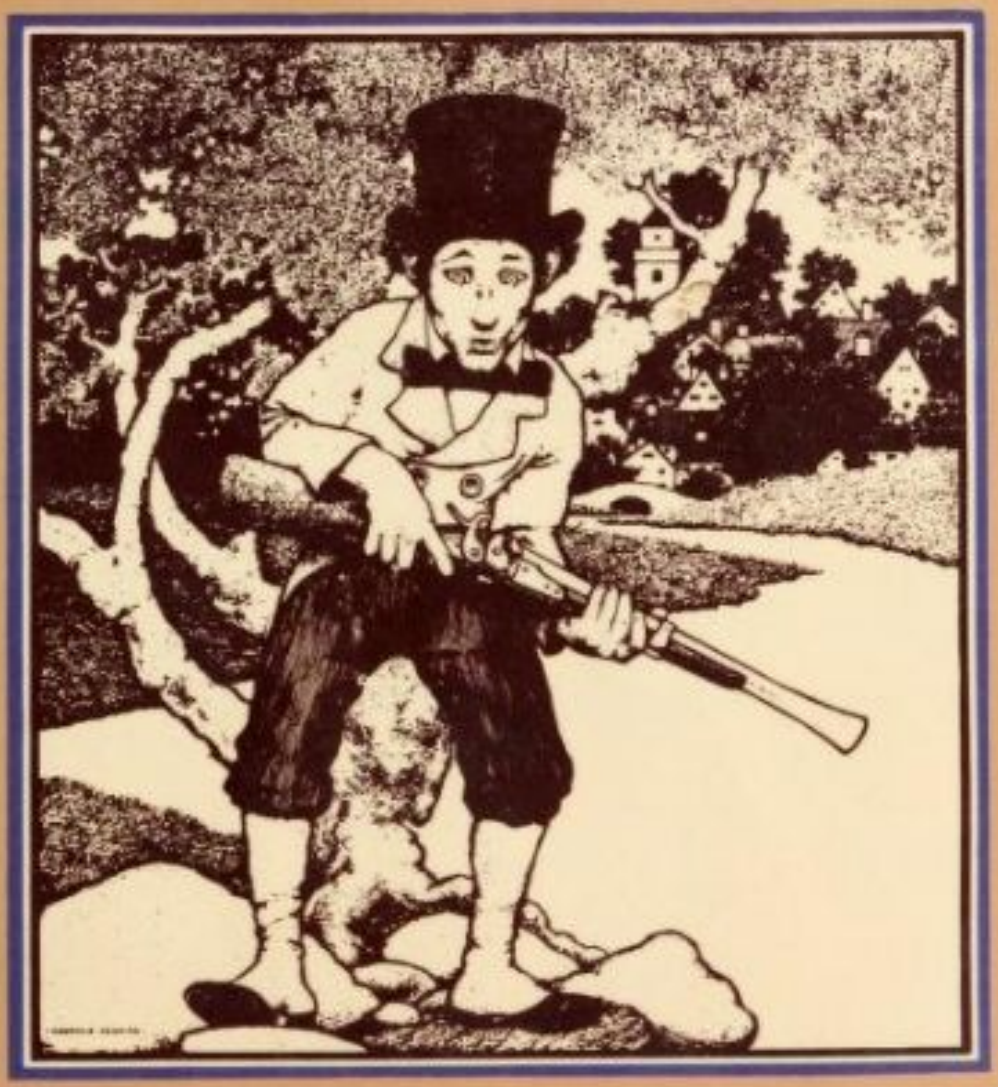
Mother Goose in Prose



by L. Frank Baum

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Sing a Song o' Sixpence

Sing a song o' sixpence, a handful of rye,
Four-and-twenty blackbirds baked in a pie;
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing,
Was n't that a dainty dish to set before the King?

IF you have never heard the legend of Gilligren and the King's pie you will scarcely understand the above verse; so I will tell you the whole story, and then you will be able to better appreciate the rhyme.

Gilligren was an orphan, and lived with an uncle and aunt who were very unkind to him. They cuffed him and scolded him upon the slightest provocation, and made his life very miserable indeed. Gilligren never rebelled against this treatment, but bore their cruelty silently and with patience, although often he longed to leave them and seek a home amongst kinder people.

It so happened that when Gilligren was twelve years old the King died, and his son was to be proclaimed King in his place, and crowned with great ceremony. People were flocking to London from all parts of the country, to witness the festivities, and the boy longed to go with them.

One evening he said to his uncle,

"If I had sixpence I could make my fortune."

"Pooh! nonsense!" exclaimed his uncle, "a sixpence is a small thing. How then could you make a fortune from it?"

