

THE SURPRISE

KEYWORD: Friendship.

“Oh! what a fine morning,” cried John, as he darted out of the front door.

He was greeted on all sides by glad sounds. The birds in the trees sang joyfully their morning song. His low whistle was answered by a lusty bark from a faithful companion, Bruce, a handsome collie given to him by a dear friend. John and Bruce were real friends, each ever thoughtful of the other's safety and comfort.

They walked briskly down the straight path between the lovely shade trees, then out into the road. They had not

gone far before they saw right in front of them a wagon filled with fruit, and the owner was in trouble. One of the wheels had come off, and that of course upset some of the fruit; there it was all over the road. So John helped to pick it up, while the man fixed the wagon. Soon everything was right again, and away went the man on his journey. John patted his faithful companion, and they walked along the road wondering what would happen next.

John was an only child. He loved his parents dearly, and was always glad to help them. He was fond of flowers, and spent much time in his garden. He loved books, and so had many friends who lived in the books which he read hour after hour. But with all this he was restless, for he wanted some *real* friends.

You see, it was this way. His heart was kind, and when his family lived in the city, as they used to, he had plenty of chances to do kind things for people. There was the lame boy across the street. Each morning he ran over there and gave a whistle call that all the boys knew. Then he helped his little lame friend on the way to school, always carrying his books for him. Also, there was his grandmother, who watched for him from her window. He always ran in for a minute to kiss her and see that she was well and happy. And then there was the lovely Virginia, about his own age, who had always been such a true and loyal friend. She seemed to understand all his joys and sorrows. If he had won in his games, she praised him. If he had failed in some of his lessons, she encouraged him to try just a little harder. So he was willing to try and try again.

But when his mother's health failed, his father had bought a fine home in the country, and Virginia was left behind in the big city. The soft country breezes and the life-giving sun made his dear mother ever so much better, and of course this made John happy, for there was a beau-

tiful friendship between his lovely mother and himself. But, oh! he did so miss his little playmate, Virginia.

Now as John and Bruce came near the house next to their own, the collie gave a quick, sharp bark, and John looked quickly about to see what was the matter. A surprise was in store for him. The house had been freshly painted and fixed up, and he wondered who had moved in and whether there would be any pleasant playmates there for him. So he patted Bruce and whispered to him, "All right, old friend, we will walk around the grounds and try to find out who our neighbors are. Maybe we may make some new friends."

So they walked through the grounds in the direction of the garden, and there sitting on a bench underneath a rose arbor was a beautiful girl. John's heart gave a leap, and then he stood quite still for a minute. *Could it be she?* Was it really Virginia? Yes, he was sure now, and yet she seemed not to see him. So he tiptoed up and sat down beside her. Even then she seemed not to know he was there. Then he spoke her name, and she turned and saw him. Oh, how glad she was! They were so happy to be together again, and told each other all about what they had done since they had seen each other before. A real friend is the greatest treasure we can have, and love is the key which unlocks the door of friendship.

Soon Bruce barked to let them know he was waiting patiently to be greeted too. Then together they went to the house, where Virginia's father and mother and brothers and sisters were happy to see John again, for they all loved him dearly. He was a true friend, ever ready to do a kindness to make some one else happy. And that is the secret of friendship — a heart full of love and thoughtfulness for others' happiness.