



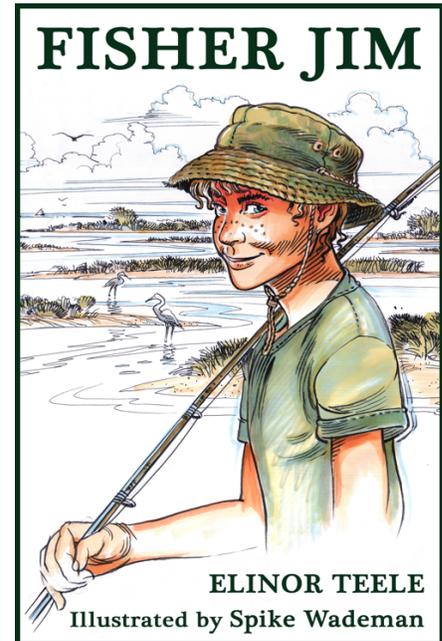
CHAPTER THREE

When I die, the last thing I wanna see through my bleary old eyes is the Great Marsh.

I've told you I live on the Fisher River, but I don't think I said where the Great Marsh is. It's on the edge of the North Atlantic. It's a long stretch of mudflats that runs fourteen-odd miles from a granite knuckle in the south to a heap of hills up north.

There are islands and creeks and sand fine as sugar. There are skeeters and crickets and midges small enough to gnaw through your eardrum. Da says there are twenty thousand acres in the Great Marsh, and I've explored 19,997 of them.

Which was fortunate, considering my sit-u-ation. I figured I had about ten minutes before the Harbormaster made it out of his clothes and onto his boat. He was probably already radioing the Coast Guard to keep an eye out for a kid with a green T-shirt and a crooked shoulder. I needed a place to hide.



About Fisher Jim

A Free eBook for Kids Ages 8-12

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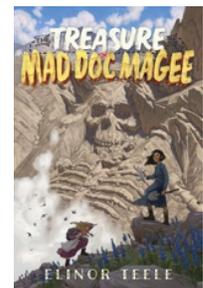
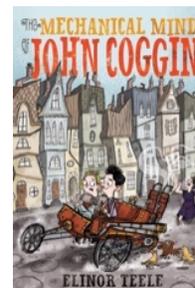
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First off, it was gonna have to be close. The Rita Anne's outboard was only good for around fifteen knots at top speed. You won't get very far with that kinda grunt.

Second, it was gonna have to be deep enough to hold a Woodbury skiff. We had a new moon tide coming high at seven, so I wasn't much worried about that.

Third, it was gonna have to be secret. The Harbormaster might be dumb, but he wasn't totally brainless. He'd have a chart of most of the waterways round these parts.

But I was pretty sure he wouldn't know about Gunpowder Davey's Cove.

That's the name I gave it when I was eight. I'd been hanging round the north side of the river, waiting for Da and Mom to finish digging clams and arguing, when I ran into this spot up Babson Creek. There was an old shack and a crappy pier and a thick patch of willow trees.

The minute I found it, I knew exactly what it was.

A rumrunner's hideout.

Back in the old days, Granddad told me, the government got it into its head to ban everyone from drinking booze. You couldn't sip a beer without six federal agents leaping out of the grass and leading you away in handcuffs.

The whole idea worked about as well as you'd expect. Instead of buying bottles off the shelf, people took to sneaking them in from Canada. They'd load their crates off big boats in international waters and put 'em on small boats to take up the river. Granddad says rumrunners like his wild Auntie Pat made three or four trips a night in the high season. And the cove was one of the places they landed their cargo.

A rumrunner's hideout is pretty cool and pretty empty. But since I've never been one to let facts get in the way of adventures, I decided right then and there that it was also the lair of Gunpowder Davey—the meanest, orneriest Irishman on the seven seas.

When he turned up the next morning and threatened to slit my gizzards, my spec-u-lations were confirmed.

We got to be good friends, Gunpowder Davey and me. He told me he used the cove as a place for hiding gold and dumping bodies and other things a pirate has to take care of. Sometimes he'd ride in on a beluga; sometimes he'd row. If he got bored, he'd throw himself a party on the pier. He was really good at cracking crab claws with his teeth.

One day I asked Gunpowder Davey what he would do if his parents wouldn't stop ragging on each other.



“Keelhaul ‘em!”

I told him that you weren’t allowed to do that to parents.

“Mutiny!”

I told him you couldn’t do that either.

“Arrrgghh! It’s the duty of the Captain and the First Mate to take care of their crew. Through storm, wind, and wrack!”

“Mom says adults need to talk out their feelings.”

“Feelings, bah! I didn’t have *feelings* when I sailed my men ‘round the Horn in a hundred-year gale! I didn’t have *feelings* when we were becalmed for eight days and chawing on boot leather. Their job is to steer the bloody ship!”

I had to admit he had a point. Still, it’s pretty tricky for an eight-year-old to arrange a keelhauling. Especially when you don’t have a vessel.

I might have asked Gunpowder Davey for the loan of his, only I made the mistake of joking that his beard looked like a crawling lump of maggots. He didn’t mind maggots, he said, but he wouldn’t stand for similes. After threatening to skewer me, he rowed off in a huff. And I never saw him again.

Which is kinda a long way of saying that Gunpowder Davey’s Cove was the perfect place for me and the Rita Anne to hole up in for a couple of hours. The willows had grown big and bushy and the pier was invisible on both sides of the water. Not even the Harbormaster’s binoculars could find us there.

In five minutes we were at the head of the creek and in seven we were pushing through the catkins. They made a curtain of yellowy green, real soft and whishing.

It was a comforting sound, like the waves in our washing machine when Mom was cleaning her frilly things. I recall a number of times when we’d sit in a patch of sun on the floor, with our backs to the wall, and watch the day roll over.

The more I listened to those catkins, the more I felt this memory tugging on my sleeve. Something really important about Mom and water and home. Yawning some, I nestled the Rita Anne next to the pier and killed the motor. I figured if I closed my eyes, maybe I could concentrate better.



It was a knuckleheaded idea. You take one ten-year-old, little to no sleep, and a good whack of sun and you better believe that it adds up to cat-a-tonia. I was halfway gone before my head hit the deck.

And as I was going, I kept hearing the same kooky rhymes tumbling round my skull: Dome, loam, Nome. Mome, roam, home.