"That I cannot tell you," replied Gilligren, "but if you will give me the sixpence I will go to London, and not return until I am a rich man."

"The boy is a fool!" said his uncle, with anger; but the aunt spoke up quickly.

"Give him the money and let him go," she said, "and then we shall be well rid of him and no longer be obliged to feed and clothe him at our expense."

"Well," said her husband, after a moment's thought, "here is the money; but remember, this is all I shall ever give you, and when it is gone you must not come to me for more."

"Never fear," replied Gilligren, joyfully, as he put the sixpence in his pocket, "I shall not trouble you again."

The next morning he cut a short stick to assist him in walking, and after bidding good-bye to his uncle and aunt he started upon his journey to London.

"The money will not last him two days," said the man, as he watched Gilligren go down the turnpike road, "and when it is gone he will starve to death."

"Or he may fall in with people who will treat him worse than we did," rejoined the woman, "and then he 'll wish he had never left us."

But Gilligren, nothing dismayed by thoughts of the future, trudged bravely along the London road. The world was before him, and the bright sunshine glorified the dusty road and lightened the tips of the dark green hedges that bordered his path. At the end of his pilgrimage was the great city, and he never doubted he would find therein proper work and proper pay, and much better treatment than he was accustomed to receive.

So, on he went, whistling merrily to while away the time, watching the sparrows skim over the fields, and enjoying to the full the unusual sights that met his eyes. At noon he overtook a carter, who divided with the boy his luncheon of bread and cheese, and for supper a farmer's wife gave him a bowl of milk. When it grew dark he crawled under a hedge and slept soundly until dawn.

The next day he kept steadily upon his way, and toward evening met a farmer with a wagon loaded with sacks of grain.

"Where are you going, my lad?" asked the man.

"To London," replied Gilligren, "to see the King crowned."

"Have you any money?" enquired the farmer.

"Oh yes," answered Gilligren, "I have a sixpence."

"If you will give me the sixpence," said the man, "I will give you a sack of rye for it."

"What could I do with a sack of rye?" asked Gilligren, wonderingly.

"Take it to the mill, and get it ground into flour. With the flour you could have bread baked, and that you can sell."

"That is a good idea," replied Gilligren, "so here is my sixpence, and now give me the sack of rye."

The farmer put the sixpence carefully into his pocket, and then reached under the seat of the wagon and drew out a sack, which he cast on the ground at the boy's feet.

"There is your sack of rye," he said, with a laugh.

"But the sack is empty!" remonstrated Gilligren.

"Oh, no; there is some rye in it."

"But only a handful!" said Gilligren, when he had opened the mouth of the sack and gazed within it.

"It is a sack of rye, nevertheless," replied the wicked farmer, "and I did not say how much rye there would be in the sack I would give you. Let this be a lesson to you never again to buy grain without looking into the sack!" and with that he whipped up his horses and left Gilligren standing in the road with the sack at his feet and nearly ready to cry at his loss.

"My sixpence is gone," he said to himself, "and I have received nothing in exchange but a handful of rye! How can I make my fortune with that?"

He did not despair, however, but picked up the sack and continued his way along the dusty road. Soon it became too dark to travel farther, and Gilli-

gren stepped aside into a meadow, where, lying down upon the sweet grass, he rolled the sack into a pillow for his head and prepared to sleep.

The rye that was within the sack, however, hurt his head, and he sat up and opened the sack.

"Why should I keep a handful of rye?" he thought, "It will be of no value to me at all."

So he threw out the rye upon the ground, and rolling up the sack again for a pillow, was soon sound asleep.

When he awoke the sun was shining brightly over his head and the twitter and chirping of many birds fell upon his ears. Gilligren opened his eyes and saw a large flock of blackbirds feeding upon the rye he had scattered upon the ground. So intent were they upon their feast they never noticed Gilligren at all.

He carefully unfolded the sack, and spreading wide its opening threw it quickly over the flock of blackbirds. Some escaped and flew away, but a great many were caught, and Gilligren put his eye to the sack and found he had captured four and twenty. He tied the mouth of the sack with a piece of twine that was in his pocket, and then threw the sack over his shoulder and began again his journey to London.

"I have made a good exchange, after all," he thought, "for surely four and twenty blackbirds are worth more than a handful of rye, and perhaps even more than a sixpence, if I can find anyone who wishes to buy them."

He now walked rapidly forward, and about noon entered the great city of London.

Gilligren wandered about the streets until he came to the King's palace, where there was a great concourse of people and many guards to keep intruders from the gates.

