

TIDAL POOLS

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CHAPTER 1

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Back in the early 1950's, life was adventurous and uncomplicated for kids who lived a few minute's bike ride from the ocean in the coastal village of Somers Beach, Maine. In the summer we fished, swam and built huge sandcastles with our buddies. Sometime we just watched the girls "from away" who were visiting. Many of us caddied at the nearby Ocean Hills Golf Club to earn spending money. An extra perk was being able to play for free after 4 PM.

All that changed in the fall. School, homework and and sports filled our days. Autumn was also when our fathers oiled their hunting guns. Some of them taught us how to shoot. And that's where my story begins.

You see, after the summer people left, bird hunters often walked out to the end of Berry Island at low tide to shoot Black Ducks as they flew across the island. Because the island is studded with large granite ledge rocks, the hunters could hide behind them for cover.

When I was 14, one of my older friends, 16-year-old Sherman Clarke, and his brother Caleb, who was my age, suggested we go out on Berry Island the next morning to hunt for ducks before we took the bus to school. They invited their cousin Billy whose dad, Allen Noble, was a lobsterman and lived close by, but he couldn't come because his father needed him to help load traps into his pickup truck.

I was not really interested in hunting but I liked being with my friends, so I reluctantly agreed. The Clarke brothers used their father's old 16-gauge shotgun and I had a relatively low powered 20-gauge double barrel that my father had taught me how to shoot. Truthfully, the odds were bleak that any of us could ever hit a fast, high-flying duck.

I had never gone duck hunting before, nor had I ever ventured out to the farthest end of Berry Island at low tide. As we approached the end, I noticed that most of the slippery sharp rocks were covered with seaweed and surrounded by tidal pools. Injuring myself at the start of basketball season was the last thing I wanted to do. I decided to take a slightly longer but safer path to the big ledge outcropping.

Our plan was to shoot for about half-an-hour, then race home to catch the school bus. We knew the ten foot tide, which was at it's low ebb, would be turning about the time we finished shooting. But as boys often do, we were having so much fun, we didn't realize that we were running a little late. Suddenly, we saw that the tide was slowly, then less slowly, starting to come in. We knew we had to leave right then.

I chose to take the same path back that I had used when we walked out — even though I knew it was longer. But I saw how the fast incoming tide was filling the tidal pools with knee-deep water and decided to go another way. Inadvertently, I slipped on a mossy boulder and my boot got wedged between two rocks.

I yelled to my friends, but they were way ahead of me and couldn't hear my voice over the crashing waves. I hollered again and again, and felt myself beginning to panic. The water was rising fast. I was alone and helpless. Then, just as the sea water reached my waist, I heard someone say, "Hold on, I'll get you."

I looked up and spotted a tall barrel-chested dark skinned man about 50 feet away, wading through the icy water and climbing over the slippery rocks. When he finally got to me, he helped pull my foot out of the crevice. I was freezing, soaked and breathing heavily, but I was free. I knew I was lucky to be alive.

"Hello, son," the man said. "I'm Henry Brand. My wife and I live in the house over there on the high part of the island. I saw you boys come out this morning and wondered what you were up to. Then I saw that you got yourself in a mess and I couldn't let something bad happen. Let's go over to the house and get dried off. Mary will make you some hot chocolate."

This kind, gentle man saved my life. His wife Mary gave me towels to dry off, and then handed me a cup of steaming hot chocolate. From that day on, Mr. and Mrs. Brand were my special friends. Over the next few years, I often stopped by their house to say hello and chat.

They told me that the house they lived in on Berry Island was actually owned by Mr. and Mrs. Crowell, a wealthy couple who resided in a large home on a hill overlooking the golf course. Henry and Mary helped them manage that house. At summer's end, they travelled with the Crowells to their other residence in Charleston, South Carolina. The Brands had worked for the Crowells for years and always looked forward to their summers in Maine where they lived on what Mary called "our own rocky island."

Berry Island is an irregular and low-lying granite outcropping which, centuries ago, was actually 15 acres of arable land. By the early 20th century, storms, rising water levels and the winds of time had reduced the grassy area to less than an acre. Around that time, a prior owner of the island had built an unpretentious four-room two story summer cottage with a small barn on the island's highest point.

When the Crowells bought the island in the early 1950s, the barn was long gone and the old house was barely habitable, but Mr. Crowell knew that Henry was a skillful carpenter. Shortly after arriving at Somers Beach for the summer, Mr. Crowell suggested that if Henry wanted to fix up the old house, he and Mary might prefer living there rather than in the house on the golf course.

Late that same day, Henry walked Mary out to the island, by the rocky causeway that connects the island to the shore, to show her the house. She stood there watching a spectacular sunset over the bay to the southwest, and smiled. "I like it here," she said.

Henry's carpentry skills soon made the cottage livable and comfortable. He enjoyed fixing up the old home and, on warm summer evenings, fishing the local waters in his punt. Mary liked to poke around her vegetable garden, staking tomatoes and weeding around the cucumbers. Best of all, she said, "We like our privacy here."



