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# FRECKLES

*by Gene Stratton-Porter*



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# FRECKLES

*“If you will give me a job where I can earn me food, clothes, and a place to sleep,” he said, “if I can have a Boss to work for like other men, and a place I feel I’ve a right to, I will do precisely what you tell me or die trying.”*

“Freckles” is a nameless, one-armed orphan who is too old to live in the state home any longer. When he shows up at a logging camp, thin and ragged and looking for employment, the tough and rugged loggers immediately dismiss him. But the Boss sees something special in Freckles and agrees to give him a job guarding a plot of valuable swampland rich in lumber. Determined to show his gratitude, Freckles risks life and limb to protect the trees and prove his worth to the Boss. While fighting off rattlesnakes, thieves, and loneliness, his kindness and character touch the hearts of the people and animals he meets. In the middle of the Indiana Limberlost, will Freckles find the love and answers to his past that he has always been missing?

*“Freckles is more than an engaging, beautifully written story; it’s a book that makes you feel, makes you think, and makes you want to be a better person. We are grateful to offer a clean language version of this beautiful classic book.”*—Jenny Phillips

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# FRECKLES

By Gene Stratton-Porter

*To all good Irishmen in general  
and one Charles Darwin Porter  
in particular*

Cover design by Phillip Colhouer

Cover illustration by Dan Burr

First published in 1904

Some offensive language has been modified.

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## Characters:

**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 the Grand Rapids 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 Dutch timber-thief who wants rascality made easy.

**BLACK JACK**, a villain to whom thought of repentance comes too late.

**SEARS**, camp cook.

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# Chapter I

## *Wherein Great Risks Are Taken, and the Limberlost Guard Is Hired*

Freckles came down the corduroy that crosses the lower end of the Limberlost. At a glance he might have been mistaken for a tramp, but he was truly seeking work. He was intensely eager to belong somewhere and to be attached to almost any enterprise that would furnish him food and clothing.

Long before he came in sight of the camp of the Grand Rapids Lumber Company, he could hear the cheery voices of the men, the neighing of the horses, and could scent the tempting odors of cooking food. A feeling of homeless friendlessness swept over him in a sickening wave. Without stopping to think, he turned into the newly-made road and followed it to the camp, where the gang was making ready for supper and bed.

The scene was intensely attractive. The thickness of the swamp made a dark, massive background below, while above towered gigantic trees. The men were calling jovially back and forth as they unharnessed tired horses that fell into attitudes of rest and crunched, in deep content, the grain given them. Duncan, the brawny Scotch head-teamster, lovingly wiped the flanks of his big bays with handfuls of pawpaw leaves as he softly whistled, "O wha' will be my dearie, O!" and a cricket beneath the leaves at his feet accompanied him. The green wood fire hissed and crackled merrily. Wreathing tongues of flame wrapped around the big black kettles,

and when the cook lifted the lids to plunge in his testing-fork, gusts of savory odors escaped.

Freckles approached him.

“I want to speak with the Boss,” he said.

The cook glanced at him and answered carelessly, “He can’t use you.”

The color flooded Freckles’ face, but he said simply, “If you will be having the goodness to point him out, we will give him a chance to do his own talking.”

With a shrug of astonishment, the cook led the way to a rough board table where a broad, square-shouldered man was bending over some account-books.

“Mr. McLean, here’s another man wanting to be taken on the gang, I suppose,” he said.

“All right,” came the cheery answer. “I never needed a good man more than I do just now.”

The manager turned a page and carefully began a new line.

“No use of your bothering with this fellow,” volunteered the cook. “He hasn’t but one hand.”

The flush on Freckles’ face burned deeper. His lips thinned to a mere line. He lifted his shoulders, took a step forward, and thrust out his right arm, from which the sleeve dangled empty at the wrist.

“That will do, Sears,” came the voice of the Boss sharply. “I will interview my man when I finish this report.”

He turned to his work, while the cook hurried to the fires. Freckles stood one instant as he had braced himself to meet the eyes of the manager; then his arm dropped, and a wave of whiteness swept him. The Boss had not even turned his head. He had used the possessive. When he said “my man,” the hungry heart of Freckles went reaching toward him.