Seeing he could not enter from the front, the boy walked around to the rear of the palace and found himself near the royal kitchen, where the cooks and other servants were rushing around to hasten the preparation of the King's dinner.

Gilligren sat down upon a stone where he could watch them, and laying the sack at his feet was soon deeply interested in the strange sight.

Presently a servant in the King's livery saw him and came to his side.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, roughly.

"I am waiting to see the King," replied Gilligren.

"The King! The King never comes here," said the servant; "and neither do we allow idlers about the royal kitchen. So depart at once, or I shall be forced to call a guard to arrest you."

Gilligren arose obediently and slung his sack over his shoulder. As he did so the birds that were within began to flutter.

"What have you in the sack?" asked the servant.

"Blackbirds," replied Gilligren.

"Blackbirds!" echoed the servant, in surprise,

"well, that is very fortunate indeed. Come with me at once!" He seized the boy by the arm and drew him hastily along until they entered the great kitchen of the palace.

"Here, Mister Baker!" the man called, excitedly, "I have found your blackbirds!"

A big, fat man who was standing in the middle of the kitchen with folded arms and a look of despair upon his round, greasy face, at once came toward them and asked eagerly,

"The blackbirds? are you sure you can get them?"

"They are here already; the boy has a bag full of them."

"Give them to me," said the cook, who wore a square cap, that was shaped like a box, upon his head.

"What do you want with them?" asked Gilligren.

"I want them for a pie for the King's dinner," answered Mister Baker; "His Majesty ordered the dish, and I have hunted all over London for the blackbirds, but could not find them. Now that you have brought them, however, you have saved me my position as cook, and perhaps my head as well."

"But it would be cruel to put the beautiful birds in a pie," remonstrated Gilligren, "and I shall not give them to you for such a purpose."

"Nonsense!" replied the cook, "the King has ordered it; he is very fond of the dish."

"Still, you cannot have them," declared the boy

stoutly, "the birds are mine, and I will not have them killed."

"But what can I do?" asked the cook, in perplexity; "the King has ordered a blackbird pie, and your birds are the only blackbirds in London."

Gilligren thought deeply for a moment, and conceived what he thought to be a very good idea. If the sixpence was to make his fortune, then this was his great opportunity.

"You can have the blackbirds on two conditions," he said.

"What are they?" asked the cook.

"One is that you will not kill the birds. The other condition is that you secure me a position in the King's household."

"How can I put live birds in a pie?" enquired the cook.

"Very easily, if you make the pie big enough to hold them. You can serve the pie after the King has satisfied his hunger with other dishes, and it will amuse the company to find live birds in the pie when they expected cooked ones."

"It is a risky experiment," exclaimed the cook, "for I do not know the new King's temper. But the idea may please His Majesty, and since you will not allow me to kill the birds, it is the best thing I can do. As for your other condition, you seem to be a very bright boy, and so I will have the butler take

you as his page, and you shall stand back of the King's chair and keep the flies away while he eats."

The butler being called, and his consent secured, the cook fell to making the crusts for his novel pie, while Gilligren was taken to the servants' hall and dressed in a gorgeous suit of the King's livery.

When the dinner was served, the King kept looking for the blackbird pie, but he said nothing, and at last the pie was placed before him, its crusts looking light and brown, and sprigs of myrtle being stuck in the four corners to make it look more inviting.

Although the King had already eaten heartily, he smacked his lips when he saw this tempting dish, and picking up the carving-fork he pushed it quickly into the pie.

At once the crust fell in, and all the four and twenty blackbirds put up their heads and began to look about them. And coming from the blackness of the pie into the brilliantly lighted room they thought they were in the sunshine, and began to sing merrily, while some of the boldest hopped out upon the table or began flying around the room.

At first the good King was greatly surprised; but soon, appreciating the jest, he lay back in his chair and laughed long and merrily. And his courtiers and the fine ladies present heartily joined in the laughter, for they also were greatly amused.

Then the King called for the cook, and when

Mister Baker appeared, uncertain of his reception, and filled with many misgivings, His Majesty cried,

"Sirrah! how came you to think of putting live birds in the pie?"

The cook, fearing that the King was angry, answered,

"May it please your Majesty, it was not my thought, but the idea of the boy who stands behind your chair."

The King turned his head, and seeing Gilligren, who looked very well in his new livery, he said,

"You are a clever youth, and deserve a better position than that of a butler's lad. Hereafter you shall be one of my own pages, and if you serve me faithfully I will advance your fortunes with your deserts."

And Gilligren did serve the King faithfully, and as he grew older acquired much honor and great wealth.

"After all," he used to say, "that sixpence made my fortune. And it all came about through such a small thing as a handful of rye!"

