

FRECKLES

By
Gene Stratton-Porter

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[Concluded.]

The next morning the man of affairs, with a heart filled with misgivings, undertook the interview on which Freckles insisted. His fears were without cause. Freckles was the son of honor and simplicity.

"Have they been telling you what's come to me?" he asked without even waiting for a greeting.

"Yes," said the angel's father. "Do you think you have the very worst of it clear to your understanding?"

Under Freckles' earnest eyes the man of affairs answered soberly, "I think I have, Mr. O'More."

That was the first time Freckles heard his name from the lips of another man. One second he lay overcome, the next great tears filled his eyes, and he reached out his hand. Then the angel's father understood, and he clasped that hand and held it in a strong, firm grasp.

"Terence, my boy," he said, "let me do the talking. I came in here with the understanding that you wanted to ask me for my only child. I should like, at the proper time, to regard her marriage, if she has found the man she desires to marry, not as losing all I have, but as gaining a man I can depend on to love as a son and to take charge of my affairs for her when I retire from business. Bend all of your energies toward rapid recovery, and from this hour understand that my daughter and my home are yours."

"You're not forgetting this?" Freckles lifted his right arm.

"Terence, I'm sorer than I have words to express about that," said the man of affairs. "But if it's up to me to choose whether I give all I have left in this world to a man with a hand off his body or to one of these gambling, tippling, immoral spend-thrifts of today, with both hands and feet off their souls and a rotten spot in the core, I choose you, and it seems that my daughter does the same. Put what is left of you of that right arm to the best uses you can in this world, and never again mention or feel that it is defective as long as you live. Good day, sir!"

"One minute more," said Freckles. "Yesterday the angel was telling me that there was money coming to me from two sources. She said that my grandmother had left me father all of her fortune and her house because she knew that his father would be cutting him off, and that me uncle had also set aside for me what would be me father's interest in his father's estate."

"Whatever the sum is that my grandmother left me father, because she loved him and wanted him to be having it, that'll be taking. 'Twas hers from her father, and she had the right to giving it as she chose. Anything from the man that knowingly left me father and me mother to go cold and hungry and into the fire in misery when just a little would have made life so beautiful to them and saved me this crippled body—money that he willed from me when he knew I was living, of his blood and on charity among strangers, I don't touch, not if I freeze, starve and burn too! If there ain't enough besides that and I can't be earning enough to fix things for the angel!"

"We are not discussing money!" burst in the man of affairs. "We don't want any blood money! We have all we need without it. If you don't feel right and easy over it, don't you touch a cent of any of it."

"It's right I should have what me grandmother intended for me father, and I want it," said Freckles, "but I'd die before I'd touch a cent of me grandfather's money!"

"Now," said the angel, "we are all going home. We have done all we can for Freckles. His people are here. He needs to know them. They are very anxious to get acquainted with him. We'll turn him over to them and go home. When he is well, why, then he will be perfectly free to go to Ireland or come to the Lumberlost, just as he chooses. We will go right away."

McLean bore it for a week, and then he could stand it no longer. Communing with himself in the long, soundful nights of the swamp, he had learned to his astonishment that for the last year his heart had been circling the Lumberlost with Freckles.

He started for Chicago, loaded with a big box of goldenrod, asters, fringed gentians and crimson leaves that the angel had carefully gathered for Freckles' room, and a little, long slender package. He would not admit it even to himself, but he was unable to remain longer away from Freckles and leave him to the care of Lord O'More.

In a few minutes' talk, while McLean waited admission to Freckles' room, his lordship had genially chat-

ted of Freckles' rapid recovery, of his delight that he was unspotted by his early surroundings and his desire to visit the Lumberlost with Freckles before they sailed. He said they were anxious to do all they could to help bind Freckles' arrangements with the angel, as both he and Lady O'More regarded her as the most promising girl they knew and one that could be fully fitted to fill the high position in which Freckles would place her.

Every word he uttered was pungent with bitterness to McLean. The swamp had lost its flavor without Freckles, and yet as Lord O'More talked McLean fervently wished that he was in the heart of it.

All the tan and sunburn had been washed from Freckles' face in sweats of agony. It was a smooth, even white, its brown rift showing but faintly. What the nurses and Lady O'More had done to Freckles' hair McLean could not guess, but it was the most beautiful that he had ever seen. Fine as floss, bright in color, waving and crisp, it fell about the white face.

