

Mr Spigot Forgets



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A Story of Inkwell School

Mr Gonightly was in a terrible tizz.

The Headmaster stormed down the corridors of Inkwell School with his long black cloak swirling behind him.

If he saw any pupils standing still, he shouted "Move!"

If he saw anybody moving, he yelled, "Stand still!"

He charged into Mr Spigot's class and glowered at the children.

"You'd better not let me down!" he roared. The children were bewildered.

Josh put up his hand. "Please sir, what do you mean?" he asked.

Mr Gonightly whirled round and glared at Mr Spigot. "Haven't you told them?"

"Told them what?" said Mr Spigot.

"You've forgotten, haven't you?" cried Mr Gonightly.

"Forgotten what?" said Mr Spigot.

"I don't believe this!" yelled Mr Gonightly, clamping his hands to his head. If he had any hair he would have torn it out.

But the children in Class 4 could believe it all too well; for Mr Spigot had a truly terrible memory.

Although their teacher was a very clever man, he forgot dozens of things a day. He never forgot facts like the capital of Romania or the square root of 169 – he always remembered *those*.

Mr Spigot knew fifteen languages and the chemical formula for a cashew nut. He could remember reams of poetry and the dates of a hundred kings.

But his head was so full of this amazing knowledge that there was no room for the everyday stuff. He couldn't remember anything ordinary: like what day it was, and where the spelling books were kept, and even, on occasion, his own name.

Because he was a kind and patient teacher, the children took great care of him. They went to fetch him from the staffroom after break, in case he got lost on his way back to the class. They stuck a huge timetable on the wall so that they could point to it whenever Mr Spigot forgot important things like lunchtime or PE.

At the end of each day they found his coat and saw him to the bus stop. They put him on the right bus and told the driver where to let him off. Mrs Spigot would be waiting for him at the other end.

So today, they were not at all surprised to learn that Mr Spigot had forgotten something.

"Please, Mr Gonightly," asked Joshua, "what should he have told us?"

"About the school inspector!" shouted the Headmaster. "Miss Pinfold, the chief inspector who is waiting in my office at this very moment, and who is about to come to this class to inspect you! So *don't let me down!*"

"Of course not," Mr Spigot said with dignity. "My class is always very well-prepared."

"We have to be," muttered Annabelle to Josh.

"And what lesson are you teaching them this morning?" snapped Mr Gonightly.

"Um..." said Mr Spigot.

"History, sir," said Lee. "We're doing Tudors."

"Then I hope you know enough about them to impress the inspector!"

"My class is always very well-informed," said Mr Spigot proudly.

This was true. Mr Spigot stuffed the children's brains with so many fascinating facts that they could almost feel their skulls expanding daily, like balloons.

"I hope so!" growled Mr Gonightly. "All right. I'll send her over."

He swept out of the classroom – luckily, too fast to hear Mr Spigot ask bemusedly: "Send who?"

Five minutes later the chief inspector appeared at the classroom door. She wore a sludge-green suit and a very stern expression. Mr Spigot stared at her blankly.

"I am Miss Pinfold," she informed him frostily, waving a clipboard at him.

Quickly Josh said in a loud voice, "Maybe the *school inspector* would like to sit in my place, sir."

"Ah! Good idea," said Mr Spigot. "Welcome to Class...er..."

"Four," said Lee.

Miss Pinfold sat in Josh's seat and glanced out of the window. She frowned.

"What on earth is that in the middle of your playground?"

"That's the Inkwell," Mr Spigot said. "It's always been there. It was there before the school was built."

"Well, it looks extremely dangerous," announced Miss Pinfold.

"Oh, it is! It is!" said Mr Spigot with feeling.

"Indeed? It should be filled in," snapped Miss Pinfold, and she wrote busily on her clipboard.

"It's historic," said Josh. "That's why we're so keen on *history* in this class. We can't wait for our *history lesson*."