The Story of Little Boy Blue

Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn,
The sheep 's in the meadow, the cow 's in the corn;
Where 's the little boy that minds the sheep?
He 's under the haystack, fast asleep!

THERE once lived a poor widow who supported herself and her only son by gleaning in the fields the stalks of grain that had been missed by the reapers. Her little cottage was at the foot of a beautiful valley, upon the edge of the river that wound in and out among the green hills; and although poor, she was contented with her lot, 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 was never more pleased than when she allowed him to help her with her work.

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 do n't know what we shall do for bread," she said, kissing her boy with tears in her eyes, "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."

At first the widow was reluctant to consent to this, since she loved to keep her child at her side, but finally, as nothing else could be done, she decided to let him go to see the Squire.

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. For the bright blue jacket set off his curls to good advantage, and the color just matched the blue of his eyes. His trousers were blue, also, and she took the silver buckles from her own shoes and put them on his, that he might appear the finer. And then she brushed his curls and placed his big straw hat upon them and 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 that 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, could n't I?"

His tone was so pleading that mistress Madge was unable to resist it, and even the Squire was touched. The young lady came forward and took the boy's hand in her own, and pressing back his curls, she kissed his fair cheek.

"You shall be our shepherd," she 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, "it shall be as you say, and if he is attentive and watchful he will be able to save me a good bit of trouble and so really earn his money."

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!" broke in the

Squire's daughter; "I shall call him Little Boy Blue, since he is dressed in blue from head to foot, and his dress but matches 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, as he pinched his daughter's rosy cheek; "be watchful, Little Boy Blue, and you shall be well paid."

Then Little Boy Blue thanked them both very sweetly and ran back over the hill and into the valley where his home lay nestled by the river-side, to tell the good news to his mother.

The poor widow wept tears of joy when she heard his story, and smiled when he told her that his name was to be Little Boy Blue. She knew the Squire was a kind master and would be good to her darling son.

Early the next morning Little Boy Blue was at the Hall, and the Squire's steward gave him a new silver horn, that glistened brightly in the sunshine, and a golden cord to fasten it around his neck. And then he was given charge of the sheep and the cows, and told to keep them from straying into the meadow-lands 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. His mother needed food no longer, for the Squire paid her son liberally and the Squire's daughter made a favorite of the small shepherd and loved to hear the call of his silver horn

echoing amongst the hills. Even the sheep and the cows were fond of him, and always obeyed the sound of his horn; 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. After a few weeks she became strong enough to leave the cottage and walk a little in the fields each day; but she could not go far, because her limbs were too feeble to support her long, so the most she could attempt was to walk as far as the stile to meet Little Boy Blue as he came home from work in the evening. Then she would lean on his shoulder and return to the cottage with him, and the boy was very glad he could thus support his darling mother and assist her faltering steps.

But one day a great misfortune came upon them, since it is true that no life can be so happy but that sorrow will creep in to temper it.

Little Boy Blue came homeward one evening very light of heart and whistled merrily as he walked, for he thought he should find his mother awaiting him at the stile and a good supper spread upon the table in the little cottage. But when he came to the stile his mother was not in sight, and in answer to his call a low moan of pain reached his ears.

Little Boy Blue sprang over the stile and found lying upon the ground his dear mother, her face white and drawn with suffering, and tears of anguish running

down her cheeks. For she had slipped upon the stile and fallen, and her leg was broken!

Little Boy Blue ran to the cottage for water and bathed the poor woman's face, and raised her head that she might drink. There were no neighbors, for the cottage stood all alone by the river, so the child was obliged to support his mother in his arms as best he could while she crawled painfully back to the cottage. Fortunately, it was not far, and at last she was safely laid upon her bed. Then Little Boy Blue began to think what he should do next.

"Can I leave you alone while I go for the doctor, mamma?" he asked, anxiously, as he held her clasped hands tightly in his two little ones. His mother drew him towards her and kissed him.

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

Little Boy Blue rushed away to the river bank and unfastened the little boat; and then he pulled sturdily down the river until he passed the bend and came to the pretty village below. When he had found the doctor and told of his mother's misfortune, the good man promised to attend him at once, and very soon they were seated in the boat and on their way to the cottage.

It was very dark by this time, but Little Boy Blue knew every turn and bend in the river, and the doctor helped him pull at the oars, so that at last they came

to the place where a faint light twinkled through the cottage window. They found the poor woman in much pain, but the doctor quickly set and bandaged her leg, and gave her some medicine to ease her suffering. It was nearly midnight when all was finished and the doctor was ready to start back to the village.

