

FRECKLES

By Gene Stratton-Porter

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SYNOPSIS.

Freckles, a homeless boy, is hired by Boss McLean to guard the expensive timber in the Lumberlost from timber thieves. Freckles does his work faithfully, makes friends with the birds and yearns to know more about nature. He lives with Mr. and Mrs. Duncan.

He resolves to get books and educate himself. He becomes interested in a huge pair of vultures and calls his bird friends his "chickens."

Some of the trees he is guarding are worth \$1,000 each. Freckles' books arrive. He receives a call from Wessner.

Wessner attempts to bribe Freckles to betray his trust, and Freckles whips him. McLean overhears them and witnesses the fight.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BIRD WOMAN.

FRECKLES was amazed to hear himself exclaiming: "It was so hot in there. You couldn't be expected to bear it for hours and not be moving. I can take you back around the trail almost to where you were. Then you can get up in the carriage, and I will go find the Bird Woman."

"You'll get killed if you do! When she stays this long, it means that she has a focus on something. You see, when she gets a focus, and lies in the weeds and water for hours, and the sun bakes her, and things crawl over her, and then some one comes along and scares her bird away just as she has it coaxed up—why, she kills them if I melt, you won't go after her. She's probably blistered and half eaten up, but she will never quit until she is satisfied."

"Then it will be safer to be taking care of you," suggested Freckles. "Now you're talking sense!" said the angel.

"May I try to help your arm?" he asked. "Have you any idea how it hurts?" she queried. "A little," said Freckles. "Well, Mr. McLean said we'd probably find his son here!"

"His son?" cried Freckles. "That's what he said. And that you would do anything you could for us, and that we could trust you with our lives. But I would have trusted you anyway, if I hadn't known a thing about you. Say, your father is rambling proud of you, isn't he?"

"I don't know," answered the dazed Freckles. "He's so proud of you he is all swelled up like the toad in Aesop's fable. If you have ever had an arm hurt like this and can do anything why, for pity sake do it!"

She turned back her sleeve, holding out to Freckles an arm of palest crimson. Freckles unlocked his case and bandaged the ugly, ragged wound. He worked with trembling fingers and a face tense with earnestness.

"Is it feeling any better?" he asked. "Oh, it's well now!" cried the angel. "It doesn't hurt at all now."

The velvet touch of her warm arm was tingling in Freckles' finger tips. Dainty laces and fine white stuffs peeped through her torn dress. There were beautiful rings on her fingers. Every article about her was of the finest material and in excellent taste. There was the trembling Lumberlost guard in his coarse clothing, with his cotton rags and his old pair of swamp water. Freckles was sufficiently accustomed to contrasts to notice them and sufficiently fine to be hurt by them always.

He lifted his eyes to hers with a shadowy pain in them and found them of serene, unconscious purity. "We must go and find the carriage," said the angel, rising.

Freckles led the way, sharply watching every step. He went as near the log as he felt that he dared and with a little searching found the carriage. "This is a shame!" said Freckles. "You'll never be coming here again."

"Oh, yes, I shall!" said the angel. "The Bird Woman says that these birds stay over a month in the nest and she would like to make a picture every few days for seven or eight weeks perhaps."

Freckles barely escaped crying out for joy. "Then don't you ever be torturing yourself and your horse to be coming in here again," he said. "I'll show you a way to drive almost to the nest on the east trail, and then you can come around to my room and stay while the Bird Woman works. It's nearly always cool there, and there's comfortable seats and water."

"Oh! Did you have drinking water there?" she cried. "I was never so thirsty or so hungry in my life, but I thought I wouldn't mention it." "And I had not the wit to be seeing!" wailed Freckles. "I can be getting you a good drink in no time." He turned to the trail. "Please wait a minute," called the

angel. "What's your name? I want to think about you while you are gone."

Freckles smiled quizzically. "Freckles?" she guessed, with a peal of laughter. "And mine is?" "I'm knowing yours," interrupted Freckles. "I don't believe you do. What is it?" asked the girl.

"You won't be getting angry?" "Not until I've had the water at least."

It was Freckles' turn to laugh. He whipped out his big, floppy straw hat, stood uncovered before her and said in the sweetest of all the sweet tones of his voice, "There's nothing you could be but the Swamp Angel."