"Ah, yes! Now, where were we?" Mr Spigot scratched his head.

"Please can you tell us some more about the Tudors, sir?" asked Annabelle.

“Of course. Let me explain why Henry the Eighth decided to have so many wives.”

The class started to relax; but not for long.

“I’ll write the wives’ names down on the um... um...”

“Whiteboard,” supplied Josh.

“Whiteboard, that’s right. Um...”

“It’s over there, sir.”

“Oh, yes! So it is. Now then, how do I...”

By the time Millie had shown Mr Spigot how the whiteboard worked, and Lee had found the pen, and Josh had reminded him to use it the other way around, Mr Spigot had totally lost his thread.

“Tudors, Sir,” said Millie helpfully.

But Mr Spigot was gazing at the inspector with a puzzled expression.

“That’s Miss Pinfold,” whispered Lee. “She’s come here to inspect us.”

“My goodness, why didn’t you say so?” cried Mr Spigot, and he dropped the whiteboard pen. “Stand up, everybody!” he commanded.

The children all jumped to their feet.

“Now line up! Eldest first. Open your mouths. Wider! *Wider!*”

Mr Spigot turned to the inspector, beaming. “Ready!” he said.

“Ready for what?” asked Miss Pinfold, startled.

“Ready for you to inspect their teeth! Or would you rather check their eyes first?”

“Their *teeth*?” repeated Miss Pinfold. “Their *eyes*?” Her own eyes bulged like ping-pong balls.

“Oh, sorry! Of course, first you’ll want to look for nits.”

“*Nits*?” Miss Pinfold’s nostrils flared indignantly.

Josh tugged at Mr Spigot's sleeve. "She's not the nurse!" he hissed. "She doesn't want to see our teeth or eyes or hair! She's come here to inspect the classroom."

"Oh, silly me!" Mr Spigot chuckled. "Just wait there a minute!" He dashed into his big cupboard.

There was a loud clattering and banging. Then Mr Spigot emerged carrying the overhead projector, three glue guns and a kettle. He dumped the lot on to Miss Pinfold's knee.

"There you are! Do you need a screwdriver?"

"A *what?*" Miss Pinfold's eyebrows shot up and disappeared beneath her iron-grey hair.

"To test them. That's what the last health and safety inspector did!"

Josh tugged at Mr Spigot's sleeve again. "She's not here to inspect equipment," he muttered. "She's here to inspect *you!*"

Mr Spigot looked down, worried. "Why? Is my shirt on back to front? Is there egg on my tie?"

Miss Pinfold cleared her throat. "I," she announced icily, "am Chief Inspector Pinfold."

Mr Spigot gasped. He leapt backwards into the cupboard where she could not see him. Crouching there, he beckoned frantically at Josh until Josh followed him in.

"Help!" whispered Mr Spigot hoarsely. "They must have found me out!"

"Who?" said Josh.

"The police! You heard her – she's the chief inspector! Did I park on a double yellow line, or crash into an ice-cream van? I can't remember!"

"Mr Spigot," said Josh patiently, "you don't have a car."

"Then it must be something else!"

“It’s to do with the school.”

“Oh, help,” said Mr Spigot. “Then it’s even worse than I thought.”

“But, Mr Sp—”

“Someone must have seen me stealing from the staffroom biscuit tin!”

“But—”

“There’s nothing for it,” declared Mr Spigot. “I shall have to go on the run.”

“No,” said Joshua firmly. “What you have to do is to distract her. Then she’ll forget all about stolen biscuits.”

“How can I do that?” begged Mr Spigot, wringing his hands.

“By telling her everything you know about the Tudors! And make it as fascinating as you can.”

Mr Spigot brightened. “All right! It’s worth a try.”

And, bounding out of the cupboard like a jack-in-the-box, he shouted, “Now then! Who wants to be Anne Boleyn and have their head cut off?”

