



Memory

ft the farm after breakfast the next morning. Aunt e and Uncle Fred were by the car, and Hazeline saying, 'Now you come back on the thirtieth to edding, you hear? All of you!'

e will if we possibly can,' my mom said. 'I still ot believe that you are getting married, because ast time I saw you, you know, you were in ils.'

e'd better get going,' Dad said. 'The traffic's going bad.'

'Well, at least we won't be on bicycles,' Mum said. 'I couldn't pedal from here to the porch if my life depended on it.'

Dad put my suitcase and Petie's in the back seat and shook hands with Uncle Fred. I hated to say good-bye to people I liked. Nothing made me feel worse.

Mom hugged Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred and then they all looked at me, and right then I wanted to say the greatest thing in the world to Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred, because I had realized after I let the fox go that they were probably the nicest people I would ever meet. In all the past week they had never mentioned once what I had done.

All I could say though was, 'Aunt Millie, I will never, ever forget how good it was to be on the farm with you and Uncle Fred.'

'Well, it's just been real good for us to have you,' she said. She hugged me and kissed me on my eyebrow.

Uncle Fred said, 'You come back next summer. Send the folks to Australia or somewhere.'

'Only *please* not on bicycles,' Mom said.

We all laughed and got in the car and Petie Burkis said, 'Thank you for having me,' in an odd voice.

'You come back, too, Petie,' Aunt Millie said.

'I will.'

Then Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred and Hazeline stepped back from the car and we drove off. Dad

started blowing the horn and said, 'Home, here we come.'

I looked back all the way to the main road, because you could get a real good view of the whole farm, and I wanted to memorize it. Aunt Millie was still waving, but Hazeline had sat down on the steps and was saying something to her dad.

'Well, how will it be to get home, Tom?' my dad said.

'Real good, I guess.'

'To tell you the truth, our old house looked better to me than any castle I saw in Europe.'

Mom turned around and smiled and said, 'Now, tell me, how was the farm really?'

'It wasn't bad.'

'I told you, didn't I? I told you you'd like it.'

'I loved it,' I said. It was the first time I had ever admitted that my parents were right about something and I was wrong, and this made her feel enormously good and she said again, 'I knew you would.'

It was afternoon when we got home and everything was just the same, our street, the house, everything. The only thing that seemed the least bit different to me was when I went in my room, because all I could see at first was models, models, hundreds of models everywhere. You would have thought that I had done nothing all my life but glue pieces of plastic together. That was funny, too, because when I was at the farm

remembering my room, I had never thought once about all these models.

The rest of the summer went by so quickly that it was like the whole summer had been spent on the farm, because Petie and I hardly had time to do anything before school started. Then we joined a science club that met every Saturday, and the whole year just started flying by. I never knew time could go so fast.

And pretty soon my visit to the farm began to seem hazy. For one thing I couldn't remember the way Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred and Hazeline looked. Hazeline had sent me a picture of her feeding wedding cake to Mikey with Aunt Millie and Uncle Fred standing beside them, but they certainly hadn't looked like that, all stiff and formal and in clothes that seemed to have been made for other people. Only I couldn't remember exactly what they had looked like.

And one night I tried to think of the name of Uncle Fred's prize pig. I must have heard him say her name a thousand times that summer, only I had to lie in my bed for about three hours before I finally remembered that it was Rowina.

It all seemed like something that had happened to another boy instead of me. Like one time Petie and I made a time capsule out of a large jar, and we put into it a lot of things, so that in a hundred years,

and know exactly what Petie Burkis and I had been
We put pictures of ourselves in the jar and lists of
things we had done and Petie wrote down everything
we ate and drank in one day and I wrote down the
books I had read in the past year. We put in stories we
had written about our families for English class and
my poem 'TV Land' and pictures we had drawn,
then we buried it. A year went by and one day
Petie said, 'Hey, let's go dig up the time capsule.' So
we went and dug it up and took all the stuff out and laid
it on the ground and read it and Petie kept saying, 'I
never wrote that. I *know* I never wrote that.' And I was
the same way about this crayon picture with my name
on it. I couldn't remember doing it at all. It was as if
some other boys had made up the time capsule and
buried it in the ground. And now, that was the way I
felt about the farm. It was as if it had happened to
some other boy, not me at all.

But then sometimes at night, when the rain is beat-
ing against the windows of my room, I think about
that summer and everything is crystal-clear. I am once
again beside the creek. The air is clean and the grass is
deep and very green. And I look up and see the black
cat leaping over the crest of the hill and she is exactly
like she was the first time I saw her.

Or I am beneath that tree again. The cold rain is

And I hear, just as plainly as I heard it that August
night, above the rain, beyond the years, the high clear
bark of the midnight fox.