



FRECKLES

By
Gene Stratton-Porter

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trail. Freckles was roughly laying off the swamp in sections and searching for marked trees. In that time he had found one deeply clipped and the chip cunningly replaced and tacked in. It promised to be quite rare, so he was jubilant. He also found so many subjects for the Bird Woman that her coming was of almost daily occurrence, and the hours he spent with her and the angel were nothing less than golden.

The Limberlost now was arrayed like the queen of Sheba in all her glory. The first frosts of autumn had bejeweled her crown in flashing topaz, ruby and emerald. About her feet trailed the purple of her garments, and in her hand was her golden scepter. Everything was at full tide. It seemed as if nothing could grow lovelier, and it was all standing still a few weeks, waiting coming destruction.

The swamp was patitant with life. Every pair of birds that had flocked to it in the spring was now multiplied by from two to ten. The young were tame from Freckles' triparenthood, and so plump and sleek that they were quite as beautiful as their elders, even if in many cases they lacked their brilliant plumage. There were chubby little groundhogs scudding along the trail. There were cunning baby coons and opossums peeping from hollow logs and trees. Young muskrats followed their parents across the lagoons.

If you could come upon a family of foxes that had not yet disbanded and see the young playing with a wild duck's carcass that their mother had brought and note the pride and satisfaction in her eyes as she lay at one side guarding them it would be a picture not to be forgotten. Freckles never tired of studying the devotion of a fox mother to her babies.

The angel was wild about the baby rabbits and squirrels. Earlier in the season, when the young were still very small, it had so happened that at times Freckles could give into her hands one of these little ones. Then it was pure joy to stand back and watch her heaving breast, flushed cheek and shining eyes. Hers were such lovely eyes. They were forever changing. Now sparkling and darkling with wit, now humid with sympathy, now taking on strength of color with ambition, now flashing indignantly at the abuse of any creature. She had carried several of the squirrel and bunny babies home and had the conservatory littered with them. Her care of them was perfect.

Brown butterfly time had come. The outer edge of the swale was filled with milkweed and other plants beloved of them, and the air was golden with the flashing satin wings of the monarch, viceroy and argynnis. They outnumbered those of any other color three to one.

Among the birds it really seemed as if the little yellow fellows were in the preponderance. At least they were until the red winged blackbirds and bobolinks that had nested on the upland came swarming by hundreds for these last few weeks before migration. Never was there a finer feast spread for the birds. The grasses were filled with seeds; so, too, were weeds of every variety. Fall berries were ripe. Wild grapes and black haws were ready.

They seemed to feel the new reign of peace and fitness most of all. As for hunting, they didn't even have to hunt for themselves these days, for the bounty now being spread before Little Chicken every day was more than he could master, and he was glad to have his parents come down and feast with him.

He was a fine, overgrown fellow, and his wings, with quills of jetty black, gleaming with bronze, were so strong they almost lifted his body. The funny little hops, springs and sidewise bounds he gave set Freckles and the angel, hidden out in the swamp watching him, into smothered chuckles of delight.

Sometimes he fell to coquetting with himself, and that was the funniest thing of all, for he turned his head up, down, from side to side, and drew in his chin with prinkly little jerks and lifts. He would stretch his neck, throw up his head, turn it to one side and smirk—actually smirk, the most complacent and self satisfied smirk that any one ever saw on the face of a bird. It was so comical that Freckles and the angel told the Bird Woman of it one day.

When she finished her work on Little Chicken she left them the camera all ready for use, telling them they might hide back in the bushes and watch. If Little Chicken came out and truly smirked and they could squeeze the bulb at just the proper moment to snap him she would be more than delighted.

Freckles and the angel quietly curled down beside a log and with eager eyes and softest breathing patiently waited. They were becoming anxious, for the light would soon be gone and

they had so wanted to try for the picture. At last Little Chicken lifted his head, opened his beak and gaped widely. He dozed a minute or two more. The angel said that was his beauty sleep. Then he lazily gaped again and stood up, stretching and yawning. He ambled leisurely down toward the gateway, and the angel said, "Now, we may have a chance, at last."

"I do hope so," shivered Freckles. With one accord they rose to their knees and trained their eyes on the mouth of the log. The light was full and strong. Little Chicken prospected again with no results. He dressed his plumage, polished his beak, and when he felt fine and in full toilet he began to flirt with himself. Freckles' eyes snapped and his breath sucked between his clenched teeth.

"He's going to do it," whispered the angel. Little Chicken nodded daintily and ruffled his feathers. He gave his head sundry little sidewise jerks and rapidly shifted his point of vision. Once there was the fleeting little ghost of a smirk.

"Now! No!" snapped the angel. Freckles leaned toward the bird. Tense as a steel trap he waited. Unconsciously the hand of the angel clasped his. He scarcely knew it was there. Suddenly Little Chicken sprang straight up in the air and landed with a thud. The angel started slightly, but Freckles was immovable. Then, as if in approval of his last performance, the overgrown baby wheeled until he was more than three-quarters, almost full side, toward the camera, straightened on his legs, squared his shoulders, stretched his neck full height, drew in his chin and smirked his most pronounced smirk directly in the face of the lens.

Freckles' fingers closed on the bulb convulsively, and the angel's closed on his at the instant. Then the angel heaved a great sigh of relief and lifted her hands to push back the damp, clustering hair from her face.

Hand in hand they ran for the north end of the swamp, yelling, "We got it!"

The Bird Woman plunged into the swale at the mouth of Sleepy Snake creek and came wading out with a couple of cameras and dripping tripod.

Moved by an impulse she never afterward regretted, she bent and laid her lips on Freckles' forehead, kissing him gently and thanking him for his many kindnesses to her in her loved work. Freckles started off walking on air, and he felt inclined to keep watching behind to see if the trail were not curling up and rolling down the line after him.

