



# Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

## Uncle Wiggily and the Freckled Girl

*Howard R. Garis*

Uncle Wiggily was hopping through the woods one summer day, when, as he happened to stop to get a drink of some water that the rain-clouds had dropped in the cup of a Jack-in-the-pulpit flower, the bunny gentleman heard a girl saying:

"Oh, I wish I could get them off! I wish I could scrub them off with sandpaper, or something like that! I've tried lemon juice and vinegar, but they won't go!"

Uncle Wiggily stopped and rubbed the end of his pink, twinkling nose with the brim of his tall, silk hat.

"This is very strange," said the bunny uncle to himself. "I wonder what is it she has tried to take off with lemon juice? She seems very unhappy, this little girl."

The bunny uncle looked through the trees and, seated on a green, mossy stump, he saw a girl about ten or twelve years old. She held a looking-glass in her hand, and as she glanced at her likeness in the mirror she kept saying:

"How can I get them off? How can I make them disappear so I will be beautiful? Oh, how I hate them!"

"What in the world can be the matter?" thought Uncle Wiggily to himself. For, as I have told you, the bunny gentleman was now able to hear and understand the talk of girls and boys, though he could not himself speak that language.

He hopped a little closer to the unhappy girl on the green, mossy stump, but the bunny stepped so softly on the leaf carpet of the forest that he hardly made a sound, and the girl with the mirror never heard him.

"I wonder if I said a little verse, such as I have read in fairy books, whether they would go away?" murmured the girl. "I've tried everything but that. I'll do it—I'll say a magical verse! But I must make up one, for I never have read of the kind I want in any book."

She seemed to be thinking deeply for a moment and then, shutting her eyes, and looking up at the sun which was shining through the trees of the wood, the girl recited this little verse:

"Sun, sun, who made them come, Make them go away. Then I'll be like other girls, Happy all the day!"

"This is like a puzzle, or a riddle," whispered Uncle Wiggily to himself, as he kept out of sight behind a bush near the stump. "What is it she wants the sun to make go away? It can't be rain, or storm clouds, for the sky is as blue as a baby's eyes. I wonder what it is?"

Then, as the girl took up the mirror again, and looked in it, Uncle Wiggily saw the reflection of her face.

It was covered with dear, little brown freckles!

"Ho! Ho!" softly crooned Uncle Wiggily to himself. "Now I understand. This girl is unhappy because she is freckled. She thinks she doesn't look pretty with them! Why, if she only knew it, those freckles show how strong and healthy she is. They show that she has played out in the fresh air and sunshine, and that she will live to be happy a long, long while. Freckles! Why, she should be glad she has them, instead of sorry!"

But the girl on the stump kept her eyes shut, clenching the mirror in her hand and as she held her face up to the sun she recited another verse of what she thought was a mystic charm.

This is what she said:

"Freckles, freckles, go away! Don't come back any other day. Make my face most fair to see, Then how happy I will be!"

Slowly, as Uncle Wiggily watched, hidden as he was behind the bush, the girl opened her eyes and held up the looking-glass. Over her shoulder the bunny gentleman could still see the freckles in the glass; the dear, brown, honest, healthy freckles. But when the girl saw them she dropped the mirror, hid her face in her hands and cried:

"Oh, they didn't go away! They didn't go away! Now I never can be beautiful!"

Uncle Wiggily twinkled his pink nose thoughtfully.

"This is too bad!" said the bunny gentleman. "I wonder how I can help that girl?" For, since he had helped the Toothache Boy by letting Dr. Possum pretend to pull an aching tooth, the bunny gentleman wanted do other favors for the children who loved him.

"I'd like to make that girl happy, even with her freckles," said the bunny. "I'll hop off through the woods, and perhaps I may meet some of my animal friends who will show me a way."

The bunny gentleman looked kindly at the girl on the stump. She was sobbing, and did not see him, or hear him, as she murmured over and over again:

"I don't like freckles! I hate them!"

Away through the woods hopped Uncle Wiggily. He had not gone very far before he heard a bird singing a beautiful song. Oh, so cheerful it was, and happy—that song!

"Good morning, Mr. Bird!" greeted Uncle Wiggily, for you know it is the father bird who sings the sweetest song. The mother bird is so busy, I suppose, that she has little time to sing. "You are very happy this morning," the rabbit said to the bird.

"Why, yes, Uncle Wiggily, I am very happy," answered Mr. Bird, "and so is my wife. She is up there on the nest, but she told me to come down here and sing a happy song."

"Why?" asked the bunny.

"Because we are going to have some little birds," was the answer. "There are some eggs in our nest, and my mate is sitting on them to keep them warm. Soon some little birds will come out, and I will sing a still happier song."

"That's nice," said Uncle Wiggily, thinking of the unhappy freckled girl on the stump. "May I see the eggs in your nest?"

"Of course," answered the father-singer. "Our nest is in a low bush, but it is well hidden. Here, I'll show you. Mrs. Bird will not mind if you look."