"Take good care of your mother," he said to the boy, "and don't worry about her, for it is not a bad break and the leg will mend nicely in time; but she will be in bed many days, and you must nurse her as well as you are able."

All through the night the boy sat by the bedside, bathing his mother's fevered brow and ministering to her wants. And when the day broke she was resting easily and the pain had left her, and she told Little Boy Blue he must go to his work.

"For," said she, "more than ever now we need the money you earn from the Squire, as my misfortune will add to the expenses of living, and we have the doctor to pay. Do not fear to leave me, for I shall rest quietly and sleep most of the time while you are away."

Little Boy Blue did not like to leave his mother all alone, but he knew of no one he could ask to stay with her; so he placed food and water by her bedside, and ate a little breakfast himself, and started off to tend his sheep.

The sun was shining brightly, and the birds sang sweetly in the trees, and the crickets chirped just as

merrily as if this great trouble had not come to Little Boy Blue to make him sad.

But he went bravely to his work, and for several hours he watched carefully; and the men at work in the fields, and the Squire's daughter, who sat embroidering upon the porch of the great house, heard often the sound of his horn as he called the straying sheep to his side.

But he had not slept the whole night, and he was tired with his long watch at his mother's bedside, and so in spite of himself the lashes would droop occasionally over his blue eyes, for he was only a child, and children feel the loss of sleep more than older people.

Still, Little Boy Blue had no intention of sleeping while he was on duty, and bravely fought against the drowsiness that was creeping over him. The sun shone very hot that day, and he walked to the shady side of a big haystack and sat down upon the ground, leaning his back against the stack.

The cows and sheep were quietly browsing near him, and he watched them earnestly for a time, listening to the singing of the birds, and the gentle tinkling of the bells upon the wethers, and the far-away songs of the reapers that the breeze brought to his ears. And before he knew it the blue eyes had closed fast, and the golden head lay back upon the hay, and Little Boy Blue was fast asleep and dreaming that his mother was well again and had come to the stile to meet him.

The sheep strayed near the edge of the meadow and paused, waiting for the warning sound of the horn. And the breeze carried the fragrance of the growing corn to the nostrils of the browsing cows and tempted them nearer and nearer to the forbidden feast. But the silver horn was silent, and before long the cows were feeding upon the Squire's pet cornfield and the sheep were enjoying themselves amidst the juicy grasses of the meadows.

The Squire himself was returning from a long, weary ride over his farms, and when he came to the cornfield and saw the cows trampling down the grain and feeding upon the golden stalks he was very angry.

"Little Boy Blue!" he cried; "ho! Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn!" But there was no reply. He rode on a way and now discovered that the sheep were deep within the meadows, and that made him more angry still.

"Here, Isaac," he said to a farmer's lad who chanced to pass by, "where is Little Boy Blue?"

"He's under the hay-stack, your honor, fast asleep!" replied Isaac with a grin, for he had passed that way and seen that the boy was lying asleep.

"Will you go and wake him?" asked the Squire; "for he must drive out the sheep and the cows before they do more damage."

"Not I," replied Isaac, "if I wake him he'll surely cry, for he is but a baby, and not fit to mind the sheep. But I myself will drive them out for your

honor," and away he ran to do so, thinking that now the Squire would give him Little Boy Blue's place, and make him the shepherd boy, for Isaac had long coveted the position.

The Squire's daughter, hearing the angry tones of her father's voice, now came out to see what was amiss, and when she heard that Little Boy Blue had failed in his trust she was deeply grieved, for she had loved the child for his pretty ways.

The Squire dismounted from his horse and came to where the boy was lying.

"Awake!" said he, shaking him by the shoulder, "and depart from my lands, for you have betrayed my trust, and let the sheep and the cows stray into the fields and meadows!"

Little Boy Blue started up at once and rubbed his eyes; and then he did as Isaac prophesied, and began to weep bitterly, for his heart was sore that he had failed in his duty to the good Squire and so forfeited his confidence.

But the Squire's daughter was moved by the child's tears, so she took him upon her lap and 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, between his sobs, "and I did not sleep all last night, but sat by her bedside nursing her. And 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!"

"Where does your mother live?" asked the Squire, in a kindly tone, for he had already forgiven Little Boy Blue.

"In the cottage down by the river," answered the child; "and she is all alone, for there is no one near to help us in our trouble."

"Come," said Mistress Madge, rising to her feet and taking his hand; "lead us to your home, and we will see if we cannot assist your poor mother."

So the Squire and his daughter and Little Boy Blue all walked down to the little cottage, and the Squire had a long talk with the poor widow. And that same day a big basket of dainties was sent to the cottage, and Mistress Madge bade her own maid go to the widow and nurse her carefully until she recovered.