They had got his arms into and his chest covered with a finely embroidered pale blue silk shirt, with soft white tie at the throat. Among the many changes that had taken place during his absence, the fact that Freckles was most attractive and barely escaped being handsome remained almost unnoticed by the boss, so great was his astonishment at seeing both cuffs turned back and the right arm in view. Freckles was using the maimed arm that heretofore he had always hidden.

"Oh, Lord, sir, but I'm glad to see you!" burst out Freckles, almost rolling from the bed as he reached for him. "I'm picking the angel's ring stone that me Aunt Alice ordered. It's an emerald—just me color. Lord O'More says. Every color of the old swamp is in it. I asked angel to have a little shamrock leaf cut on it, so every time I saw it I'd be thinking of the love, truth, and valor of that song she was teaching me. Ain't that a beautiful song?"

Freckles tilted about a tray of unset stones that would have ransomed several valuable kings.

"I tell you I'm glad to see you, sir,"

he said. "I tried to tell me uncle what I wanted, but this ain't for him to be mixed up in, anyway, and I don't think I made it clear to him. I can be telling you, sir. I told him that I would pay only \$500 for the angel's stone. I'm thinking that with what he has laid up for me, and the bigness of things that the angel did for me, that seems like a stingy little sum to him. I know he thinks I ought to be giving a lot more, but I feel as if I just had to be buying that stone with money I earned myself, and that is all I have saved of me wages. I don't mind paying for the muff, or the dressing table, or Mrs. Duncan's things, from this other money, and later the angel can have every last cent of me grandmother's, if she'll take it, but just now—oh, sir, can't you see that I have to be buying this stone with what I have in the bank?"

"In other words, Freckles," said the boss, "you don't want to buy the angel's ring with money. You want to give for it your first awful fear of the swamp. You want to pay for it with the loneliness and heart hunger you have suffered there, with last winter's freezing on the line and this summer's burning in the sun. You want the price of that stone to be the fears that have chilled your heart—the sweat and blood of your body."

Freckles' face quivered with feeling. "Dear Mr. McLean," he said, reaching up with a caress over the boss' black hair and along his cheek. "Dear boss, that's why I've wanted you so. I know you would know. Now you will be looking at these? I don't want emeralds, because that's what she gave me."

Freckles heaped the pearls with the emeralds. He studied the diamonds a long time. The diamonds joined the emeralds and pearls. There was left a little red heap, and Freckles' fingers touched it with a new tenderness.

"I'm thinking here's me angel's stone," he exulted. "The Lumberlost, and me with it, grew in mine, but it's going to bloom, and her with it, in this! There's the red of the wild poppies, the cardinal flowers and the little bunch of crushed foxfire that we found where she put it to save me. There's the light of the camp fire and the sun setting over Sleepy Snake creek. There's the red of the blood we were willing to give for each other. It's like her lips and like the drops that dried on her beautiful arm that first day, and I'm thinking it must be like the brave, tender, clean, red heart of her."

Freckles lifted the ruby to his lips and handed it to McLean.

"Freckles, may I ask you something?" he said.

"Why, sure," said Freckles. "There's nothing you would be asking that it wouldn't be giving me joy to be telling you."

McLean's eyes traveled to Freckles' right arm, with which he was pushing the jewels about.

"Oh, that!" cried Freckles with a merry laugh. "You're wanting to know where all the bitterness is gone? Well, sir, 'twas carried from me soul, heart and body on the lips of an angel. Seems that hurt was necessary in the beginning to make today come true. The wound had always been raw, but the angel was healing it. If she doesn't care, I don't. May I be asking you a question? Well, then, if this accident and all that's come to me since had never happened, what was it you meant to do with me?"

"Why, Freckles," answered McLean, "I figured on taking you to Grand Rapids and putting you in the care of my mother. I had an idea it would be

best to get a private tutor to teach you for a year or two, until you were fit to enter Ann Arbor or the Chicago university in good shape. Then I thought we'd finish in this country at Yale or Harvard, and end with Oxford, to get a good all round flavor."

"Is that all?" asked Freckles.

"No; that's leaving the music out. I intended to have your voice tested, and



"DEAR BOSS, DEAR FATHER, DON'T BE DOING THAT!"

if you really were endowed for a career as a great musician, and had inclinations that way. I wished to have you drop some of the college work and make music your chief study. Finally, I wanted us to take a trip over Europe and clear around the circle together."

"And then what?" queried Freckles breathlessly.

