



## **The Seal Of Marsh Cove**

*By Edith Morris Hemingway*

Fog blew in wisps across the wide bay with snatches of bright sunlight above. It was the first glimpse of blue sky Bryn had seen in the five dreary days of her summer vacation in Maine.

“Ready to go, Bryn?” Dad called from the open door. “The sun is out. The tide is almost high, and, if we catch it right, we can paddle the canoe around the point and into Marsh Cove.”

“Are you sure it’s safe?” Mom said. “It looks a bit windy.”

Before Dad could open his mouth to answer, Bryn jumped up from the couch and said, “We’ll be fine, Mom. Don’t worry.” She shoved her feet into her sneakers and tied them. Then she grabbed her life jacket from the hook next to the door and ran outside.

Her younger brother was right behind her with his own life jacket in hand. “I want to go too.”

Bryn groaned.

“Not this time, Michael,” Dad said. “It’s Bryn’s turn.”

They dragged the canoe down the rocky steps and far enough out in the water so it floated. After Dad fastened his knapsack around the thwart of the canoe, he held the boat steady while Bryn climbed in. Keeping low, she made her way up to the bow. Then Dad pushed it out a little farther and climbed in. Bryn’s sneakers were wet and squishy and cold on her feet, but the sun felt warm on her shoulders.

“Is your life jacket fastened, Bryn?” Dad asked. When she nodded, he smiled, and she smiled back.

Bryn had practiced her strokes on a calm lake, but this was her first time out on coastal waters. Dad did most of the steering and the strong paddling. Bryn kept them on their course. They headed straight out from shore to get clear of the rocks and then turned up Gouldsboro Bay. Traveling with the tide, they didn’t take long to round the point with its high rocky cliff.

Dad pointed up to the top of a tall fir tree. “A bald eagle,” he said and reached out to hand her the binoculars. The eagle looked big even from this far away. She could see its white head twist around to look for food.

The family had walked up to this same point yesterday at low tide. Then the entire cove was a sea of mud with a few rocks poking up. Sea lavender and marshy grasses grew around the edge. It smelled like dead fish. Bryn had seen a man walking around in high boots, digging in the mud with a spade. Dad said he was clamming. Bryn wondered if all the fish, lobsters, and other creatures swam in and out with the tide.

Now, at high tide, Marsh Cove looked very different. Far out in the middle was one big rock jutting out of the water. Something long and dark moved up the side of the rock. Bryn looked through the binoculars. “I think it’s a seal, Dad!” Maybe this was the one she had heard barking in the distance. Ever since she had done a report on seals in the sixth grade, she had hoped to see one in the wild. All week she had been watching for seals along the rocky ledges. Seeing one at the aquarium wasn’t the same.

“Let’s go investigate,” Dad said.

They had been floating toward shore as they rested, but now they paddled a fast straight line toward the rock. The seal must have seen them coming because it slid off the rock into the water. Bryn groaned in disappointment.

“Take your paddle out of the water and be as quiet as you can,” Dad said.

They sat there, watching, and drifted away from the rock. Bryn wanted to paddle back, but Dad shook his head and pointed down. Bryn saw a dark shadow, then one or two more. “Maybe they think our gray canoe is a big seal,” she whispered.

Dad nodded and whispered back. “Could be.”

Another shadow and another, closer this time, and then one whiskery nose poked out of the water. The nose disappeared just as quickly. They were getting braver — or more curious. Now two noses appeared on the left and one on the right. Pretty soon their whole heads were bobbing in and out of the water. One was sleek and black, another had circles around its eyes, and one had freckles on its face. The seals swam and dove all around the canoe, sort of like a game. When they stuck their noses out, Bryn could see their nostrils open and hear them breathe in the air. As they dove back down, they slapped their tails on the water and rocked the canoe.

For the rest of the story, see *Summer Shorts*  
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