



# FRECKLES

By  
Gene Stratton-Porter

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## PROLOGUE.

This romance of Freckles and the Angel of the Limberlost is one of the most novel, entertaining, wholesome and fascinating stories that have come from the pen of an American author in many years. The characters in this sylvan tale are:

- Freckles, a plucky waif 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 XX.

### LOVE AS A REMEDY.

HE caught Freckles' hand to her breast, and, bending over him, looked deep into his stricken eyes.

"Angel, I give you my word of honor that I will keep right on breathing. That's what you are going to promise me," she said. "Do you say it?"

Freckles hesitated.

"Freckles," imploringly commanded the angel, "do you say it?"

"Yes," gasped Freckles.

The angel sprang to her feet.

"Then that's all right," she said, with a tinge of her old-time briskness. "You just keep sawing away like a steam engine and I will do all the rest."

The eager men gathered about her. "It's going to be a tough pull to get Freckles out," she said, "but it's our only chance. You four there get on those wagon horses and ride to the sleeping tent. Get the stoutest cot, a couple of comforts and a pillow. Ride back with them some way to save time. If you meet any other men of the gang send them on here to help carry the cot. We won't risk the job of driving with him. The rest of you clear a path out to the road, and, Mr. McLean, you take Nellie and ride to town. Tell my father how Freckles is hurt and that he risked it to save me. Tell him I'm going to take Freckles to Chicago on the noon train and I want him to hold it if we are a little late. If he can't then have a special ready at the station and another on the Pittsburg at Fort Wayne, so we can go straight through. You needn't mind leaving us. The Bird Woman will be here soon.

When they stood ready to lift Freckles the angel bent over him in a passion of tenderness.

"Dear old Limberlost guard, we're going to lift you now," she said. "I suspect you will faint from the pain of it, but we will be just as easy as ever we can, and don't you dare forget your promise!"

A whimsical half smile touched Freckles' quivering lips.

"Angel, can a man be remembering a promise when he ain't knowing?" he asked.

"You can," said the angel stoutly, "because a promise means so much more to you than it does to most men."

A look of strength flashed into Freckles' face at her words.

"I am ready," he said.

With the first touch his eyes closed, a mighty groan was wrenched from him, and he lay senseless. The angel gave Duncan one panic-stricken look. Then she set her lips and gathered her

noticed and repeatedly commented on the young girl with me. It is that child that he wants! He worships her to adoration, and knowing he can never be anything to her, he prefers death to life. In God's name, what can I do about it?"

"Barring that missing hand, I never handled a finer man," said the surgeon, "and she seems perfectly devoted to him, why cannot he have her?"

"Why?" echoed McLean. "Why? Well, for a good many reasons. I told you he was my son. You probably knew that he was not. A little over a year ago I had never seen him. He joined one of my lumber gangs from the road. He is a stray, left at one of your homes for the friendless here in Chicago. When he grew up the superintendent bound him out to a brutal man. He ran away and landed in one of my lumber camps. He has no name or knowledge of legal birth. The angel—we have talked of her. She has ancestors reaching back to Plymouth Rock and across the sea for generations back of that. She is an idolized, petted only child, and there is great wealth. He sees it more plainly than any one else could. There is nothing for the boy but death if it is the angel that is required to save him."

The angel stood between them.

"Well, I guess not!" she cried. "If Freckles wants me all he has to do is to say so, and he can have me!"

"That he will never say," said McLean at last, "and you don't understand, angel. I don't know how you came here. I wouldn't have had you hear that for the world, but since you have, dear, you must be told that it isn't your friendship or kindness Freckles wants; it is your love."

"Well, I do love him," she said simply.

McLean's arms dropped helplessly. "You don't understand," he reiterated patiently. "It isn't the love of a friend, or a comrade, or a sister, that Freckles wants from you; it is the love of a sweetheart. And if to save the life he has offered for you you are thinking of being generous and impulsive enough to sacrifice your future—in the absence of your father it will become my plain duty, as the protector in whose hands he has placed you, to prevent such rashness. The very words you speak and the manner in which you say them proves that you are a mere child and have not dreamed what love is."