"Why, then," said McLean, "you know that my heart is hopelessly in the woods. I will never quit the timber business while there is timber to handle and breath in my body. I

thought if you didn't make a profession of music, and had any inclination my way, we would stretch the partnership one more and take you into the firm, placing your work with me."

Freckles lifted anxious and eager eyes to McLean.

"You told me once on the trail, and again when we thought I was dying, that you loved me. Do these things that have come to me make any difference in any way with your feeling toward me?"

"None," said McLean. "Nothing could make me love you more, and you will never do anything that will make me love you less."

"Glory be to God!" burst out Freckles. "When I'm educated enough, we'll all—the angel and her father, the Bird Woman, you, and me—will go together and see me house and me relations and be taking that trip. When we get back, we'll add O'More to the lumber company, and golly, sir, but we'll make things hum! Good land, sir! Don't do that! Why, Mr. McLean, dear boss, dear father, don't be doing that! What is it?"

"Nothing, nothing!" boomed McLean's deep bass; "nothing at all!"

He abruptly turned away and hurried to the window.

"This is a mighty fine view," he said.

"I'll be glad to see Ireland," said Freckles, "but I ain't ever staying long. All me heart is the angel's, and the Lumberlost is calling every minute. 'Me heart's all me Swamp Angel's, and me love is all hers, and I have her and the swamp so confused in me mind I never can be separating them. When I look at her, I see blue sky, the sun rifling through the leaves and pink and red flowers, and when I look at the Lumberlost I see a pink face with blue eyes, gold hair, and red lips, and, it's the truth, sir, they're mixed till they're one to me!"

"I'm afraid it will be hurting some, but I have the feeling that I can be making my dear people understand, so that they will be willing to let me come back home. Send Lady O'More to put these flowers God made in the place of these glasshouse legacies, and please be cutting the string of this little package the angel's sent me."

As Freckles held up the package, the lights of the Lumberlost flashed in the emerald on his finger. On the cover was printed: "To the Lumberlost Guard!" Under it was a big, crisp, iridescent black feather.

THE END

The Flood Loss.

The present year has been an unusual one for floods. In the early spring the whole of the Mississippi valley suffered most severely because of the degree to which the rivers were swollen. Now the reports from Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania tell of a large loss of life and of great financial losses because of midsummer floods in those states. This is unusual, at this time of year, but scarcely a spring passes without reports of damage in these three states from this cause. If Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia would face the problem set them by the floods and build a system of storage reservoirs, as a provision against such disaster, the initial expense would be very large, but it would not need to be repeated. The loss of life would be eliminated and so would the loss of property. There is little excuse for these states not taking some action which will make such floods impossible.—Boston Advertiser.

Peafowls' Winter Roost.

The hereditary habit of the peacocks of roosting for the night in trees sometimes forces upon them considerable discomfort. After selecting a roosting place the birds return to it each night; apparently the same ones without ever deserting the site. Usually two in the same tree. Once during a heavy snowstorm Dr. Blair directed my attention to two male peafowl that had selected a big oak tree near his office window as a perching place. The snow had fallen during the night to a depth of about 10 inches, forming a wall on each side of the sleeping birds, which completely arched over their backs. As the heat of their bodies melted the snow the water gradually saturated their lighter feathers and formed a tiny coronet of ice on their heads. As we watched them they stood erect as if to learn just what the prospect of morning might be. The effort probably convinced them that an attempted flight to the ground meant a tumble and not a fly, for they promptly settled down again for another nap.—Dumb Animals.

Women and Economy.

Mrs. Pearl White of Michigan, writing to Farm and Home, has this to say on the subject of women practicing false economy: "Many a woman will walk half a mile or more to borrow a pattern that is not even the right size, trying to make it fit, but the chances are that the time alone which she would save would more than equal the 10-cent expenditure for a new pattern, besides securing a better fit and style, and considerable saving of nerves."

Oh, Learned Judge.

A California judge decided that there is no judicial authority to keep a man from making love to his wife, although it could stop his beating her. The remarkable cause of this remarkable decision was that a woman in Los Angeles had applied for an injunction to restrain her husband from insisting on being attentive to her. This judge was not a Solomon, but he realized that only a Solomon could be trusted to rule upon the whims and inconsistencies of womankind.

Unnecessary.

Gruff Customer (looking up from the menu card)—Have you brains? Timid Waitress (confused)—No, sir. That's the reason I'm working here.—Judge.

Medical.

Back-ache is a Warning

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