

The **Big Switch**

by Agnes Jules



- 1 Nicholas and Gem had been close companions ever since Nicholas was a little boy and Gem was a puppy. Everywhere that Nicholas went, Gem went.
- 2 Nicholas sometimes felt that being a dog would be so much better than being a boy. Dogs don't have to go to school. As a matter of fact, they aren't even allowed at his school. In addition, dogs get petted by everyone; someone feeds them every day; and all they do all day is run and play or lie around and sleep. They just do whatever they want to do, and they don't do anything they don't want to do. No one expects them to clean up anything, wash any dishes, take a daily bath, or even brush their teeth. Nicholas thought it would be wonderful to be a dog.
- 3 Gem sometimes felt that being a boy would be so much better than being a dog. Boys get to go everywhere and anywhere. They spend a lot of time playing games, get to be with all their friends at school, and can eat what they want when they want it. Boys have so much more independence than dogs do. Have you ever seen a boy tied to a leash or put inside a fence? Just look at the house a boy gets! It is so much bigger than any doghouse. Gem thought it would be wonderful to be a boy.
- 4 Then one cold winter morning, the two friends got a jolt. When the alarm buzzed, Gem sat up instantly, just like always—except that today Gem was sitting on the edge of the bed, and Nicholas was curled up on the floor. Nicholas's mother came by and said, "Hurry up, Gem. You don't want to be late for school, do you?" Gem squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head to get rid of the cobwebs. When he opened his eyes, Nicholas was sitting on his haunches with his tongue hanging out, waiting to be petted. Gem patted Nicholas on the head, and then went into the bathroom to wash his face. He tried to brush his teeth, but without a thumb, he couldn't really hold the toothbrush. At breakfast, Gem sat down to a delicious bowl of cereal and started slurping like dogs do. Nicholas's mother said gently, "Gem, you know that is not the proper way for a boy to eat. Use your spoon, please."
- 5 School was very different than Gem thought it would be. You were expected to read, which of course Gem couldn't. The teacher was nice, but she kept asking him questions he didn't know the answers to—and didn't care to know. The kids just ignored him, like they saw a boy that looked like a dog every day.
- 6 Back home, Nicholas was disappointed because Gem just gave him a quick pat on the head before he left for school. However, Nicholas decided that it didn't matter because Gem would probably play fetch with him when he got home. Since he was starving, Nicholas went downstairs to get some breakfast. When he got up to the table, his mother said sharply, "Nicholas, you know dogs are not allowed at the table. Your food is in the bowl by the back door." Nicholas went over to the bowl to eat, but it looked and smelled disgusting. He decided to pass. Maybe when Gem got home he would give Nicholas a people treat. Nicholas spent all day lying in the sun that shone through the living room window. He thought napping all day would be great, but truthfully, he got a little bored.
- 7 When Gem got home, he couldn't play because he had to do his homework right away. So Nicholas lay under the table while Gem worked. Nicholas was bored. Gem was frustrated with his homework and mumbled constantly under his breath.
- 8 During supper, Nicholas tried begging for some food from Gem. However, Nicholas's mom got angry and put Nicholas in the backyard. Nicholas was getting very hungry, and there was nothing to do in the backyard. He couldn't swing or throw and catch a baseball. All he could do was sit in his doghouse and guard his family.
- 9 By the time Nicholas and Gem went to bed, they had changed their minds about wanting to be something else. Nicholas felt very sad and wanted to cry, but dogs don't cry. So he howled. Gem felt sad too, but boys don't howl so he cried. Nicholas curled up next to the bed and Gem put on Nicholas's pajamas.
- 10 It seemed like only minutes went by. Suddenly it was morning again. Nicholas's alarm buzzed him awake and he sat up groggily on the edge of the bed. Opening his eyes, he saw Gem sitting on his haunches, waiting for his first petting of the day. Nicholas let out a sigh of relief, and Gem wagged his tail enthusiastically.

COMPREHENSION

A Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 1 This story is called "The Big Switch" because a boy and a dog
 - a** get along so well.
 - b** trade lives for a day.
 - c** play tricks on everyone.
- 2 Nicholas wanted to be a dog because he
 - a** didn't like using a fork and spoon.
 - b** thought a dog's life was easier than a boy's life.
 - c** wanted people to pet him.
- 3 Gem wanted to be a boy because boys
 - a** could ride bikes.
 - b** got to go to school.
 - c** got to do anything they wanted.

- 4 Nicholas and Gem were both disappointed because
 - a** nothing was as good as they thought it would be.
 - b** no one noticed them.
 - c** the day was too long and boring.
- 5 At the end Nicholas sighed and the dog wagged his tail because they
 - a** were happy to be themselves again.
 - b** woke up early for school.
 - c** were going on an adventure.

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

B Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- 1 people who spend a lot of time together (1)
- 2 a surprise (4)
- 3 part of the body that includes the hip and upper thigh (4)
- 4 go after something and bring it back (6)
- 5 feeling stressed because of an inability to do something (7)
- 6 in a sleepy or confused way (10)
- 7 in an excited way (10)

C **too** = also

two = the number after *one*

Words that sound alike but have different spellings and meanings are called homophones. *Too* and *two* are homophones.

Look at each word in **bold type** below. Note the paragraph number. Look at the paragraph and find the homophone. Which of the two words fits in the blank in the sentence? Write the word.

8 accept (4)

Gem could not _____ that the children at school ignored him.

9 reed (5)

Gem had to _____ a story at school.

10 board (6)

Nicholas became _____ just lying around all day.

THINK ABOUT IT

- D** The writer has a **baby** puppy.
The writer has a puppy.

When writers or speakers are careless, they sometimes use an unnecessary word and say the same thing twice.

Read each sentence. Which word in **bold type** is not needed because the same idea is expressed elsewhere in the sentence? Write the word.

- 1 The **history** teacher didn't seem to notice that Gem was an odd student **enrolled** at the school.
- 2 The **cold** snow clung to Gem's **shaggy** fur.
- 3 An **excited** Gem raced **quickly** out of the house to get to school.
- 4 While Gem did homework, Nicholas was **hidden** out of sight under the **kitchen** table.
- 5 Nicholas followed **behind** Gem on his way to the **front** door.

- E** The dog **woofed** at the possum.
The possum **squeaked**.

Some words imitate the sound they refer to. *Woofed* and *squeaked* are two such words.

Read each sentence. Which word imitates a sound? Write the word.

- 6 The icy rain pattered on the window during the night.
- 7 Gem howled to show how sad and disappointed he was.
- 8 Gem's nails clicked on the kitchen floor.
- 9 Nicholas sniffed the food in the bowl and decided he wasn't hungry.
- 10 Gem had trouble zipping up Nicholas's coat.

- F** dishonest = **dis** + honest
reorder = **re** + order

The letters *dis-* and *re-* are called prefixes. A prefix is added to the beginning of a word. It changes the word's meaning. *Dis-* sometimes means "not." The word *dishonest* means "not honest." *Re-* means "again." The word *reorder* means "order again."

Read each set of sentences. Choose the word in parentheses () that makes sense. Write the word.

- 11 Nicholas's mother did not approve of dogs at the table. She (disapproved, reapproved).
- 12 Gem took possession of his own identity again. He (repossessed, dispossessed) it.
- 13 Gem came back into sight at the end of the school day. He (disappeared, reappeared).
- 14 Gem did not continue howling. He (discontinued, recontinued) howling.
- 15 Gem and Nicholas will tell the story of this day again and again. They will (distell, retell) it many times.