

A BOLD DESERTER.

By JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS.

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SYNOPSIS.

At the beginning of the civil war there resided in Hillsborough, Ga., a poor widow, known for miles around as Aunt Sally. Her son, a lad of 20, whom everybody called Billy Cochran, was a great favorite, especially with Major Goolisby, a wealthy planter, whose dead wife had been tenderly nursed by Aunt Sally. When, therefore, the boy was taken as a recruit to the confederate army, the major threatened and defied the conscript officer, but it was of no avail, and little Billy was forced to go.

II.

Of course, everybody sympathized with Aunt Sally, and their sympathy added to her grief, for she was a tender-hearted woman. Moreover, when she found herself the object of so much condolence, she naturally concluded that her trouble was a great deal worse than she had any idea of, and she sat in her humble home and wept, and, like Rachel, refused to be comforted. But the situation was not nearly so bad as Aunt Sally thought it was, or as Major Goolisby expected it would be. The major himself sent her a little negro girl to keep her company and the neighbors for miles around contended with one another in their efforts to make her comfortable. Not a day passed except Sundays, that Miss Mary, the major's daughter, did not drive out to Aunt Sally's little place and spend an hour or two with her. Miss Mary was eighteen, as pretty as a peach, and as full of fun as an egg is of meat. She was a brunette with blue eyes, and although they were laughing eyes, they could look very sad and tender when occasion called for it.

She made herself very useful to Aunt Sally. She read to her the letters that little Billy sent back from the camp to instruction at Loudersville, and an-



Miss Mary Writes a Note to Little Billy.

swered them at Aunt Sally's dictation. In this way she came to feel that she knew little Billy better than anyone else except his mother. She was surprised to find that, although little Billy had had few advantages in the way of schooling, he could write a beautiful letter. She took the fact home to her innocent bosom and wondered how it could be that this country lad had the knack of putting himself into his letters along with so many other things that were interesting. She was touched too, by the love for his mother that shone through every line he wrote. Over and over again, he called her his dear mammy and tried to comfort her; and sometimes he spoke of Miss Mary, and he was so deft in expressing his gratitude to her that the young lady blushed and trembled lest some one else was writ-

ing little Billy's letters, as she was writing his mother's. And then, somehow, she never knew how, his face came back to her memory and planted itself in her mind and remained there. Little Billy was no longer the green, awkward and ungainly country boy, peddling the scanty fruits of his poverty about the village, but a hero, who had no thought for anybody or anything except his dear old mammy.

As the cold weather came on, little Billy wrote that he would feel a great deal more comfortable in the wind if he knew where he could get a thick suit of clothes and a heavy pair of shoes. He begged his dear mammy not to worry about that, for he had no doubt the clothes and shoes would be forthcoming when he needed them most. Miss Mary skipped this part of the letter when she was reading it aloud to Aunt Sally, but it wasn't long before the clothes were made, with the aid and under the direction of little Billy's mother; and the shoes were bought, costing Major Goolisby a pretty round sum in confederate currency. Moreover, Miss Mary baked a fruit cake with her own hands, and this was to be put in the box with the clothes and shoes. The next thing was to find out if anybody from Hillsborough or from the countryside was going to the camp of instruction, where little Billy's headquarters were. But right in the midst of expectation and preparation Aunt Sally fell ill. She had never reconciled herself to her separation from little Billy. Until the conscript law tore him away from her side she had never parted from him a day since the Lord sent him to her arms.

The strain was too much for the motherly heart to bear. Aunt Sally gradually pined away, though she tried hard to be cheerful, and, at last, just before little Billy's Christmas box was to be sent, she took to her bed and lay there as helpless as a child. The doctor came and prescribed, but little Billy was the only medicine that would do Aunt Sally any good. So she kept to her bed, growing weaker and weaker, in spite of everything that the doctor and the neighbors could do.

At last when an opportunity came to forward the box Miss Mary wrote a note and pinned it where it could be seen the first thing. She began it with "Dear little Billy," but this seemed too familiar, and she began it with "Mr. Cochran." She told him that his dear mammy was very ill, and if he wanted to see her he would do well to come home at once. It was a very pretty letter, brief, simple and sympathetic. This duty done, Miss Mary turned her attention to nursing Aunt Sally, and, except at night, was never absent from her bedside more than an hour at a time.

III.