The boy drew a quivering breath. Then he whipped off his old

hat and beat the dust from it carefully. With his left hand he caught the right sleeve, wiped his sweaty face, and tried to straighten his hair with his fingers. He broke a spray of ironwort beside him and used the purple bloom to beat the dust from his shoulders and limbs. The Boss, busy over his report, was, nevertheless, vaguely alive to the toilet being made behind him, and scored one for the man.

McLean was a Scotchman. It was his habit to work slowly and methodically. The men of his camps never had known him to be in a hurry or to lose his temper. Discipline was inflexible, but the Boss was always kind. His habits were simple. He shared camp life with his gangs. The only visible signs of wealth consisted of a big, shimmering diamond stone of ice and fire that glittered and burned on one of his fingers and the dainty, beautiful thoroughbred mare he rode between camps and across the country on business.

No man of McLean's gangs could honestly say that he ever had been overdriven or underpaid. The Boss never had exacted any deference from his men, yet so intense was his personality that no man of them ever had attempted a familiarity. They all knew him to be a thorough gentleman and that in the great timber city several millions stood to his credit.

He was the only son of that McLean who had sent out the finest ships ever built in Scotland. That his son should carry on this business after the father's death had been his ambition. He had sent the boy through the universities of Oxford and Edinburgh and allowed him several years' travel before he should attempt his first commission for the firm.

Then he was ordered to southern Canada and Michigan to purchase a consignment of tall, straight timber for masts, and south to Indiana for oak beams. The young man entered these mighty forests, parts of which lay untouched since the dawn of the morning of time. The clear, cool, pungent atmosphere was intoxicating. The intense silence, like that of a great empty cathedral, fascinated him. He gradually learned that, to the shy wood creatures that darted

across his path or peeped inquiringly from leafy ambush, he was brother. He found himself approaching, with a feeling of reverence, those majestic trees that had stood through ages of sun, wind, and snow. Soon it became difficult to fell them. When he had filled his order and returned home, he was amazed to learn that in the swamps and forests he had lost his heart, and it was calling—forever calling him.

When he inherited his father's property, he promptly disposed of it, and, with his mother, founded a home in a splendid residence in the outskirts of Grand Rapids. With three partners, he organized a lumber company. His work was to purchase, fell, and ship the timber to the mills. Marshall managed the milling process and passed the lumber to the factory. From the lumber, Barthol made beautiful and useful furniture, which Uptegrove scattered all over the world from a big wholesale house. Of the thousands who saw their faces reflected on the polished surfaces of that furniture and found comfort in its use, few there were to whom it suggested mighty forests and trackless swamps, and the man, big of soul and body, who cut his way through them, and with the eye of experience doomed the proud trees that were now entering the homes of civilization for service.

When McLean turned from his finished report, he faced a young man, yet under twenty, tall, spare, heavily framed, closely freckled, and red-haired, with a homely Irish face, but in the steady gray eyes, straightly meeting his searching ones of blue, there was unswerving candor and the appearance of longing not to be ignored. He was dressed in the roughest of farm clothing and seemed tired to the point of falling.

“You are looking for work?” questioned McLean.

“Yis,” answered Freckles.

“I am very sorry,” said the Boss with genuine sympathy in his every tone, “but there is only one man I want at present—a hardy, big fellow with a stout heart and a strong body. I hoped that you would do, but I am afraid you are too young and scarcely strong enough.”

Freckles stood, hat in hand, watching McLean.

“And what was it you thought I might be doing?” he asked.

The Boss could scarcely repress a start. Somewhere before accident and poverty there had been an ancestor who used cultivated English, even with an accent. The boy spoke in a mellow Irish voice, sweet and pure. It was scarcely definite enough to be called brogue, yet there was a trick in the turning of the sentence, the wrong sound of a letter here and there, that was almost irresistible to McLean, and presaged a misuse of infinitives and possessives with which he was very familiar and which touched him nearly. He was of foreign birth, and despite years of alienation, in times of strong feeling he committed inherited sins of accent and construction.