The girl laughed happily. "The girl laughed happily. Once out of her sight Freckles ran every step of the way to the cabin. Mrs. Duncan gave him a small bucket of water, cool from the well. He carried it in the crook of his right arm and a basket filled with bread and butter, cold meat, apple pie and pickles in his left hand.

"Pickles are kind o' cooling," said Mrs. Duncan. "The angel was on her knees reaching for the bucket as he came up. "Be drinking slow," he cautioned her. Freckles stood blinking in the dazzling glory of her smile.

"Mercy!" she exclaimed. "I think I had best be naming you 'the angel'—my guardian angel." "Yes," said Freckles. "I look the character every day, but today most emphatic!"

"Angels don't go by looks," laughed the girl. "Your father told us you had been scrapping. But he told us why I'd gladly wear all your cuts and bruises if I could do anything that would make my father look as peacocks as yours did. He strutted about proper. I never saw any one look prouder."

"Did he say he was proud of me?" marveled Freckles. "He didn't need to," answered the angel. "He was radiating pride from every pore."

The angel spread the lunch on the carriage seat. The daintiest parts she could select she carefully put back into the basket. The rest she ate. As she watched her with fascinated eyes Freckles told her of his birds, flowers and books.

Suddenly the angel cried, "There comes the Bird Woman!" She was staggering under a load of cameras and paraphernalia. Freckles took all he could carry and helped her into the carriage.

Soon they were out of the swamp. Then he showed them how to reach the chicken tree from the outside, indicated a cooler place for the horse and told them how the next time they came the angel could find his room while she waited.

"Were you forgetting Little Chicken's picture?" Freckles asked the Bird Woman. "Why do you call the baby culture 'Little Chicken'?" she asked. "'Twas Duncan began it," said Freckles. "You see, through the fierce cold of winter the birds of the swamp were almost starving. It is mighty lonely here, and they were all the company I was having. I got to carrying scraps and grain down to them. Duncan was that generous he was giving me of his wheat and corn from his chickens' feed, and he called the birds-me swamp chickens. Then when those big black fellows came, Mr. McLean said they were our nearest kind to some in the old world that they called 'Pharaoh's Chickens,' and he called mine 'Freckles' Chickens.'"

"Good enough!" cried the Bird Woman. "You must shoot something for them occasionally, and I'll bring more food when I come. If you will help me keep them until I get my series, I'll give you a copy of each study I make, mounted in a book."

"I'll be doing me very best," promised the boy, and from the depths he meant it. "I wonder if that other egg is going to hatch?" mused the Bird Woman. "I am afraid not. It should have been out today. Isn't it a beauty? I never saw either an egg or the young before. They are rare this far north."

"So Mr. McLean said," answered Freckles. The Bird Woman gave him her hand at parting, and Freckles joyfully realized that here was going to be another person for him to love. Freckles couldn't remember, after they had driven away, that they had even noticed his missing hand, and for the first time in his life he had forgotten it.

When the Bird Woman and the angel were well on the home road the angel told of the little corner of paradise into which she had strayed and of her new name. "Did you know Mr. McLean had a son?" asked the angel. "Isn't the little accent he has and the way he twists a sentence too dear? And isn't it too old fashioned and funny to hear him call his father mister?"

"It sounds too good to be true," said the Bird Woman, answering the last question first. "I am so tired with these present day young men that patronizingly call their fathers 'dad,' 'governor,' 'old man' and 'old chap' that the boy's attitude of respect and deference struck me as being as fine as silk. There must be something rare about that young man."

But she did not find it necessary to tell the angel that for several years she had known the man who so proudly proclaimed himself Freckles' father to be a bachelor and a Scotchman. The Bird Woman had a fine way of attending strictly to her own business. Freckles turned back to the trail, but stopped at every wild brier and looked at the pink satin of the petals. She was not of his world, and better than any other he knew it; but she might be

his angel, and he was dreaming of naught but blind, silent worship. He finished the happiest day of his life, and that night he went back to the swamp as if drawn by a magnet. That Wessner would try for his revenge he knew. That he would be abetted by Black Jack was almost certain, but fear had fled the happy heart of Freckles. He had kept his trust. He had won the respect of the boss. Nobly could ever wipe from his heart the flood of holy adoration that had welled up with the coming of his angel.

