

## LITTLE STORIES FOR LITTLE PEOPLE

## The Boy Housekeeper

By Aunt Julia

HEN MEYNARDO came home from school one morning, he found Mother washing the baby's diapers. He knew that Mother was still sick because the baby was only a week old.

"Why, Mother, why are you working?" Mey asked, his eyes opened wide with surprise.

"The maid has left," Mother answered.

Eight-year old Mey looked about the house. Father was at work. Sister Nora was still at school. There was no fire on the stove.

"We have no lunch yet, have we mother?"

"I'll cook the rice as soon as I am through with this," Mother answered hurriedly.

"Please sit down, Mother; here, on this chair. Just watch me and tell me what to do." Meynardo carried a chair to Mother.

"How can you do all the work, my boy? Don't you worry. I don't believe a little work will make me sick."

"But Father would not let you work. Do let me try, Mother."

Mother was really tired. She sat down and smiled at Mey.

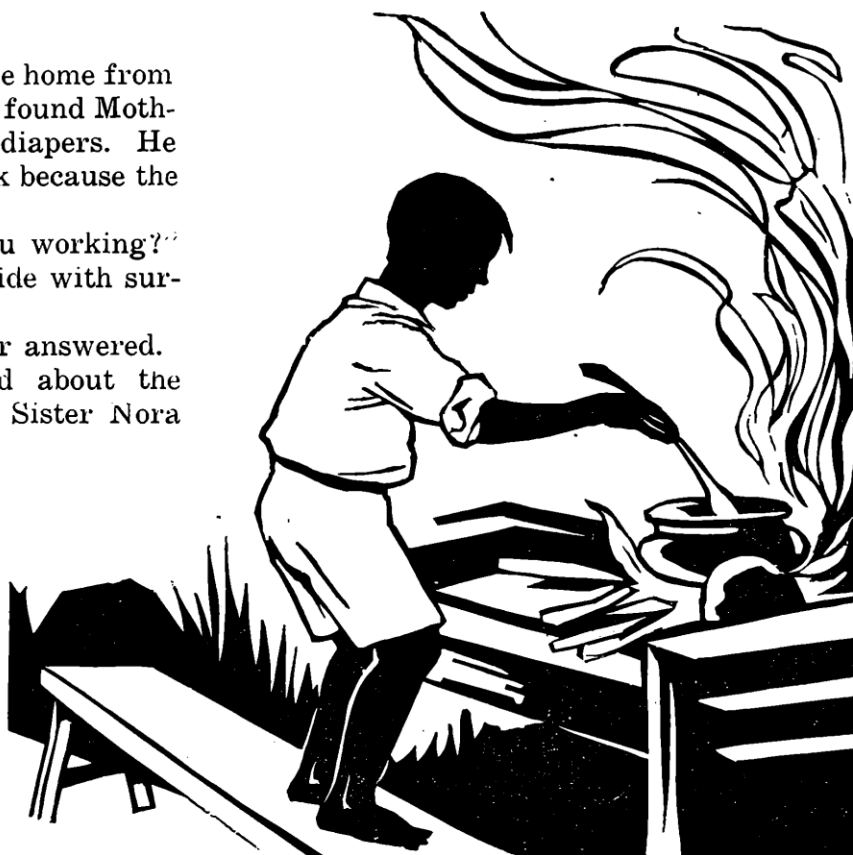
"The diapers are now clean," Mother said, panting hard. "They must be hung out on the line."

Mey carried the wash basin on his head and went out. He hung every piece neatly and held it in place with a pair of clothespins.

"Uha! Uha!"

"Mother, you must go to the baby now. I know what to do."

"Do you?" Mother asked with twinkling eyes. And she made her way slowly to the



bedroom.

Once alone, Mey sat on a stool. He began to think. He recalled what the maid used to do. In a moment his face brightened up. Humming the tune of the "Isle of Capri," he picked up the wash pan and measured two chupas of rice. He used the empty can of Milkmaid condensed milk for measuring. He sorted the palay and the little stones and threw them away. He then washed the rice by rubbing the grains between his palms. After washing the rice in two waters, he put the clean rice in a pot and poured a cup of water over it. Walking on tiptoe into the room, he took the pot to his mother.

"Mother," he whispered, "is the water enough?"

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# THE BOY HOUSEKEEPER

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"Yes, just right," Mother answered.

Mey built the fire and placed the pot on the stove. Singing loudly, he sat on a stool in front of the stove. As he watched the fire, he swung himself on the stool.

"Bog!" It was the sound of something heavy that had fallen down.

"My son, what is that?" shouted Mother running out.

"Nothing, Mother. I was just practicing leap frog over this stool." Meynardo picked up the stool and put it in the corner. He limped a little as he walked.

"Mother, the rice is boiling, look!"

But Mother was still out of breath with fright.

"What else, Mother? I want the lunch prepared before Father and Sister come home."

"I want that broiled," Mother said pointing to a milkfish wrapped in banana leaf. "But your embers are not enough."

"I shall ask *Aling Chelang* for some. She has live coals all day for her tea and *bibingca*."

Meynardo rushed down the bamboo stairs before Mother could say anything. Soon he was back. He was carrying a coconut shell full of red hot embers. After pouring them into the stove, he turned to Mother.

"Look!" he said proudly "I asked the Chinese *tienda* keeper for a few cloves of garlic. Father likes garlic with vinegar."

After spreading the coals, Mey-

nardo placed the broiler over them and put the fish on it.

"Mother, please go back to the baby. I know what to do." And he pushed Mother gently out of the kitchen.

When Father and Sister came home shortly after twelve o'clock, lunch was announced right away.

As Father sat at the table, he looked around. "Where is the maid?" he asked a little angrily.

"She left this morning," Mother told him.

"And who prepared the lunch? Did you work, Ibang?"

"No, dear. Your boy did all the work."

"Who? Mey?" Father was very much surprised.

"Yes, Mey took the place of the maid."

"I see. That is the reason why the fish is broiled so nicely. I am very proud of my boy housekeeper."