“It’s no child’s job,” answered McLean. “I am the field manager of a big lumber company. We have just leased two thousand acres of the Limberlost. Many of these trees are of great value. We can’t leave our camp, six miles south, for almost a year yet; so we have blazed a trail and strung barbed wires securely around this lease. Before we return to our work, I must put this property in the hands of a reliable, brave, strong man who will guard it every hour of the day and sleep with one eye open at night. I shall require the entire length of the trail to be walked at least twice each day, to make sure that our lines are up and that no one has been trespassing.”

Freckles was leaning forward, absorbing every word with such intense eagerness that he was beguiling the Boss into explanations he had never intended making.

“But why wouldn’t that be the finest job in the world for me?” he pleaded. “I am never sick. I could walk the trail twice, three times every day, and I’d be watching sharp all the while.”

“It’s because you are scarcely more than a boy, and this will be a trying job for a work-hardened man,” answered McLean. “You see, in the first place, you would be afraid. In stretching our lines, we killed six rattlesnakes almost as long as your body and as thick as

your arm. It's the price of your life to start through the marsh grass surrounding the swamp unless you are covered with heavy leather above your knees.

"You should be able to swim in case high water undermines the temporary bridge we have built where Sleepy Snake Creek enters the swamp. The fall and winter changes of weather are abrupt and severe, while I would want strict watch kept every day. You would always be alone, and I don't guarantee what is in the Limberlost. It is lying here as it has lain since the beginning of time, and it is alive with forms and voices. I don't pretend to say what all of them come from; but from a few slinking shapes I've seen, and hair-raising yells I've heard, I'd rather not confront their owners myself; and I am neither weak nor fearful.

"Worst of all, any man who will enter the swamp to mark and steal timber is desperate. One of my employees at the south camp, John Carter, compelled me to discharge him for a number of serious reasons. He came here, entered the swamp alone, and succeeded in locating and marking a number of valuable trees that he was endeavoring to sell to a rival company when we secured the lease. He has sworn to have these trees if he has to die or to kill others to get them, and he is a man that the strongest would not care to meet."

"But if he came to steal trees, wouldn't he bring teams and men enough that all anyone could do would be to watch and be after you?" queried the boy.

"Yes," replied McLean.

"Then why couldn't I be watching just as closely, and coming as fast, as an older, stronger man?" asked Freckles.

"Why, by George, you could!" exclaimed McLean. "I don't know as the size of a man would be half so important as his grit and faithfulness, come to think of it. Sit on that log there and we will talk it over. What is your name?"

Freckles shook his head at the proffer of a seat, and folding his arms, stood straight as the trees around him. He grew a shade

whiter, but his eyes never faltered.

“Freckles!” he said.

“Good enough for everyday,” laughed McLean, “but I scarcely can put ‘Freckles’ on the company’s books. Tell me your name.”

“I haven’t any name,” replied the boy.

“I don’t understand,” said McLean.

“I was thinking from the voice and the face of you that you wouldn’t,” said Freckles slowly. “I’ve spent more time on it than I ever did on anything else in all me life, and I don’t understand. Does it seem to you that anyone would take a newborn baby and row over it, until it was bruised black, cut off its hand, and leave it out in a bitter night on the steps of a charity home, to the care of strangers? That’s what somebody did to me.”

McLean stared aghast. He had no reply ready, and presently in a low voice he suggested: “And after?”

“The Home people took me in, and I was there the full legal age and several years over. For the most part, we were a lot of little Irishmen together. They could always find homes for the other children, but nobody would ever be wanting me on account of me arm.”

“Were they kind to you?” McLean regretted the question the minute it was asked.

“I don’t know,” answered Freckles. The reply sounded so hopeless, even to his own ears, that he hastened to qualify it by adding: “You see, it’s like this, sir. Kindnesses that people are paid to lay off in job lots and that belong equally to several hundred others ain’t going to be soaking into any one fellow so much.”

“Go on,” said McLean, nodding comprehendingly.

“There’s nothing worth the taking of your time to tell,” replied Freckles. “The Home was in Chicago, and I was there all me life until three months ago. When I was too old for the training they gave to the little children, they sent me to the closest ward school as