

FRECKLES

By
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(Continued from last week.)
CHAPTER XXII.
THE ANGEL'S GLAD STORY.

THE angel glanced at the card. The Chicago address was suit 11, Auditorium. She laid her hand on her driver's sleeve.

"There's a fast driving limit?" she asked.

"Yes, miss."

"Will you crowd it all you can without danger of arrest? I will pay well. I must catch some people."

Then she smiled at him. The hospital, an orphan's home, and the Auditorium seemed a queer combination to that driver, but the angel was always and everywhere the angel, and her ways were strictly her own.

"I will get you there just as quickly as any man could with a team," he said promptly.

She clung to the card and paper, and, as best she could in the lurching swaying cab, read the addresses over.

"O'More, suite eleven, Auditorium."

"O'More," she repeated. "Seems to fit Freckles to a dot. Wonder if that could be his name? Suite eleven means that you are pretty well fixed. Suites in the Auditorium come high."

Then she turned the card and read on its reverse, Lord Maxwell O'More, M. P., Kiltvany place, County Clare, Ireland.

"A lord man!" she groaned despairingly. "A lord man! Bet my hoo cake's scorched!"

She blinked back the tears and, spreading the paper on her knee, read: "After three months' fruitless search, Lord O'More gives up the quest for his lost nephew, and leaves Chicago today for his home in Ireland."

She read on, and realized every word of it. The likeness settled it. It was Freckles over again, only older and elegantly dressed. There was not a chance to doubt.

"Thank you; and wait, no matter how long," she said to her driver.

Catching up the paper, she hurried to the desk and laid down Lord O'More's card.

"Has my uncle started yet?" she asked, sweetly.

The surprised clerk stepped back on a bellboy, and covertly kicked him for being in the way.

"His lordship is in his room," he said, with a low bow.

The clerk shoved the bellboy toward the angel.

"Show her ladyship to the elevator and Lord O'More's suit," he said, bowing double.

At the bellboy's tap the door swung open and the liveried servant thrust a card tray before the angel. The opening of the door created a current that swayed a curtain aside, and in an adjoining room, lounging in a great chair, with a paper in his hand, sat the man who was, beyond question, of Freckles' blood and race.

With perfect control the angel dropped Lord O'More's card on the tray, whipped past his servant and stood before his lordship.

"Good morning," she said with tense politeness.

Lord O'More glanced her over with amused curiosity until her color began to deepen and her blood to run hotly.

"Well, my dear," he said at last, "how can I serve you?"

Instantly the angel bristled. She had been so shielded in the midst of almost entire freedom, owing to the circumstances of her life, that the words and the look appealed to her as almost insulting. She lifted her head with a proud gesture.

"I am not your dear," she said, with slow distinctness. "There isn't a thing in the world you can do for me. I came here to see if I could do something—a very great something—for you; but if I don't like you I won't do it!"

There was a silken rustle and a beautiful woman with cheeks of cherry bloom, hair of jet and eyes of pure Irish blue, moved to Lord O'More's side and, catching his arm, shook him impatiently.

"Terence! Have you lost your senses?" she cried. "Didn't you understand what the child said? Look at her face! See what she has!"

"I beg your pardon," he said. "The fact is, I am leaving Chicago sorely disappointed. It makes me bitter and reckless. I thought it was some more of those queer, useless people that have thrust themselves on me constantly, and I was careless. Forgive me and tell me why you came."

"I will if I like you," said the angel stoutly, "and if I don't I won't!"

"But I began all wrong, and now I don't know how to make you like me," said his lordship, with sincere penitence in his tone.

The angel looked into the beautiful woman's face.

"Are you his wife?" she asked.

"Yes," said the woman. "I am his wife."

"Well," said the angel judicially, "the Bird Woman says no one in the whole world knows all a man's big-ginnesses and all his littlenesses as his wife does. What you think of him ought to do for me. Do you like him?"

"Better than any one in the whole world," said Lady O'More promptly.

The angel mused a second, and then her legal tinge came to the fore again.

"Yes, but have you any one you could like better if he wasn't all right?" she persisted.

"I have three of his sons, two little daughters, a father, mother and several brothers and sisters," came the quick reply.

"And you like him best?" persisted the angel with finality.

"I love him so much that I would give up every one of them with dry eyes, if by so doing I could save him," said Lord O'More's wife.

"Oh!" cried the angel. "Oh, my!"

She lifted her clear eyes to Lord O'More's and shook her head.

"She never, never could do that!" she said. "But it's a mighty big thing to your credit that she thinks she could. I guess I'll tell you why I came."

She laid down the paper and touched the portrait.

"When you were just a boy, did people call you Freckles?" she asked.

"Dozens of good fellows all over Ireland and the continent are doing it today," answered Lord O'More.

The angel's face lighted with her most beautiful smile.

"I was sure of it," she said winningly.

