



Tragedy Begins

One time Petie Burkis and I made up a tv show called 'This is your Bad Moment'. And on this show contestants would come out on the stage, and the audience would get to see the contestant in a bad moment. Like if Petie Burkis was a contestant he would come out on the stage and there would be an enormous table absolutely covered with every kind of pizza in the world. Petie loved pizza and he would just stand there looking at this steaming table and while he was deciding what kind of pizza to go for first, a little door would

open and a hundred monkeys would come tumbling out, jump up on the table, and start romping all over the pizzas. Petie would leap forward, trying to save at least one, but he would be too late, and then the announcer's voice would say, 'Petie Burkis, this is your bad moment.' And the camera would come in close so everyone could see the sorrowful look on Petie's face as he watched the monkeys stomping on the pizzas.

Well, that night when Hazeline came out on the porch where I was sitting and said, 'Get on your bathing suit and let's take a swim,' I thought about that tv show. I could even hear the announcer's deep voice saying, 'Tommy, this is your bad moment.'

'What?' I said quickly.

'I said, let's take a swim. Didn't you bring your bathing suit?'

'I don't know.'

'Well, get on some old shorts then. Aren't you roasting?'

'I'm not so awfully hot.'

'Oh, come on.'

She got up and I followed her into the house and put on my bathing suit. I did not want to go swimming at all, but I went down and sat on the steps.

'Well, let's go,' Hazeline called from the corner of the house.

I looked up and she was standing there with two black inner tubes. In all my life I never saw a more welcome sight.

We went down to the pond and got in the inner tubes and just floated around. Hazeline kept saying, 'Don't splash me now. Don't splash,' until finally I got brave and did splash her a little, and then we just floated around some more.

I could have stayed in that inner tube for hours. I could have gone to sleep in that inner tube. It started getting dark and the stars came out, and I felt like that inner tube with me in it was the centre of the whole universe. I thought that if someone on another planet was looking at Earth through a tremendously powerful telescope, the first thing this person would see would be me and that black inner tube floating in the pond.

'There's Mikey,' Hazeline screamed suddenly. She always seemed surprised to see him, even though he had come over every single night since I had arrived. 'I've got on the awfulest bathing suit. Come on, let's get out and go around back before he sees us.'

We got out as quickly as we could, but of course he saw us and came running over. He grabbed Hazeline by the arms and made her walk out on this little dock and then he pretended he was going to push her into the water.

'Mikey, really, Mikey, don't push me off, *really*, because I just washed my hair and this water is muddy. Mikey, I mean it, don't push me off, hear?'

He said, 'I'm not going to push you.'

'You are, too.'

'I am not going to push you.'

'Promise?'

'I promise. I am not going to *push* you. What I'm going to do is *drop* you.' And he held her out over the water and dropped her in.

She came up and she was furious. Her hair was like a sagging bird's nest, and she started thrashing her arms around and trying to splash Mikey. He ran out of the way, but Hazeline got a bucket and filled it with muddy water and she chased Mikey until she had him pinned against the hedge and then she said, 'All right, Mikey Galter, you just apologize to me or I'm going to throw this water all over you and your good shirt.'

He said, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry -' And right then she threw the water all over him anyway and started running. It was very funny to watch and Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred came out and Uncle Fred said, 'Don't let her get away with that, Mikey,' and we were all laughing as if we would never stop.

Finally when it was over and they were drying off, I went up to my room and I felt the best I ever felt in my life. If someone had come up to me then with a paper

and pencil and said, 'You may change one thing in this world. What will it be?' I would have said without hesitation, 'Nothing.'

I got in bed and lay there and I realized after a while that there was a big smile on my face. For no reason I was lying there smiling. And then I turned over and went to sleep.

Petie Burkis had a sitter who could always tell when something bad was happening. One night she was sitting for Petie and she suddenly stood up and said, 'Someone in my family is in great danger.' Petie could see that she was really worried, so he told her it would be perfectly all right for her to call some of her relatives and warn them.

Well, she called everyone she could think of, even a half-sister in Virginia, and they were all fine. They all promised not to take any chances whatsoever for the next twenty-four hours, but the sitter still worried. She kept walking up and down the living-room saying, 'Someone I love is in danger, *grave* danger.' Petie said her hands were clasped together so tightly that her fingers were absolutely white.

When she got home that night – she called Petie the next day to tell him because he had been so nice – she found her cat lying on the doorstep half dead from a terrible fight, and she figured out that the cat had been in the fight at the very moment she had felt the danger.

That cat, she told Petie, was just like a member of the family, because he had been with her for fourteen years.

I was just the opposite. I never suspected when something terrible was happening. For it was this very night, while I was lying there sleeping with a big smile on my face, that the tragedy of the black fox began.