounded. Mrs. Duncan had led him to expect that he would find Freckles in a bad way, but this was almost deathly. The fact was apparent that the boy scarcely knew what he was doing. His eyes had a glazed, farsighted look in them, that wrung the heart of the man that loved him. Without a thought of preliminaries McLean leaned in the saddle and drew Freckles up to him.

"My poor lad!" he said. "My poor, dear lad; tell me, and we will try to right it!"

Freckles had twisted his fingers in Nellie's mane. At the kind words his face dropped on McLean's thigh and he shook with a nervous chill. McLean gathered him closer and waited.

"Freckles," said McLean at last, "will you tell me, or must I set to work in the dark and try to find the trouble?"

"Oh, I want to tell you! I must tell you, sir," shuddered Freckles. "I can not be hearing it the day out alone. I was coming to you when I remember you would be here."

He lifted his face and gazed off across the swale, with his jaws set hard a minute, as if gathering his forces. Then he spoke.

"It's the angel, sir," he said. "Instinctively McLean's grip on him tightened."

"I tried hard the other day," said Freckles, "and I couldn't seem to make you see. It's only that there hasn't been an hour, waking or sleeping, since the day she parted the bushes and looked into me, that the face of her hasn't been before me in all the tindersness, beauty and mischief of it. She talked to me friendly, like. She trusted me entirely to take right care of her. She helped me with things about me books. She treated me like I was born a gentleman, and shared with me like I was of her own blood. She walked the streets of the town with me before her friends with all the pride of a queen. She forgot herself and didn't mind the Bird Woman, and run big risks to help me out that first day, sir. This last time she walked into that gang of murderers, took their leader and twisted him to the will of her. She outdone him and raced the life almost out of her trying to save me."

"Since I can remember, whatever the thing was that happened to me in the beginning has been me curse. I've been bitter, hard and smarting under it hopelessly. She came by and found me voice and put hope of life and success like other men into me in spite of it."

Freckles held up his maimed arm. "Look at it, sir," he said. "A thousand times I've cursed it, hanging there helpless. She took it on the street, before all the people, just as if she didn't see that it was a thing to hide and shrink from. Again and again I've had the feeling with her. If I didn't entirely forget it, that she didn't see it was gone and I must pull her sleeve and be pointing it out to her. Her touch on it was so sacred like, at times since I've caught myself looking at the awful thing near like I was proud of it, sir. If I was born your son she couldn't be treating me more as her equal, and she can't help knowing you ain't truly me father. Nobody can know the ugliness or the ignorance of me better than I do and all me lack of birth, home, relatives and money and what's it all to her?"

Freckles stepped back from McLean, squared his shoulders and with a royal lift of his head looked straight

into the boss' eyes.

"You saw her in the beautiful little room of her and you can't be forgetting how she begged and pleaded with you for me. She touched me body, and 'twas sanctified. She laid her lips on me brow, and 'twas sacrament. Nobody knows the height of her better than me. Nobody's studied my depths closer. There's no bridge for the great distance between us, sir, and, clearest of all, I'm for realizing it. But she risked terrible things when she came to me among that gang of thieves. She wore herself past bearing to save me from such an easy thing as death! Now, here's me, a man, a big, strong man, and letting her live under that fearful oath, so worse than any death 'twould be for her, and lifting not a finger to save her. I cannot bear it, sir. It's killing me by inches! If any evil comes to her through Black Jack it comes from her angel like goodness to me. Somewhere he's hiding! Somewhere he is waiting his chance! Somewhere he is reaching out for her! I tell you I cannot, I dare not be hearing it longer!"

"Freckles, be quiet!" said McLean, his eyes humid. "Believe me, I did not understand. I know the angel's father well. I will go to him at once. I have transacted business with him for the last three years. I will make him see! I am only just beginning to realize your agony and the real danger there is for the angel. I will see that she is fully protected every hour of the day and night until Jack is located and disposed of. And I promise you further that if I fail to move her father or make him understand the danger I will maintain a guard over her until Jack is caught."

McLean slid from Nellie's back, and went to examine the otter.

"What do you want to do with it, Freckles?" asked McLean. "Do you know that it is very valuable?"

"I was for almost praying so, sir," said Freckles. "As I saw it coming up the bank I thought this: Once somewhere in a book there was a picture of a young girl, and she was just a breath like the beautifulness of the angel. Her hands were in a muff as big as her body, and I thought it was so pretty. I think she was some queen, or the like. Do you suppose I could have this skin tanned and made into such a muff as that—an enormous big one, sir?"

