

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Really eaten by hogs? You mean chewed up and swallowed?”

“That’s exactly what I mean,” Pepper switched over to her storytelling voice. “You see, three-hundred-odd years ago, there was a man named Smith living on the island. And he liked to keep pigs.”

“Why?”

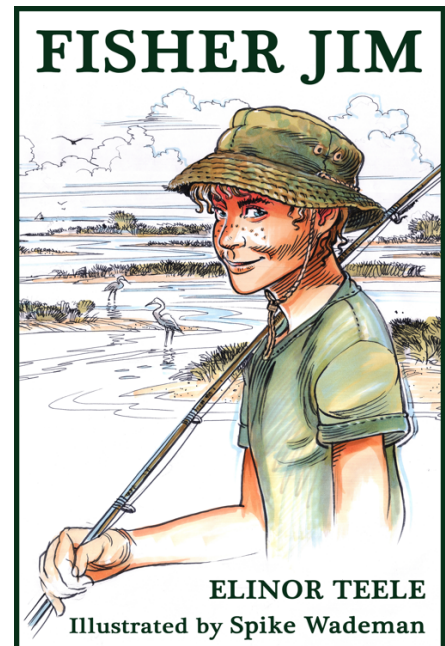
“Why what?”

“Why pigs and not cows? You can’t milk a pig.”

Pepper tapped her chin.

“Well, that’s true enough. I guess Smith liked the taste of bacon.”

That I could understand. Bacon beats most anything.



About Fisher Jim

A Free eBook for Kids Ages 8-12

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“Besides, pigs are pretty low maintenance. As long as they’re not eating your corn, they’re useful animals to have around. You can live off salt pork for an awful long time in the winter.”

I tasted salt pork once during a “Ye Olde Colonial Day” at school. It tasted like a roof tile. With salt.

“Okay.”

“Smith was a right old cuss. His first wife had died from scolding and his second from hard work. Now he was on to his third, a girl with a big fat dowry. Twenty plush acres in town.”

“What’s a dowry?”

“In the old days, before people got wise to the power of women, it was a gift that a bride brought to a marriage.”

“What did the groom bring?”

Pepper smiled.

“Smelly feet.”

She twirled the Lady Jane II around so we could both see the path that led up to the farmhouse.

“He brought her home on the harshest night of the year of 1700. Carted her over the frozen river on a horse-drawn sleigh. But he didn’t wrap her warm enough and she lost the tip of her finger to frostbite.”

Frostbite is when the blood stops flowing to parts of your body that are super, super cold. Granddad says all the muscles and nerves in your netherparts freeze and your skin turns bluey and then it goes black and then your flesh begins to fall off. He says it’s not a lot of fun.

“There was only one thing that kept his bride alive and that was Smith’s son. He was the kid of Smith’s first wife, and he was a real nice man. Hardworking, very quiet.”

Now, I like Pepper a heap, but there are times when she tries to put sicky love stuff into her stories. You can spot it a mile off—it always starts with a hardworking man.

“When do we get to the man-eating hogs?”

“Hang on, almost there!” She smiled. “So I guess you can imagine what happened. The wife fell in love with the son.”



“And the son fell in love with the wife,” I finished.

“You got it. Now, for a while, the old man knew nothing. The acres got planted, the pigs got spoiled, and the wife got pregnant. Then one day Smith spied his son and his wife walking hand in hand out of the barn. And he got real mad.”

“Why didn’t he just kick his son off the island?”

“He could have, but Smith had a nasty, grasping, conniving soul. So he thought about it for a while. And he figured out a much better way to get even.”

“The pigs?”

Pepper nodded.

“He rounded up his biggest, meanest hogs and he built a pen for them near the house. You see there?” She pointed to a dent in the slope by the farmstead. “That’s where it was.”

Da says that hogs can get huge. Bigger than people. Hundreds of pounds.

“He put them in that pen and for four weeks, while his son was away in New York, he *starved* them.”

Suddenly, I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear the end of this story.

“You okay, Jim?”

I nodded.

“Because I can stop if you’d like.”


“No, go ahead.”

Pepper patted me on the shoulder. And I hate to admit it, I’m glad she did.

“The old man had it all planned. He was intending to invite his son to come look at the new pen, clonk him over the head with a two by four, and let his starving porkers take care of the rest.”

“Is that what happened?”

Pepper shook her head.



“Nope. The night before his son returned, the old man went to check one last time on his hogs.” She paused to examine the reading on her depth meter.

“And?!?”

“And he never came back.”

“You mean the pigs ate him?!”

“That’s what his son and his wife assumed. All that was left in the hog pen were the silver buckles of his shoes.”

There was a suspicious laugh trapped somewhere in the middle of the word “shoes.” I looked at Pepper. Her mouth had twisted itself into a half hitch.

“Pepper?”

“Yeah?”

“Is this a true story?”

“Would I lie to you, Jim Tucker?”

“No. But you might hedge a bit if it fitted the tale.”

Pepper laughed.

“Right enough. But that’s what I like about stories, Jim. They’re often a helluva lot more interesting than life.”

She flicked a switch near her wheel and I heard the whirr as her anchor dropped.

“Now what say we take a look at that fuel filter.”