Next day Freckles saw them coming. The angel was standing, waving her hat. He sprang on his wheel and raced, jolting and pounding, down the corduroy to meet them. The Bird Woman stopped the horse, and the angel gave him the bit of print paper. Freckles leaned the wheel against a tree and took the proof with eager fingers. He had never before seen a study from any of his chickens. He stood staring. When he lifted his face to them it was transfigured with delight.

"You see!" he exclaimed, and fell to gazing again. "Oh, me little chicken!" he cried. "Oh, me elegant little chicken! I'd be giving all me money in the bank for you!"

Then he thought of the angel's miff and Mrs. Duncann's hat and added: "Or at least all but what I'm needing bad for something else. Would you mind my stopping at the cabin a minute and showing this to Mother Duncann?" he asked.

Freckles went hurrying on ahead, and they drove up in time to see Mrs. Duncann gazing as if awestruck and to hear her bewildered "Weel, I be drawed on!"

Freckles and the angel helped the Bird Woman to establish herself for a long stay at the mouth of Sleepy Snake creek. Then she sent them away and waited what luck would bring to her.

"Looks as if some one had been cutting a flagpole," said the angel, running the toe of her shoe around a small stump, evidently cut that season. "Freckles, what would anybody cut a tree as small as that for?"

"I don't know," said Freckles. "Well, but I want to know!" said the angel. "Nobody came away in here and cut it just for fun. They've taken it away. Let's go back and see if we can see it anywhere around there."

She retraced her steps and began searching eagerly. Freckles did the same.

"There it is," he exclaimed at last, "leaning just as naturally against the trunk of that big maple!"

"Yes, and leaning there has killed a patch of bark," said the angel. "See how dried up it looks!"

Freckles stared at her. "Angel," he shouted, "I bet you it's a marked tree!"

"Course it is!" cried the angel. "It is one of Jack's marked trees."

The clear, ringing echo of strongly swung axes came crashing through the Limberlost.

"'Tis the gang," shouted Freckles. "They're clearing a place to make the camp. Let's go help!"

"Get out your hatchet," commanded the angel. "I predict this is the most valuable tree in the swamp. You found it. I'm going to play that you're my knight. Now, you nail my colors on it!"

She untied a blue bow in her hair and doubled it against the tree. The angel had called him her knight! How he loved her! She must not see his face or surely her quick eyes would read what he was fighting to hide. He did not dare lay his lips on that ribbon

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 " " " " " " " " " "	2540 " "	80c
100 " 16 " " 47 " " " " " " " " " "		38½c
100 " 12 " " 47 " " " " " " " " " "		28c
580 " 6 " " 27 " " 7 " " " " " " "		26c
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

NEBRASKA

then, but that night he would return to it. When they had gone a little distance they both looked back, and the morning breeze set the bit of blue waving them a farewell.

She reached him her hand, and like two children, they broke into a run as they came nearer the gang. They left the swamp by the west road and followed the trail until they found the men. To the angel it seemed complete chaos.

In the shadiest spot on the west side of the line, close to the swamp and very close to Freckles' room, they were cutting down bushes and clearing out space for a tent for the men's sleeping quarters, another for a dining hall and a board shack for the cook. The teamsters were unloading, the horses were cropping leaves from the bushes, and each man was doing his part toward the construction of the new Limberlost quarters.

(To Be Continued.)

Returns From Excelsior Springs.

From Wednesday's Daily. Mr. and Mrs. G. Sprieck of Stanton, Neb., who passed through this city several weeks since en route for Excelsior Springs, Missouri, returned from that place last evening and were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. John McNurlin over night. Mr. and Mrs. Sprieck are high in their praise of the medicinal propensities of the water at Excelsior Springs and feel greatly benefited by their several weeks' stay there. Mr. and Mrs. Sprieck will go from here today to Cullom to visit their daughter, Mrs. Henry Keil, thence to Louisville to visit another daughter, Mrs. C. M. Seybert. They will also visit their son, Otto Sprieck, near Louisville, and Monday morning will start for their home at Stanton. While in Plattsmouth our old friend gave us a pleasant call.

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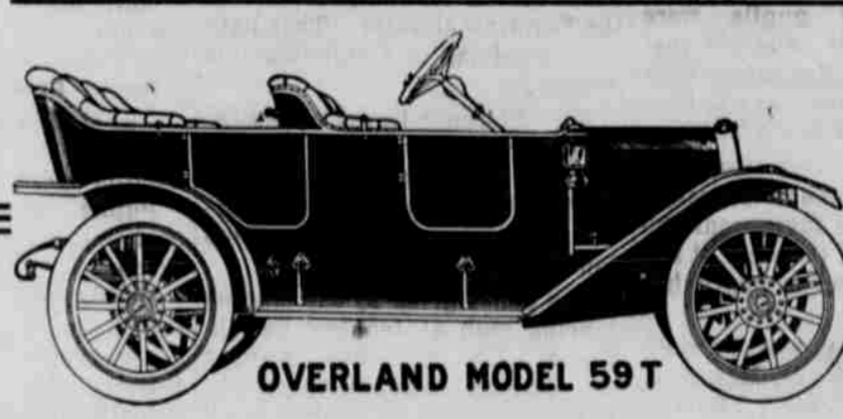
Mike Bys visited with his family over Sunday. Mike is well known in Cass county, having worked at the trade of blacksmithing in Cass county for about twenty years. He is at the present time working in the shop of R. L. Propst.

O. P. Newbranch returned from Omaha on the morning train today, where he looked after business matters for a time and also visited relatives.

D. O. Dwyer was an Omaha passenger on the fast mail this afternoon, where he was called on professional business.

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