So that after all Little Boy Blue did more for his dear mother by falling asleep than he could had he kept wide awake; for after his mother was well again the Squire gave them a pretty cottage to live in very near to the great house itself, and the Squire's daughter was ever afterward their good friend, and saw that they wanted for no comforts of life.

And 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 to manhood 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 friends. For no one is afraid to trust a boy who loves to serve and care for his mother.

The Cat and the Fiddle

Hey, diddle, diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon!
The little dog laughed
To see such sport,
And the dish ran off with the spoon!

PERHAPS you think this verse is all nonsense, and that the things it mentions could never have happened; but they did happen, as you will understand when I have explained them all to you clearly.

Little Bobby was the only son of a small farmer who lived out of town upon a country road. Bobby's mother looked after the house and Bobby's father took care of the farm, and Bobby himself, who was not very big, helped them both as much as he was able.

It was lonely upon the farm, especially when his father and mother were both busy at work, but the boy had one way to amuse himself that served to pass many an hour when he would not otherwise have known what to do. He was very fond of music, and his father one day brought him from the town a small fiddle, or violin, which he soon learned to play upon. I don't suppose he was a very fine musician, but the

tunes he played pleased himself, as well as his father and mother, and Bobby's fiddle soon became his constant companion.

One day in the warm summer the farmer and his wife determined to drive to the town to sell their butter and eggs and bring back some groceries in exchange for them, and while they were gone Bobby was to be left alone.

"We shall not be back till late in the evening," said his mother, "for the weather is too warm to drive very fast. But I have left you a dish of bread and milk for your supper, and you must be a good boy and amuse yourself with your fiddle until we return."

Bobby promised to be good and look after the house, and then his father and mother climbed into the wagon and drove away to the town.

The boy was not entirely alone, for there was the big black tabby-cat lying upon the floor in the kitchen, and the little yellow dog barking at the wagon as it drove away, and the big moolie-cow lowing in the pasture down by the brook. Animals are often very good company, and Bobby did not feel nearly as lonely as he would had there been no living thing about the house.

Besides he had some work to do in the garden, pulling up the weeds that grew thick in the carrot-bed, and when the last faint sounds of the wheels had died away he went into the garden and began his task.

The little dog went too, for dogs love to be with

people and to watch what is going on; and he sat down near Bobby and cocked up his ears and wagged his tail and seemed to take a great interest in the weeding. Once in a while he would rush away to chase a butterfly or bark at a beetle that crawled through the garden, but he always came back to the boy and kept near his side.

By and by the cat, which found it lonely in the big, empty kitchen, now that Bobby's mother was gone, came walking into the garden also, and lay down upon a path in the sunshine and lazily watched the boy at his work. The dog and the cat were good friends, having lived together so long that they did not care to fight each other. To be sure Towser, as the little dog was called, sometimes tried to tease pussy, being himself very mischievous; but when the cat put out her sharp claws and showed her teeth, Towser, like a wise little dog, quickly ran away, and so they managed to get along in a friendly manner.

By the time the carrot-bed was all weeded, the sun was sinking behind the edge of the forest and the new moon rising in the east, and now Bobby began to feel hungry and went into the house for his dish of bread and milk.

"I think I 'll take my supper down to the brook," he said to himself, "and sit upon the grassy bank while I eat it. And I 'll take my fiddle, too, and play upon it to pass the time until father and mother come home."

It was a good idea, for down by the brook it was cool and pleasant; so Bobby took his fiddle under his arm and carried his dish of bread and milk down to the bank that sloped to the edge of the brook. It was rather a steep bank, but Bobby sat upon the edge, and placing his fiddle beside him, leaned against a tree and began to eat his supper.

The little dog had followed at his heels, and the cat also came slowly walking after him, and as Bobby ate, they sat one on either side of him and looked earnestly into his face as if they too were hungry. So he threw some of the bread to Towser, who grabbed it eagerly and swallowed it in the twinkling of an eye. And Bobby left some of the milk in the dish for the cat, also, and she came lazily up and drank it in a dainty, sober fashion, and licked both the dish and spoon until no drop of the milk was left.

Then Bobby picked up his fiddle and tuned it and began to play some of the pretty tunes he knew. And while he played he watched the moon rise higher and higher until it was reflected in the smooth, still water of the brook. Indeed, Bobby could not tell which was the plainest to see, the moon in the sky or the moon in the water. The little dog lay quietly on one side of him, and the cat softly purred upon the other, and even the moolie-cow was attracted by the music and wandered near until she was browsing the grass at the edge of the brook.

