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## The Story Of Little Boy Blue

by L. Frank Baum

There once lived a poor widow who supported herself and her only son by collecting the stalks of grain that had been missed by the reapers in the fields. Her little cottage was in a beautiful valley, on the bank of a river among the green hills; and although poor, she was contented with her life, for her home was pleasant and her lovely boy was a constant delight to her. He had big blue eyes, and fair golden curls, and he loved his good mother very dearly.

And so the years passed happily away till the boy was eight years old, but then the widow fell sick, and their little store of money melted gradually away.

"I don't know what we'll do for bread," she said, "for I am not yet strong enough to work, and we have no money left."

"But I can work," answered the boy; "and I 'm sure if I go to the Squire up at the Hall he will give me something to do."

Being too proud to allow her son to go to the great house in his ragged clothes, she made him a new suit out of a pretty blue dress she had herself worn in happier times, and when it was finished and the boy dressed in it, he looked as pretty as a prince in a fairy tale. Then she sent him away with a kiss to see the Squire.

It so happened that the great man was walking in his garden with his daughter Madge that morning, and was feeling in an especially happy mood, so when he suddenly looked up and saw a little boy before him, he said, kindly,

"Well, my child, what can I do for you?"

"If you please, sir," said the boy bravely, although he was frightened at meeting the Squire face to face, "I want you to give me some work to do, so that I can earn money."

"Earn money!" repeated the Squire, "why do you wish to earn money?"

"To buy food for my mother, sir. We are very poor, and since she is no longer able to work for me, I wish to work for her."

"But what can you do?" asked the Squire; "you are too small to work in the fields."

"I could earn something, sir, couldn't I?"

"You will be our shepherd," Madge said, pleasantly, "and keep the sheep out of the meadows and the cows from getting into the corn. You know, father," she continued, turning to the Squire, "it was only yesterday you said you must get a boy to tend the sheep, and this little boy can do it nicely."

"Very well," replied the Squire. Then he turned to the child and said, "Come to me in the morning, my little man, and I will give you a silver horn to blow, that you may call the sheep and the cows whenever they go astray. What is your name?"

"Oh, never mind his name, papa!" said the Squire's daughter; "I shall call him Little Boy Blue, since he is dressed in blue from head to foot, and his clothes match his eyes. And you must give him a good wage, also, for surely no Squire before ever had a prettier shepherd boy than this."

"Very good," said the Squire, cheerfully. Then Little Boy Blue thanked them both very sweetly and ran home to tell the good news to his mother.

Early the next morning Little Boy Blue was at the Hall, and the Squire's servant gave him a new silver horn, that glistened brightly in the sunshine. And then he was given charge of the sheep and the cows and told to keep them from straying into the meadows and the fields of grain.

It was not hard work, but just suited to Little Boy Blue's age, and he was watchful and vigilant and made a very good shepherd boy indeed. Therefore, the Squire's corn thrived finely and was never trampled.

Little Boy Blue was now very happy, and his mother was proud and contented and began to improve in health. But one day a great misfortune came upon them. Little Boy Blue came home one evening, but when he came to the gate, his mother was not in sight, and in answer to his call he heard a low moan of pain.

He found his mother lying upon the ground, for she had slipped and fallen, and her leg was broken! There were no neighbours, because the cottage stood all alone by the river, so the child had to support his mother back to the cottage. Then Little Boy Blue began to think what he should do next.

"Can I leave you alone while I go for the doctor, mama?" he asked, anxiously.

"Take the boat, dear," she said, "and fetch the doctor from the village. I shall be patient till you return."

Little Boy Blue paddled down the river until he came to the pretty village below. When he found the doctor and told him about his mother's misfortune, the good man promised to go with him at once.

When they arrived, the doctor quickly set and bandaged her leg and gave her some medicine.

All through the night the boy was sitting by the bedside, and when the day broke, his mother was resting easily and the pain had left her, and she told him he must go to work. He went to work, but he had not slept the whole night and so before he knew it, he was fast asleep.

The sheep strayed near the edge of the meadow and paused, waiting for the warning sound of the horn. But the silver horn was silent, and soon the cows were feeding upon the Squire's cornfield, and the sheep were enjoying themselves in the juicy grasses of the meadows.

The Squire was returning from a long ride, and when he came to the cornfield and saw the cows trampling down the grain, he became very angry.

"Little Boy Blue!" he cried; "ho! Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn!" But there was no reply. Then he discovered that the sheep were deep within the meadows, and that made him angrier still.

"Awake!" shouted the Squire, "and leave my lands, because you let the sheep and the cows stray into the fields and meadows!"

Little Boy Blue woke up at once and began to weep bitterly. But the Squire's daughter comforted him, asking, "Why did you sleep, Little Boy Blue, when you should have watched the cows and the sheep?"

"My mother has broken her leg," answered the boy, "and I did not sleep all last night, but sat by her bedside nursing her. I tried hard not to fall asleep, but could not help myself; and oh, Squire! I hope you will forgive me this once, for my poor mother's sake!"

"Come," said Mistress Madge, "lead us to your home, and we will see if we can assist your poor mother."

So they all walked down to the little cottage, and the Squire had a long talk with the poor widow. Soon a big basket of food was sent to the cottage, and Mistress Madge told her own maid go to the widow and nurse her carefully until she recovered.

Little Boy Blue did not fall asleep again at his post but watched the cows and the sheep faithfully for many years, until he grew up and had a farm of his own.

He always said his mother's accident had brought him good luck, but I think it was rather his own loving heart and his devotion to his mother that made him lucky in life. For no one is afraid to trust a boy who loves to serve and care for his mother.