"Of course you can," said McLean. "That's a fine idea and it's easy enough. It would be a mighty fine thing for you to give to the angel as a little reminder of the Limberlost before it is despoiled, and as a souvenir of her trip for you."

Freckles lifted a face with a glow of happy color creeping into it and eyes lighting with a former brightness. Throwing his arms about McLean, he cried: "Oh, how I love you! Oh, I wish I could make you know how I love you!"

McLean strained him to his breast. "God bless you, Freckles," he said. "I do know! We're going to have some good old times out of this world together, and we can't begin too soon. Would you rather sleep first, or get a bite of lunch and have the drive with me, and then rest? I don't know but sleep will come sooner and deeper to take the ride and have your mind set at ease before you lie down. Suppose you go."

"Suppose I do," said Freckles, with a glimmer of the old light in his eyes and newly found strength to shoulder the otter. Together they turned into the swale.

McLean noticed and spoke of the big black chickens.

"They've been hanging round out there for several days past," said Freckles. "I'll tell you what I think it means. I think the old ratter has killed something too big for him to swallow, and he's keeping guard and won't let me chickens have it. I'm just sure, from the way the birds have acted out there all summer, that it is the ratter's den. You watch them now. See the way they dip and then rise, frightened like!"

Suddenly McLean turned on him with a blanching face.

"Freckles!" he cried. "You think it's Jack!" shuddered Freckles.

He dropped the otter, caught up his club, and plunged into the swale. Reaching for his revolver, McLean followed. The chickens circled higher at their coming, and the big snake lifted his head and rattled angrily. It sank in sinuous coils at the report of McLean's revolver, and together he and Freckles stood beside Black Jack. His fate was evident and most horrible.

"Come," said the boss at last. "We don't dare touch him. We will get a sheet from Mrs. Duncan and tuck over him, to keep these swarms of insects away, and set Hall on guard, while we go for the officers."

Freckles' lips closed resolutely. He deliberately thrust his club under Black Jack's body and, raising him, rested it on his knee. He pulled a long silver pin from the front of the dead man's shirt and sent it spinning out into the swale. Then he gathered up a few crumpled bright flowers and dropped them into the pool far away.

"My soul is sick with the horror of this thing," said McLean as he and Freckles drove toward town. "I can't understand how Jack dared risk creeping through the swale even in desperation. No one knew its dangers better than he. And why did he choose the rankest, muckiest place to cross the swamp?"

"Don't you think, sir, it was because it was on a line with the Limberlost south of the corduroy? The grass was tallest there, and he counted on those willows to screen him. Once he got among them he would have been safe to walk by stooping. If he'd made it past that place he'd been sure to get out."

# BARGAIN PRICES ON FENCING

Owin to the late spring we find ourselves greatly overstocked on woven wire fencing, and are making the following prices on stock on hand for SPOT CASH:

780 rods, 6 inch stay, 34 inches high, 9 bar, American fence, weight per 100 rods 1230 lbs, per rd	34½c
80 " 6 " 36 " 9 " Kokomo fence	1230 " 34½c
160 " 6 " 47 " 10 " American fence	1460 " 38½c
580 " 12 " 47 " 10 " "	1080 " 28c
580 " 6 " 26 " 7 " "	960 " 26c
20 " 12 " 71 " 21 " "	3120 " \$1.00
35 " " 50 " Ellwood Lawn fence	2540 " 80c
100 " 16 " 47 " 10 bar Kokomo fence	28c
100 " 12 " 47 " " "	26c
580 " 6 " 27 " 7 " "	22c
120 " 12 " 27 " 7 " "	22c
2 12 foot American gates, 50 inches high, each	\$6.50
2 14 foot American gates, 50 inches high, each	\$7.00
1 12 foot, 2 bar Iowa gate	\$7.00
2 14 foot, 2 bar Iowa gates, each	\$7.50
1 15½ foot 2 bar Iowa gate	\$7.75
2 14 foot, 1 bar Iowa gate, each	\$4.00
1 15 foot 1 bar Iowa gate	\$4.25

## JOHN BAUER

PLATTSMOUTH

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"Well, I'm as sorry for Jack as I know how to be," said McLean, "but I can't help feeling relieved that our troubles are over with this dreadful punishment for Jack, Wessner safe in jail and warrants out for the others. Jack knew the swamp better than anyone about here. When he found there were two companies trying to lease he wanted to stand in with the one from which he could realize the most. Even then he had trees marked here that he was trying to dispose of. I think his sole intention in forcing me to discharge him from my gang was to come up here and try to steal timber. We had no idea when we took the lease what a gold mine it was."