After a time, when Bobby had played all the tunes

he knew, he laid the fiddle down beside him, near to where the cat slept, and then he lay down upon the bank and began to think.

It is very hard to think long upon a dreamy summer night without falling asleep, and very soon Bobby's eyes closed and he forgot all about the dog and the cat and the cow and the fiddle, and dreamed he was Jack the Giant Killer and was just about to slay the biggest giant in the world.

And while he dreamed, the cat sat up and yawned and stretched herself, and then began wagging her long tail from side to side and watching the moon that was reflected in the water.

But the fiddle lay just behind her, and as she moved her tail, she drew it between the strings of the fiddle, where it caught fast. Then she gave her tail a jerk and pulled the fiddle against the tree, which made a loud noise. This frightened the cat greatly, and not knowing what was the matter with her tail, she started to run as fast as she could. But still the fiddle clung to her tail, and at every step it bounded along and made such a noise that she screamed with terror. And in her fright she ran straight towards the cow, which, seeing a black streak coming at her, and hearing the racket made by the fiddle, became also frightened and made such a jump to get out of the way that she jumped right across the brook, leaping over the very spot where the moon shone in the water!

Bobby had been awakened by the noise, and opened his eyes in time to see the cow jump; and at first it seemed to him that she had actually jumped over the moon in the sky, instead of the one in the brook.

The dog was delighted at the sudden excitement caused by the cat, and ran barking and dancing along the bank, so that he presently knocked against the dish, and behold! it slid down the bank, carrying the spoon with it, and fell with a splash into the water of the brook.

As soon as Bobby recovered from his surprise he ran after the cat, which had raced to the house, and soon came to where the fiddle lay upon the ground, it having at last dropped from the cat's tail. He examined it carefully, and was glad to find it was not hurt, in spite of its rough usage. And then he had to go across the brook and drive the cow back over the little bridge, and also to roll up his sleeve and reach into the water to recover the dish and the spoon.

Then he went back to the house and lighted a lamp, and sat down to compose a new tune before his father and mother returned.

The cat had recovered from her fright and lay quietly under the stove, and Towser sat upon the floor panting, with his mouth wide open, and looking so comical that Bobby thought he was actually laughing at the whole occurrence.

The Cat and the Fiddle

And these were the words to the tune that Bobby composed that night:

Hey, diddle, diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon!
The little dog laughed
To see such sport,
And the dish ran away with the spoon!

The Black Sheep

Black sheep, black sheep, have you any wool?
Yes, my little master, three bags full;
One for my master and one for his dame,
And one for the little boy that lives in the lane.

IT was a bright spring day, and the sun shone very warm and pleasant over the pastures, where the new grass was growing so juicy and tender that all the sheep thought they had never tasted anything so delicious.

The sheep had had a strange experience that morning, for the farmer had taken them down to the brook and washed them, and then he tied their legs together and laid them on the grass and clipped all the heavy, soft wool from their bodies with a great pair of shears.

The sheep did not like this very well, for every once in a while the shears would pull the wool and hurt them; and when they were sheared they felt very strange, for it was almost as if someone took off all your clothes and let you run around naked. None of them were in a very good temper this morning, although the sun shone so warmly and the grass was so sweet, and as they watched the farmer and his man

carry their wool up to the house in great bags, the old ram said, crossly,

"I hope they are satisfied, now that they have stolen from us all our soft, warm fleece."

"What are they going to do with it?" asked one of the sheep.

"Oh, they will spin it into threads and make coats for the men and dresses for the women. For men are such strange creatures that no wool grows on them at all, and that is why they selfishly rob us of our fleece that they may cover their own skinny bodies!"

"It must be horrid to be a man," said the Black Sheep, "and not to have any wool grow on you at all. I 'm sorry for that little boy that lives in the lane, for he will never be able to keep warm unless we give him some of our wool."

"But what a shame it is," continued the ram, "for the farmer to steal all the wool from us when we have taken all the trouble to grow it!"

"I do n't mind," bleated a young lamb named Frisky, as it kicked up its heels and gambolled about upon the grass; "it 's nice to have all that heavy wool cut off my back, for I sha' n't have to carry it around wherever I go."

"Oh, indeed!" sneered the ram, "you like it, do you? Have you any idea what you look like, all sheared down to your skin? How would you like to have someone come along and see you, now that you are all head and legs?"

"Oh, I would n't mind," said the lamb again; "I shall grow more wool by winter-time, and I 'm sure I do n't look any worse than you do."

Some of the sheep looked at the ram and began to titter, for he was old and thin, and looked very comical indeed without any wool. And this made him so angry that he went off by himself and began eating grass, and would not speak to the others at all.

