

“Why, what in the round world is the matter, honey?” Aunt Sally inquired, seeing the downcast look of her son.

Little Billy simply shook his head. He could not have uttered a word then had his life depended on it.

“Git up, Beck!” exclaimed Aunt Sally, slapping her old mule with the rope reins.

Major Goolsby watched the mother and son for a few moments as they drove back across the public square. His lip quivered as he remembered how, years before, Aunt Sally had nursed his dead wife. He turned to the conscript officer and straightened himself up.

“Mister” — his voice was soft, sweet, and insinuating — “Mister, how many of your kind are loafing around in the South, picking up the mainstay of widows?”

“As many as are necessary, sir,” replied the officer.

“‘As many as are necessary, sir,’” said the major, turning to his acquaintances and mimicking the tones of the officer. “Boys, that’s what they call statistics — the exact figures. Well, sir, if there’s one for every town in the Confederacy, there’s more than