At the edge of the clearing he came out into the bright moonlight, and there sat McLean on his mare. Freckles hurried up to him. "Is there trouble?" he asked anxiously. "That's what I wanted to ask you," said the boss. "I stopped at the cabin to see you a minute before I turned in, and they said you had come down here. You must not do it, Freckles."

Freckles stood combing his fingers through Nellie's mane, and the dainty creature was twisting her head around in his caresses. He pushed back his hat and looked up into McLean's face. "It's come to the sleep with one eye open," he said. "I'm not looking for anything to be happening for a week or two, but it's bound to come, and soon if I'm to keep me true as I've promised you and myself, I've to live her mostly until the gang comes. You must be knowing that, sir."

"I'm afraid it's true, Freckles," said McLean. "And I've decided to double the guard until we get here. It will only be a few weeks now, and I'm so anxious for you that you must not be left alone further. If anything should happen to you, Freckles, it would spoil one of the very dearest plans of my life."

Freckles heard with dismay the proposition to place a second guard. "Oh! no, no, Mr. McLean," he cried. "Not for the world! I wouldn't be having a stranger around, scaring me and disturbing all me ways for any money. I am all the guard you need. I will be faithful! I will turn over the fence with no tree missing—no me life. I will! Oh, don't be sending another man to set them saying I turned coward and asked for help. It will just kill the honor of me heart if you do it. The only thing I want is another gun."

McLean handed a shining big revolver to Freckles, who slipped it beside the one already in his belt. "Freckles," he said at last, "we never know the timber of a man's soul until something cuts into him deeply and brings the grain out strong. You're the making of a mighty fine piece of furniture, my boy, and you shall have your own way these few weeks yet. Then if you will go I am going to take you to the city and educate you, and you are to be my son, my lad—my own son."

Freckles twisted his fingers in Nellie's mane to steady himself. "But why should you be doing that to me?" he faltered. "McLean slid his arm down about the boy's shoulders and gathered him close to him. "Because I love you, Freckles," he said simply.

McLean tightened his clasp a second longer, then he rode away down the trail. Freckles lifted his hat and faced the sky. The harvest moon looked down sheeting the swamp in silver glory. The Lumberlost sang her night song. The swale softly rustled in the wind. Wined things of night brushed his face, and still Freckles gazed upward trying to fathom these things which had come to him. To one above the sky he must make acknowledgment for these miracles. His lips moved and he began softly:

"Thank you for each separate good thing that has come to me," he said, "and, above all, for the falling of the feather, for if it didn't really fall from an angel its falling brought an angel, and if it's in the great heart of you to exercise yourself any further about me, oh, do please to be taking good care of her!"

[Continued next week.]

The German emperor was lately the recipient of a pair of very curious birds from the East Indies. The species is nearly extinct, and it is said that an effort will be made to prevent their becoming entirely so by enforcing the laws against hunting them.

These birds always travel in pairs and are hardly ever separated. The beak of the male is short and strong, while that of the female is fine, long and curved. The male's work is to break with his strong bill the tough bark of trees in order that his mate may introduce her pointed beak into the holes dug into the trunk by insects and so extract food. When the male detects an "insect haunt" he lays it bare and the female pulls forth the prey with her beak, divides it in two, gives the male his portion and eats the other, continuing the process until both have had enough. Consequently the death of one or the other means starvation to the survivor, the female being unable to break the bark of trees and the male to take out the prey when its presence is exposed.—Harper's Weekly.

He Got It. "My nephew," says the bespectacled man, "entertained me most generously while I was in New York. He took me almost every evening to one restaurant or another and I heard several most lively songs."

"What were they?" asks the other. "Do not remember them definitely but one of them had a refrain which began by stating 'Everybody is Engaged in a Similar Occupation at the Present Time.'"

The KITCHEN CABINET

ONE of the most valuable qualities of the housekeeper is an accurate sense of the proper amount of material to order or to prepare for a given meal. This sense of quantity is the basis of successful catering, professional or domestic.

A FEW USES FOR LEFTOVER FRUIT.

Ripe fruit is so perishable that a large supply should never be bought. An orange that shows signs of softening is not fit for food. It should never be canned or preserved. Perfectly fresh fruit is the only safe kind to can.