The father bird fluttered to the nest, and Mrs. Bird raised her fluffy feathers to show Uncle Wiggily some beautiful blue eggs.

"Why—why, they're *freckled*!" exclaimed the bunny gentleman. "Aren't you birds sad because you have freckled eggs? Why, your little birds will be freckled, too! And, if they are girl birds they will cry!"

"Why?" asked Mr. Bird in surprise. "Why will our girl birdies cry?"

"Because they'll be *freckled*," answered the bunny. "I just saw a girl in the woods, crying because she is freckled!"

"Nonsense!" chirped Mrs. Bird. "In the first place these are not freckles on my eggs, though they look so. My eggs are spotted, or mottled, and they would not be half so pretty if they were not colored that way. Besides, being spotted as they are, makes them not so easily seen in the nest. And, when I fly away to get food, bad snakes or cats can not so easily see my eggs to eat them. I just love my *freckled* eggs, as you call them!" laughed Mrs. Bird.

"Well, they are pretty," admitted Uncle Wiggily. "But will your little birds be speckled, too?"

"Not at all," sang Mr. Bird. "Say, Uncle Wiggily!" he whistled, "if we could get that girl here so she could see our spotted eggs, and know how beautiful they are,

even if they are what she would call 'freckled'; wouldn't that make her happier?"

"Perhaps it would," said the bunny rabbit. "I never thought of that. I'll try it! You will not be afraid to let her see your eggs, will you?" he asked.

"No," replied the mother of the speckled eggs. "Bring the unhappy girl here, and Mr. Bird and I will hide in the bushes while she peeps into our nest."

"I will!" said Uncle Wiggily.

Away he hopped through the woods, and soon he came to the place where the freckled girl was still sobbing on the stump.

"Now how can I get her to follow me through the woods, to see the nest, when I can't talk to her?" whispered Uncle Wiggily.

Then he thought of a plan.

"I'll toss a little piece of tree-bark at her," chuckled the bunny. "That will make her look up, and when she sees me I'll hop off a little way. She'll follow, thinking she can catch me. But I'll keep ahead of her and so lead her to the woods. I want to make her happy!"

The bunny tossed a bit of bark, hitting the girl on her head. She looked around, and then she saw Uncle Wiggily, all dressed up as he was with his tall silk hat and his red, white and blue striped rheumatism crutch.

"Oh, what a funny rabbit!" exclaimed the girl, smiling through her tears, and forgetting her freckles, for a while at least. "I wonder if I can catch you?" she said.

"Well, not if I know it," whispered Uncle Wiggily to himself, for he knew what the girl had said. "But I'll let you think you can," the bunny chuckled to himself.

He hopped on a little farther, and the girl followed. But just as she thought she was going to put her hands on the rabbit, Uncle Wiggily skipped along, and she missed him. But still she followed, and soon Uncle Wiggily had led her to the bushes where the birds had built their nest.

Mr. and Mrs. Bird were watching, and when they saw Uncle Wiggily and the freckled girl, Mr. Bird began to sing. He sang of blue skies, or rippling waters of sunshine and sweet breezes scented with apple blossoms.

"Oh, what a lovely song!" murmured the freckled girl. "Some birds must live here. I wonder if I could see their nest and eggs? I wouldn't hurt them for the world!" she said softly.

Uncle Wiggily shrank back out of sight. The girl looked around for the singing birds, and just then the wind blew aside some leaves and she saw the nest. But she saw more than the nest, for she saw the eggs that were to be hatched into little birds. And, more than this; the girl saw that the eggs were spotted or mottled—freckled as she was herself!



"Oh! Oh!" murmured the girl, clasping her hands as she looked down at the speckled eggs in the nest. "They have brown spots on, just like my face. They are *freckled eggs*—but, oh, how pretty they are! I never knew that anything freckled could be beautiful! I never knew! Oh, how wonderful!"

As she stood looking at the eggs, Mr. Bird sang again, a sweeter song than before, and the wind blew softly on the freckled face of the unhappy girl—no, not unhappy now, for she smiled, and there were no more tears in her eyes.

"Oh, how glad I am that the funny rabbit led me to the nest of freckled eggs!" said the girl. "I wonder where he is?"

She looked around, but Uncle Wiggily had hopped away. He had done all that was needed of him.

The mother bird softly fluttered down into her nest, covering the beautiful mottled eggs with her downy wings. She was not afraid of the girl. The girl reached out her hand and timidly stroked the mother bird. Then she gently touched her own freckled cheeks.

"I'm never going to care any more," she whispered. "I did not know that freckles could be so pretty. I'm glad I got 'em!"

The freckled girl walked away, leaving the mother bird on the nest, while the father of the speckled eggs, that soon would be little birds, sang his song of joy. The freckled girl, with a glad smile on her face, went back to the stump, and, without looking into the mirror, she tossed the bit of looking-glass into a deep spring.

"I don't need you any more," she said, as the glass went sailing through the air. "I know, now, that freckles can be beautiful!"

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