

The People Next Door

by Elizabeth Trach

Alex and Andy were best friends. Andy lived next door. They played outside every day. They walked to school together. But Andy's family moved away at the end of May, and Alex was alone all summer.

By August, Alex was very bored. He missed Andy. The days were long without a friend to play with.

One hot day, a big, white truck stopped in front of the house next door. Big men began carrying boxes into the house. They worked all day. It was almost night by the time the truck drove away.

The next day, a green car drove up. A man, a woman, and a girl got out and went inside the house.

Alex was interested. The girl looked about his age.

"Why don't you go say hello?" Alex's mom said.

Alex put on his shoes and opened the front door. He jumped back. The girl was standing right there!

"Oh, hello," she said. "I'm Jenny. I live next door now."

Alex said hello and let Jenny inside. "Do you want to play a game?" he asked.

"Yes, please!" said Jenny. "All my toys and games are still in boxes. I've been bored for days. We drove all the way from River City."

Alex showed Jenny his games. She picked checkers, which was Alex's favorite. They took turns being red and black. Sometimes Jenny won, and sometimes Alex won.

When they were tired of playing checkers, Alex showed Jenny his back yard. Jenny pointed at Alex's tree house. "Wow! Is that yours?"

Alex looked at the tree house. He and Andy had built it together. It was their special clubhouse. All summer, looking at it made him miss Andy. Should he let Jenny inside? No one else had ever climbed up and gotten past the door. Alex and Andy had a secret password.

Alex looked at Jenny. She smiled. Alex smiled back. "Yes," he answered. "I built it with my friend Andy. He moved away. You have to know the secret word to get in," he said.

"Oh," said Jenny. She sighed.

"The secret word is cheese," said Alex. "So, when you get to the top, knock three times, say 'cheese,' and you can come in."

Jenny did just that, and the two played in the tree house for the rest of the day. They were both happy to have made a new friend.