If there is a small dish of canned fruit with juice, rub the fruit through a sieve, thicken with cornstarch and sweeten if necessary, and use as a sauce for puddings.

Bits of fruit, either fresh or canned, if put through a sieve may be added to ice cream when partly frozen, or poured over it as a sauce when it is served.

A small amount of fruit may be stirred into muffins or small cakes before baking. Often fresh fruit, if a small quantity, is allowed to spoil because there is not enough to go around. Two or more kinds may be mixed together very acceptably as a salad or fruit to serve as a dessert with cake.

Fruit Whip.—Put a little crushed sweetened fruit in lemonade glasses, fill up with sweetened whipped cream and serve as an evening dessert with light cakes.

Emergency Salad.—Cut a few bits of cheese into neat cubes; chop six or eight olives. Break a few English walnut meats in pieces, a few grapes, seeds and skins removed; a banana and orange, a sour pickle cut in thin slices. Mix all together and fill apple cups. Cut the stem end off carefully, scoop out the pulp and fill with the salad after mixing with mayonnaise dressing. Put on the lid and serve on a paper doily covered plate.

Lemon Cups for Dressings or Cocktails.—When making lemonade save the best halves by putting them into cold water. In this way they will keep for several days, and are nice to use for hard sauce receptacles or cocktails or fish sauces; any number of ways may be thought of to use them.

Lemons may be prepared into lemon sirup and kept indefinitely and are always ready for a quick, cold drink. To a cup of water add a half cup of sugar and a cup of lemon juice; boil for ten minutes and bottle for use. Keep in a cool place.

Lemon Juice for Dressings or Cocktails.—When making lemonade save the best halves by putting them into cold water. In this way they will keep for several days, and are nice to use for hard sauce receptacles or cocktails or fish sauces; any number of ways may be thought of to use them.

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At the Bird Store Window. The bird store window is an unfailing attraction to many people. Perhaps it attracts men more than women, but it is a magnet that draws all children.

Let small boys or girls discover a bird store and they halt and linger long, wondering over or admiring the strange or beautiful feathered creatures within, and children walking with their mother if they should spy this window are sure to tug her toward it to give them a chance to look in. The bird store window interests all children, as it appears to interest also many grown men who may be drawn to it by a natural fondness for birds and animals, or be attracted by the novel or striking character of the exhibit on view.

Here, for instance, in this window is a white peacock, a remarkable bird seen with its plumage in whatever form. As with characteristic deliberation it walks about with its long tail feathers folded and trailing people stop to look at it, and then let it raise and spread its great white fan and many more halt and gather in a crowd around the window.—New York Sun.

Hurt in the Sequel. Graham Ferguson has just returned after an absence of six months on "the other side." Fergie did not spend all his time abroad at the home of his Ayrshire ancestors; he visited Switzerland and Italy and did not neglect Paris. It was in this famous city that he witnessed a famous sight.

"When I was in France," he told a newspaper friend Sunday, "I saw a duel."

"Oh! One of those French duels, eh? Nobody was hurt, I presume?" "You are wrong there. One of the contestants was seriously injured."

"One of the contestants? Surely you mean, a bystander or a second or a surgeon?" "No, sir; one of the duellists. He had a rib broken."

"You astound me! One of those toy rapiers could not smash a rib, surely?" "Rapier, nothing! The brave man's rib was broken in the embrace with his opponent, after the duel was over."

Thick. "How far is it to the next town?" inquired the traveler in the mud bespattered buggy. "Bout ten mile, mister," said the farmer by the roadside. "Long miles, too, I suppose."

"No, sir, they're not so very long, but you'll find them pretty blamed thick."

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ing draught of and is as pure as skill can poss-entire establish-with the very cal inventions vices known to ing, having re-bottling equip-second to none. methods of ster-before they are scientific process the beer after it matically bottled lasting purity of bottle our beer in AMBRE bot-tles, as exposure to light injures flavor.

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Casters Need Oil. Oil your casters once in a while and see how much more easily large pieces of furniture may be moved. Do this at any rate at housecleaning time, and take care to wipe off any superfluous oil, not only because it would collect dirt if allowed to remain, but also because it might drip a little and stain the carpets or rugs.

Delicious Dish. Serve pumpkin pie with whipped cream and pecan nuts over the top for a change.

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