When little Billy arrived at the camp of instruction, the first person on whom his eye fell was Private Chadwick. Simultaneously the eye of Private Chadwick fell on little Billy. Mr. Chadwick was something of a humorist in his way, and a rough one, as the raw conscripts found out to their cost. A heartless jest rose to his lips, but something in little Billy's face—an expression of loneliness, perhaps—stayed it. In another moment Private Chadwick's hand fell on little Billy's shoulder, and it was a friendly hand. "Where from?" he asked.

"Close about Hillsborough," little Billy answered. "I reckon you know the Tripps and the Littles?" "Mighty well," said little Billy. "What name?" "Cochran." "How old?" "Twenty, last April gone." "You don't look like you're fifteen to do much soldierin'," suggested Private Chadwick.

"Oh, I'm tough," said little Billy, laughing, though he had a big lump in his throat. "Come with me, Buddy," remarked the private, smiling, "if I'm ever to keep a tavern, I reckon I might as well begin with you as a boarder."

And so, for the first time at least, little Billy was installed in Private Chadwick's tent, much to the surprise of those who knew the peculiarities of the man. The camp was in charge of Captain Mosely, who was recovering from a wound, and he had selected his old comrade, Private Chadwick, as his drillmaster—a curious selection it seemed to be to those who didn't know the man, but the truth was that Private Chadwick knew as much about tactics as any West Pointer, and had the knack, too, of imparting what he knew, even if he had to use his belt strap to emphasize his remarks.

The ush of the matter was that little Billy went to Private Chadwick's tent and remained there. He and the private became inseparable companions when neither was on duty, and in these hours of leisure little Billy learned as much about tactics as he did from the actual practice of drilling. He seemed to take to the business naturally, and far outstripped the men who had been drilling twice a day for three months. Naturally, therefore, Private Chadwick was very proud of his pupil, and frequently called Captain Mosely's attention to little Billy's proficiency.

Over and over during the pleasant days of November, Private Chadwick could be seen sitting in front of their tent engaged in earnest conversation, little Billy leaning his face on his hands, and Private Chadwick making fantastic figures in the sand with the point of his bayonet. On such occasions little Billy would be talking about his dear old mammy, and about Miss Mary, and although Private Chadwick was something of a joker, in his way, he never could see anything to laugh at in little Billy's devotion to his mother or in his fondness for Miss Mary, and although Private Chadwick was something of a joker, in his way, he never could see anything to laugh at in little Billy's devotion to his mother or in his fondness for Miss Mary, and although Private Chadwick was something of a joker, in his way, he never could see anything to laugh at in little Billy's devotion to his mother or in his fondness for Miss Mary.

It was a very fortunate stroke indeed. The color slowly came back into little Billy's face and stayed there. After Private Chadwick had read the letter little Billy took it and gave it a careful inspection. His face was so full of color at what he saw that a stranger would have said that he was blushing.

"What's to be done about it?" Private Chadwick asked.

"I must go home and see mammy," replied little Billy.

Private Chadwick shook his head and continued to shake it, as if by that means he would blot out the idea.

"Can I get a furlough?" little Billy asked, with tears in his voice.

If any other conscript had asked him this question, Private Chadwick would have used violent language, but the in-

nocent and ignorance of little Billy were dear to him. "Now, whoever heard of the like of that?" he said, in a kindly tone. "There ain't but one way for a conscript to leave this camp, and that is to desert."

"I'll do it!" exclaimed little Billy. "You know what that means, I reckon," said Private Chadwick dryly. "It means that I'll see my dear mammy once more," replied little Billy. "And, after that I don't care what happens."

Private Chadwick looked at little Billy long and hard, smiling under his mustache, and then went out. He walked to the center of the encampment, where the flag-pole stood. This inoffensive affair he struck hard with his fist, exclaiming under his breath: "Lord, Lord! What makes some people such big gizzards?" The next day little Billy was missing. (To be concluded.)



"Hello! What Kind of a Pizic Is This?"

Seeing that the lad was troubled about something, he lowered his voice. "What's the matter, old man? If it's trouble, I'll do you more good to talk about it than to think about it."

For answer little Billy held out the letter. Private Chadwick took it and began to read it. Then he held it close to his eyes. "Now this is right down funny," he said, "and it's just like a real. She's gone and scratched out the best part."

Little Billy neither moved nor spoke, but turned inquiring eyes on his patron friend. "She began it: 'Dear Little Billy,'" Private Chadwick continued, "and then she went and scratched it out."

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