"I do n't know why sheep should feel badly about having their fleeces cut," remarked the Black Sheep, thoughtfully, "for the farmer is very kind to us, and so is his dame, and I am glad my wool serves to keep them warm in the winter. For before the snow comes our wool will grow out again, and we shall not be any the worse for our loss."

"What do those people who have n't any sheep do for clothes?" asked the lamb.

"I 'm sure I do n't know. They must nearly freeze in the winter. Perhaps the ram can tell us."

But the ram was still angry, and refused to say anything, so the sheep stopped talking and began to scatter over the pasture and eat the tender, new grass.

By and by the Black Sheep wandered near the lane, and looking up, saw the little boy watching it through the bars.

"Good morning, Black Sheep," said the boy; "why do you look so funny this morning?"

"They have cut off my wool," answered the sheep.

"What will they do with it, Black Sheep?" enquired the little boy.

"They will make coats of it, to keep themselves warm."

"I wish I had some wool," said the boy, "for I need a new coat very badly, and mamma is so poor she cannot buy me one."

"That is too bad," replied the Black Sheep; "but I shall have more wool by and by, and then I will give you a bagful to make a new coat from."

"Will you really?" asked the boy, looking very much pleased.

"Indeed I will," answered the sheep, "for you are always kind and have a pleasant word for me. So you watch until my wool grows again, and then you shall have your share of it."

"Oh, thank you!" said the boy, and he ran away to tell his mother what the Black Sheep had said.

When the farmer came into the field again the Black Sheep said to him,

"Master, how many bags of wool did you cut from my back?"

"Two bags full," replied the farmer; "and it was very nice wool indeed."

"If I grow three bags full the next time, may I have one bag for myself?" asked the sheep.

"Why, what could you do with a bag of wool?" questioned the farmer.

"I want to give it to the little boy that lives in the lane. He is very poor and needs a new coat."

"Very well," answered the master; "if you can grow three bags full I will give one to the little boy."

So the Black Sheep began to grow wool, and tried in every way to grow the finest and heaviest fleece in all the flock. She always lay in the sunniest part of the pastures, and drank from the clearest part of the brook, and ate only the young and juicy shoots of grass and the tenderest of the sheep-sorrel. And each day the little boy came to the bars and looked at the sheep and enquired how the wool was growing.

"I am getting along finely," the Black Sheep would answer, "for not one sheep in the pasture has so much wool as I have grown already."

"Can I do anything to help you?" asked the little boy.

"Not that I think of," replied the sheep, "unless you could get me a little salt. I believe salt helps the wool to grow."

So the boy ran to the house and begged his mother for a handful of salt, and then he came back to the bars, where the Black Sheep licked it out of his hand.

Day by day the wool on the sheep grew longer and longer, and even the old ram noticed it and said,

"You are foolish to grow so much wool, for the farmer will cut it all off, and it will do you no good. Now I am growing just as little as possible, for since

he steals what I have I am determined he shall get very little wool from my back."

The Black Sheep did not reply to this, for she thought the old ram very ill-tempered and selfish, and believed he was doing wrong not to grow more wool.

Finally the time came to shear the sheep again, and the farmer and his man came into the pasture to look at them, and were surprised to see what a fine, big fleece the Black Sheep had grown.

"There will be three bagsful at the least," said the master, "and I will keep my promise and give one to the little boy in the lane. But, my goodness! how scraggly and poor the old ram looks. There is scarcely any wool on him at all. I think I must sell him to the butcher!"

And, in truth, although the ram kicked and struggled and bleated with rage, they tied his legs and put him into the cart and carried him away to the butcher. And that was the last the sheep ever saw of him.

But the Black Sheep ran up to the bars by the lane and waited with a glad heart till the little boy came. When he saw the sheep waiting for him he asked,

"Black Sheep, Black Sheep, have you any wool?"

And the sheep replied,

"Yes my little master, three bags full!"

"That is fine!" said the boy; "but who are the three bags for?"

"One for my master, one for his dame,
And one for the little boy that lives in the lane."

"Thank you, Black Sheep," said the little boy; "you are very kind, and I shall always think of you when I wear my new coat."

The next day the sheep were all sheared, and the Black Sheep's fleece made three big bagsful. The farmer kept his promise and carried one bag to the little boy that lived in the lane, and the wool was so soft and so heavy that there was enough not only for the new coat, but to make his mother a warm dress as well.

The Black Sheep was very proud and happy when the mother and her little boy came down to the bars and showed the new clothes that had been made from the wool.

"This pays me for all my trouble," said the Black Sheep, and the little boy reached his hand through the bars and patted her gently upon the head.