"That's what we call him, and he is so like you. I doubt if any one of those three boys of yours are more so. But it's been twenty years. Seems to me you've been a long time coming!"

Lord O'More caught the angel's wrists and his wife slipped her arms about her.

"Steady, my girl!" said the man's voice hoarsely. "Don't make me think you've brought word of the boy at this last hour unless you know surely."

"It's all right," said the angel. "We have him, and there's no chance of a mistake. If I hadn't gone to that home for his little clothes and heard of you and been hunting you and had met you on the street, or anywhere, I should have stopped you and asked you who you were just because you are so like him. It's all right. I can tell you where Freckles is; but whether you deserve to know—that's another matter!"

Lord O'More did not hear her. He dropped back in his chair and, covering his face, burst into those terrible sobs that shake and rend a strong man. Lady O'More hovered over him, weeping.

"Umph! Looks pretty fair for Freckles," muttered the angel. "Lots of things can be explained. Now perhaps they can explain this."

They did explain so fully that in a few minutes the angel was on her feet, hurrying Lord and Lady O'More to reach the hospital.

"You said Freckles' old nurse knew his mother's picture instantly," said the angel. "I want that picture and the bundle of little clothes."

Lady O'More gave them into her hands.

The likeness was a large miniature painted on ivory, with a frame of beaten gold, and the face that looked out of it was of extreme beauty and surpassing sweetness. Surrounded by masses of dark hair was a delicately cut face, with big eyes. In the upper part of it there was no trace of Freckles, but the lips curving in a smile were his very own. The angel gazed as if she could never leave off. Then with a quivering breath she laid the portrait aside and reached both arms for Lord O'More's neck.

"That will save Freckles' life and insure his happiness," she said positively. "Thank you, oh, thank you for coming!"

She kissed and hugged him and then the wife who had come with him. She opened the bundle of yellow and brown linen and gave just a glance at the texture and work. Then she gathered the little clothes and the picture to her heart and led the way to the cab.

Ushering Lord and Lady O'More into the reception room, she said to McLean. "Please go call up my father and ask him to come on the first train."

She swung the door after him.

"These are Freckles' people," she said to the Bird Woman. "You can find out about each other. I'm going to him."

And she was gone.

The nurse left the room quietly as the angel entered, still carrying the bundle and the picture. When they were alone the angel turned to Freckles and saw that the crisis was, indeed, at hand.

"Angel," he panted. "Oh, angel! Did you get them? Are they white? Are the little stitches there? Oh, angel! Did my mother love me?"

The words seemed to leap from his burning lips. The angel dropped the bundle on the bed and laid the picture face down across his knees. She gently pushed his head to the pillow and caught his arms in a firm grasp.

"Yes, dear heart," she said with fullest assurance. "No little clothes were ever whiter. I never in all my life saw such dainty, fine little stitches, and, as for loving you, no boy's mother ever loved him more!"

A great trembling seized Freckles.

"Sure? Are you sure?" he urged, with clicking teeth.

"I know," said the angel firmly.

"And, Freckles, while you rest and be glad I want to tell you a little story. When you feel stronger we will look at the clothes together."

They are here. They are all right. But when I was at the home getting them I heard of some people that were hunting a lost boy. I went to see them, and what they told me was all so exactly like what might have happened to you that I must tell you. Then you'll see that things could be very different from what you have always tortured yourself with thinking."

Freckles lay quiet under her touch, but he did not hear a word that she was saying until his roving eyes rested on her face; and he immediately noticed a remarkable thing. For the first time she was talking to him and doing everything but meet his eyes. That was not like the angel at all. It was the delight of hearing her speak that she always looked one squarely in the face and with perfect frankness.

"—and he was a sour, grumpy old man," she was saying. "He always had been spotted, because he was an only son and had a title and a big estate. He would have just his way, no matter about his sweet little wife, or his boys, or any one. No when his eldest son fell in love with a beautiful girl with a title, the very girl of all the world his father wanted him to, and added a big adjoining estate to his, why, that pleased him mightily."

"Then he went and ordered his other son to marry a poky kind of a girl that nobody liked to get another big estate on the other side, and that was different. That was all the world different, because the eldest son had been in love all his life with the girl he married, and, oh, Freckles, it's no wonder, for I saw her! She's a royal beauty and she has the sweetest way."

"But that poor younger son, he had been in love with the village vicar's daughter all his life. That's no wonder either, for she was more beautiful yet. She could sing like the angels, but she hadn't a cent. She loved him to death, too, if he was bony and freckled and red haired—I don't mean that! They didn't say what color his hair was, but his father's must have been the reddest ever, for when he found out about them, and it wasn't anything so terrible, he just caved!"

"The old man went to see the girl—the pretty one with no money, of course—and he hurt her feelings until she ran away. She went over to London and began studying music. Soon she grew to be a lovely singer, and then she joined a company and came to this country."

(Continued next week.)

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