"I have never had to dream of love," she said proudly. "I have never known anything else in all my life but to love every one and to have every one love me. And there has never been any one so dear as Freckles. If you will remember, we have been through a good deal together. I do love Freckles, just as I say I do. I don't know anything about the love of sweethearts, but I love him with all the love in my heart, and I think that will satisfy him."

"Surely it ought," muttered the man of knives and lancets.

"As for my father," continued the angel, "he at once told me what he learned from you about Freckles. I've known all you know for several weeks. That knowledge didn't change your love for him a particle. I think the Bird Woman loved him more. Why should you two have all the perceptions there are? My father is never unreasonable. He won't expect me not to love Freckles, or not to tell him so, if the telling will save him."

She darted past McLean into Freckles' room, closed the door and locked the key.

Freckles lay raised on a flat pillow, his body immovable in a plaster cast, his maimed arm, as always, hidden. The angel's heart ached at the change in his appearance. He seemed so weak, so utterly hopeless and so alone. She could see that the night had been one long terror.

For the first time she tried putting herself in Freckles' place. What would it mean to have no parents, no home, no name? No name! That was the worst of all. That was to be lost, indeed—utterly and hopelessly lost. The angel lifted her hands to her dazed head and reeled as she tried to face that proposition. She dropped on her knees by the bed, slipped her arm under the pillow, and, leaning over Freckles, set her lips on his forehead. He smiled faintly.

"Dear Freckles," she said, "there is a story in your eyes this morning, tell me?"

Freckles drew a long, wavering breath.

"Angel," he begged, "be generous! Be thinking of me a little. I'm so homesick and worn out, dear angel, be giving me back my promise. Let me go?"

"Why, Freckles!" faltered the angel. "You don't know what you are asking. Let you go? I cannot. I love you better than any one, Freckles. I think you are the very finest person I ever knew. I have our lives all planned. I want you to go to be educated and learn all there is to know about singing just as soon as you are well enough. By the time you have completed your education I shall have finished college, and then I want," she choked on it a second, "I want you to be my real knight, Freckles, and come to me and tell me that you—like me—a little. I have been counting on you for my sweetheart from the very first, Freckles. I can't give you up unless you don't like me. But you do like me—just a little—don't you, Freckles?"

Freckles lay whiter than the coverlet, his eyes on the ceiling and his breath wheezing. The angel awaited his answer a second, and when none came, she dropped her crimsoning face beside him on the pillow and whispered:

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"I LOVE YOU BETTER THAN ANY ONE," FRECKLES.

"Freckles, I—I'm trying to make love to you. Can't you help me just a little bit? It's awful hard all alone! I don't know how, when I really mean it, but Freckles, I love you. I must have you, and now I guess—I guess maybe I'd better kiss you next."

She bravely hid her feverish, quivering lips on his. Her breath, sweeter bloom, was in his nostrils, and her hair touched his face.

"Freckles," she panted, "Freckles, I didn't think it was in you to be mean!"

"Mean, angel! Mean to you?" gasped Freckles.

"Yes," said the angel, "downright mean. When one kisses you, if you had any mercy at all you'd kiss back, just a little bit. Now, I'm going to try it over, and I want you to help me a little. You aren't too sick to help me just a little, Freckles?"

(To Be Continued.)

## Meet With Mrs. White.

From Wednesday's Daily.

The St. Mary's Guild of St. Luke's church were entertained in a most enjoyable manner by Mrs. White at her rooms at the Riley hotel yesterday afternoon. The ladies held their regular business session at the usual time, and during this session made final arrangements for the carnation sale, which they will hold on next Saturday afternoon. After the business session the ladies indulged in plying the busy needle, conversation and other amusements. Delicious refreshments were served by the hostess.

Mrs. Mary Armstrong of Burlington, Iowa, who has been a guest of her nephew, Sheriff Quinton, for a few days, departed this afternoon for Council Bluffs, Iowa, where she will visit relatives for a time.

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