

# THE BOY WHO FORGOT

KEYWORD: Secret forces.

There was once a little boy, a bright little lad, full of life and always good-natured. All his playmates liked him ever so much, for he could tell the nicest stories of adventure and knew so many interesting things about far-away countries, and strange people, and Nature Spirits, and all sorts of things that the rest of them knew nothing about.

But this little boy was very forgetful. It seemed as though he never, never could remember things. He would be late to breakfast almost every day, and then when he did finally come to the table, just as sure as could be he would have forgotten to comb his hair or tie his shoes or — well, always he forgot something.

He would start off to school forgetting to take all of his books, or perhaps go off without his lunch, always, always forgetting to do the right thing at the right time.

Up to the time of this story his dear loving mother was always looking after this little lad of hers, calling him back to get the forgotten books or whatever it was. But on one eventful day, as usual he forgot something very important, and that is what this story is about.

It was a beautiful bright day — warm, and the air was full of life. There was to be a picnic, and everyone was planning for a delightful holiday. As usual our little friend forgot to dress properly and so was late for breakfast. That made him late for everything. Finally the family, tired of waiting, went off without him. As his mother started out, she called back to him: "Don't forget the matches."

The merry party started for the woods, and as they went on their way they spoke about the forgetful lad. Someone said: "Too bad he is so forgetful. What can be done about it?" Someone else said: "If he would just make up his mind to remember instead of always forgetting, he would get along fine." "Just a question of will power," said another. "Anything you will to do you can do."

Finally, our little lad started out for the merry-making, and after he had gone a long way he remembered about the matches. He turned back and walked all the way home again. Of course, this made his walk very long, and he was all tired out when he reached the picnic grounds. He felt a little bit ashamed, too, as he neared the merry party; they teased him and asked him if he had forgotten the matches.

"Hurry up, do," called out one of the picnickers. "We're hungry and we can't start the fire till you get here with the matches," said another. "Next time we'll bring the matches ourselves, and then it won't make any difference whether you come or not."

Now this last remark really hurt the little boy who always forgot, and he thought about it a whole lot that day. However, he helped to gather the sticks. Then one of the boys said: "Now if you didn't forget the matches, you may light the fire." So he lighted it, and as it blazed up he sat there watching the blaze. At first it burned slowly, then there was a little hissing, sputtering sound, and then a wee voice said: "Well, well, don't sit there forever staring; give me some more paper if you expect me to burn up these big sticks. Hurry up, be quick, or I shall die before long!"

The lad was startled, but he pushed a big piece of paper right under the sticks. Sputter, sputter, crackle, crackle, then such a splendid blaze. Fascinated, he stared and stared, for he could hardly believe his own eyes. What was that? Surely the fire was not alive! Yes, it was, too. The sparks were really alive as they darted up through the sticks.

"Ha, ha," said the little voice, "guess you couldn't have a fire without us. Oh, we light the fires and make them burn," shouted the living sparks.

"Who are you?" asked the lad.

"Don't you know?" said the little wriggly things in the fire.

"No," said the boy, "I never saw lizards in the fire before."

"*Lizards!*" hissed the fire. "Is that what you call the fire spirits? 'Lizards,' indeed! We are the salamanders, and you never in the wide world could have a fire without us. We wouldn't dare to forget to come, and we have to be on time, too, for so much depends on us in this big world. The great Sun Spirit releases us to work in the world, and we have a very important work to do. Some of the salamanders live in camp fires like this one; some live in furnaces in people's homes; some live in big furnaces in steel mills and other places like that."