"That's exactly what Wessner said that first day," said Freckles angrily. "That 'twas a gold mine.' He said he didn't know where the marked trees were, but he knew a man that did, and if I would hold off and let them get the marked ones there were a dozen they could take out in a few days."

"Freckles," cried McLean, "you don't mean a dozen?"

"That's what he said, sir—a dozen. He said they couldn't tell how the grain of all of them would work up, of course, but they were all worth taking out, and five or six were real gold mines. This makes three they've tried, so there must be nine more marked, and several of them for being just fine."

"Well, I wish I knew which they were," said McLean, "so that I could get them out first."

(To Be Continued.)

### A Demonstration.

We will give a demonstration of the new Perfection Oil Cook Stove at our store on Thursday, May 2d. We want everybody to attend this demonstration and enjoy a free lunch with us. The company will have a representative here to tell you and show you all about the "Perfection," demonstrating its many points of superiority over other oil cookers. Pitman & Davis.

Miss Minnie Gutmann left for Murdock via Omaha on the morning train today, where she will visit her brother, Henry and family.

### ONE OF THE GREAT- EST AND BEST

Cole Brothers Big Shows Praised  
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Everywhere.

Wherever the Cole Brothers United Shows have exhibited press and public have been a unit in praising the work of the exceedingly large number of young and handsome women performers.

Besides the fair sex are represented among the riders, aerialists, contortionists, jugglers, high wire artists, gymnasts, bicyclists, clowns, animal trainers, chariot drivers and in fact even among the ringmasters. As may naturally be expected, keen rivalry exists between the lady and gentlemen artists, a fact which greatly enhances their performances. The lengthy imperial program presented this year by these shows contains only the best and most modern features that money and labor can procure and in such quantity and variety as to satiate every artistic taste and fancy. Lack of space prevents an enumeration of all the different acts, many of which must be seen to be appreciated. There is an extended list, the last of which does not by any means end the pleasures which the Cole Brothers Shows will provide patrons of Cass county afternoon and evening Saturday, May 4th, at Plattsmouth. There are sports of ancient Rome and modern fete day races and contests. Then the big triple menagerie forms a zoological display without a peer in all the world. Next is Cole Brothers' marvelous museum, in which are exhibited a myriad of human and animal freaks and other attractions. Thus it will be seen that there is a royal holiday feast in store for all who attend this mighty amusement exposition.

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#### Returns From Hospital.

From Saturday's Daily.  
Tim Kohoutek went to Omaha on the morning train today to bring his mother, Mrs. James Kohoutek, home from the hospital. She was operated on at Immanuel hospital on March 30 and is now strong enough to leave the care of the nurse.

Misses Bernese Newell, Clara Hunter and Esther Larson were passengers to Weeping Water this morning, where they attended a district convention of the Christian Endeavor, which convenes at that place today and tomorrow.

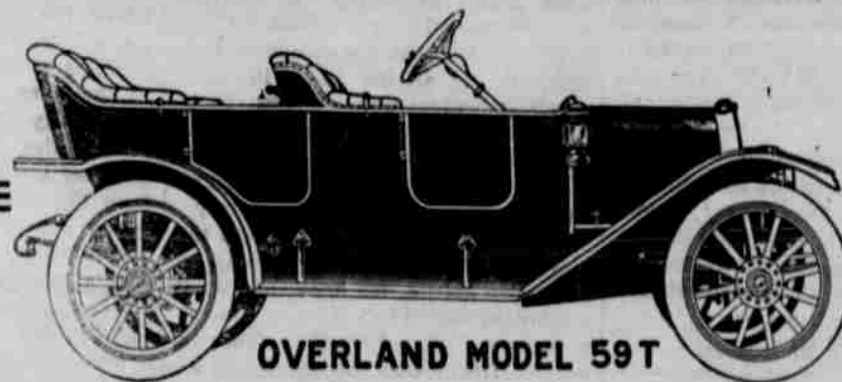
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