All the class put their hands up. They were desperate to have their heads cut off if it would make the inspector smile.

“Annabelle – you be the executioner,” decided Mr Spigot. “The metre rule can be your sword.”

So the class began to act out Henry the Eighth and his six wives. The children’s brains were brimming with so much knowledge that they could easily fill their play with facts and dates and quotes from Shakespeare.

And soon the inspector was, as they had hoped, smiling.

However, when Mr Spigot told Annabelle exactly how to cut the queen’s head off, the inspector was not smiling quite so widely.

Once he got onto other Tudor punishments, she stopped smiling altogether.

And by the time he had taught them about burning, branding and death by crushing, she looked quite green.

But Mr Spigot had no intention of letting up, in case she decided to arrest him. He was just describing how to put a traitor's head on a spike when Mr Gonightly put his own head round the door.

"Everything all right here?" he enquired with a smirk at the Inspector. "I trust you find the class both well-prepared and well-informed."

"Rather too well informed," said Miss Pinfold. "If you'll just excuse me." Clutching her handkerchief to her mouth, she fled from the room.

"What on earth have you been teaching?" demanded Mr Gonightly.

"I thought a Chief Inspector would be interested in the history of crime," explained Mr Spigot.

"But she's run away! I hope you haven't let me down!" snarled Mr Gonightly.

"It was a fascinating lesson," said Millie.

"She's just not feeling very well," said Josh.

But Annabelle, looking through the window, cried out, "She's gone into the playground! What's she doing?" They all hurried to the window to see.

Miss Pinfold was marching across the playground. She reached the Inkwell and began to drag away the wire mesh that covered its dark opening.

"No!" cried Mr Spigot in horror.

“She mustn’t touch the Inkwell!” Mr Gonightly dashed out of the room.

Mr Spigot threw open the window and shouted, “*Stop!* Don’t do it!”

But Miss Pinfold ignored him. She was peering down into the well.

Mr Spigot gave a strangled cry. He spun round, grabbed the metre rule and hurled it through the window at Miss Pinfold.

The ruler flew across the playground like a javelin. It hit her on the neck. Miss Pinfold dropped her clipboard down the well and keeled over backwards.

Millie was aghast. “You just executed Miss Pinfold!” she gasped.

“Nonsense,” said Mr Spigot. Indeed, the inspector was already staggering to her feet and looking around for her lost clipboard.

Then Mr Gonightly came loping across the playground with his long black cloak flapping behind him, looking like a giant crow.

Miss Pinfold glared at him.

“I will be giving this school a terrible report!” she shouted. “Your teacher is crazy, and this well is dangerous! I will be closing this school down – just as soon as I get my clipboard back with all my notes on it!”

“I’m afraid we can’t get it back,” said Mr Gonightly, cringing abjectly. “The Inkwell is bottomless. Your clipboard’s gone for ever.”

“What rubbish! We have a team to deal with this sort of thing. You’ll be hearing from them!” snapped Miss Pinfold. She stamped away to her car and drove off with a screech of tyres.

Mr Gonightly bounded over to the window and glared in at the class.

“I thought as much! *You’ve let me down!*” he yelled.

“Let you down where?” asked Mr Spigot, puzzled. “Down the Inkwell? I would never do that. The tortoise wouldn’t like it.”

Mr Gonightly turned pale. For a moment he looked terribly afraid. “*Don’t mention the tortoise!*” he hissed, and with his black cloak whirling tornado-like around him, he strode away.

The children looked at each other.

“Please sir,” said Josh, “what was that about a tortoise?”

Annabelle rolled her eyes. “Wait for it. *What tortoise?*” she muttered.

But Mr Spigot did not say *What tortoise?* Instead he coughed and looked uncomfortable.

“I cannot lie to you,” he said at last. “But I cannot tell you about the tortoise either.”

“Why not?”

“Because... I forget why not,” said Mr Spigot.

“Well, it’s not important right now,” said Josh. “We need to work out what do about Miss Pinfold and her clipboard.”

“It’s gone for ever,” said Annabelle. “Mr Gonightly was right. Everyone knows that the Inkwell is bottomless.” This was true. Anything dropped down there was never seen again.

All the same, at playtime Josh and the others went over to the Inkwell and peered down into its black, silent depths.

Josh dropped a pebble in, and listened for the sound of it landing. That sound never came. Lee shone a torch in, but its beam shone on nothing but slimy, smooth, stone walls.

Millie let down a weight tied to the end of a huge ball of string. Yet the string ran out before the weight touched down at the bottom of the well.

“That clipboard’s really gone for good,” sighed Josh.

“Excellent!” said Annabelle. “If Miss Pinfold can’t get her notes back, she can’t make her report.”

“Oh, we’ll get the notes back,” growled a deep voice behind the children.

They turned round. Two burly, scowling men stood there with coils of rope over their shoulders.

“Who are you?”

“We are the school inspectorate pot-holing team,” declared one of them with a leer. “We are the experts in tracking down hidden head teachers, buried books and lost ledgers.”

“We’ve crawled through caverns two miles underground in search of a runaway teacher!” scoffed the other. “He couldn’t hide from *us*. We’re not baffled by your puny little well!”

“Let’s find that clipboard!” And the pair of them began to uncoil ropes and lay out harnesses.

“Don’t worry. They haven’t got a hope,” murmured Annabelle as they watched the pot-holers get to work. One of them strapped himself into a harness and was lowered by the other on a long rope down the well.

Only a minute later there was a shout. “Got it! Pull me up!”

“However did you reach it?” asked Josh in astonishment.

“Easy!” sneered the burly man, climbing out of the well and waving a clipboard at him. “It was caught on a hook a few metres down.”

“But how...” Josh’s voice trailed away. He was sure that when they shone the torch in there, nothing had been visible. No hook; and certainly no clipboard. He didn’t know what to think.

“Now, let’s see what Miss Pinfold wrote!” announced the pot-holer gleefully. “Nothing good, I hope.” But as he read the notes on the clipboard, a frown clouded his face.

“What? *Inkwell School is extremely wonderful in all respects?* That’s not what she said to us!”

His companion read over his shoulder. “*The children’s behaviour is exquisite and their teacher is first-rate?* She didn’t tell us that!”

“But it looks like her handwriting...” The two men stared at each other, bewildered.

“I expect she got confused,” said Josh, “when she, er, fell over by the well. Maybe she banged her head.”

“She must have! Because according to her notes, *this magnificent school should not be changed in any way, especially the well which is of great importance.* Bother!”

With a snort, the pot-holer stuck the clipboard under one arm and a coil of rope over the other. “What a pity. It looks like your school is safe after all,” he grunted. The pair of them trudged disconsolately away.

“What happened to those notes?” Josh wondered. “I’m sure Miss Pinfold can’t have written that!”

“Who cares?” said Annabelle. “Let’s go and tell Mr Spigot!”

Running into school, they banged on the staffroom door and burst in without waiting for an answer.

“Mr Spigot!”

Their teacher was alone with his hand in the biscuit tin. He spun round in alarm and dropped a biscuit.

“Mr Spigot, the inspectorate pot-holers came and used their ropes and found the clipboard, and it only said nice things!” cried Lee.

Mr Spigot looked totally bemused. “Pot-holers? Clipboard?”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Josh. “The main thing is that Inkwell School is safe!”

“I’ve no idea what you are talking about,” sighed Mr Spigot.
“But I can see that you are very happy. There is obviously cause for celebration: am I right?”

“Oh, yes!”

“Good. Then we will celebrate in fitting style. I will do what I do best, and forget all about our lessons for the afternoon.”

“Yippee!”

“And if I forget about forgetting them,” their teacher added with a kindly smile, “just remind me to remember to forget!”

The End

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