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is in many ways a generic text. The Witch of Blackbird Pond is a good book, but not one I'd recommend to get the pulse racing on Halloween.November 1, 2019Not anything like my preconceived notion. The Witch of Blackbird Pond is a wonderful young adult novel set in the late 1600s in New England among the Puritans. Kit Tyler has arrived on a ship from Barbados and doesn't fit in from her first moments in Connecticut when she reveals that she can swim. The neighbors think she must be a witch since she can float! Her relatives take her in reluctantly and Kit tried to make herself useful by working hard in this new grim environment, so unlike the tropical paradise she was born in. Kit comes from an affluent family whose work was done by slaves that they owned. Her hardy Connecticut cousins try to make her understand how wrong this is. Kit's loneliness and despair soon bring her to connect with another outcast from the Puritan's society. This connection may mean Kit's death.Bren fall in love with the sea.December 22, 2023"What a pity every child couldn't learn to read under a willow tree..." — Elizabeth George Speare, The Witch of Blackbird PondA book from my childhood and one of the best pieces of Historical fiction...one of the best BOOKS. I have ever read.PLEASE do not go into this...if you have not read it...thinking it is only for children or young adults. Do you know how many people I know who read this in adulthood? So have I although my first reading of it was in my childhood.So Kit is a newcomer to the United States. She has come here from Barbados. She knows nobody. She knows nothing of the Puritan culture. Her grandfather has died and her only family left is her Aunt Rachel. She has come in the hopes of living with Rachel and her family as she is bereft and is leaving little behind.Kit is used to the free spirited way of living that she has always embraced in Barbados. She knows nothing of the customs that guide New England. She knows nothing about how the village people regard women. She does not know that women here don't know how to read, do not know how to swim and most of all she does not know about witch trials and about the rules governing the lands.It isn't long before Kit befriends two people. One of them is Prudence, a scared little child whose family thinks she is "dumb" and as a result she does not go to school. The other is Hannah. Regarded with deep suspicion and mistrust Hanna is a widow and a Quaker who lives alone. Nobody in the village will speak to her. There is a deep certainty amongst the villagers that Hannah must be a witch.So this is a bit of what the book is about but I have not even scratched the surface. It is considered a classic and I reread every few years especially when I want to go back in time and touch my childhood. I cannot think of a piece of writing better in the Historical Fiction genre and if you missed it as a kid or an adult, it is one that will stay with you.Now I have some SPOILERS, just about the ending, so if you have not read it, stop here. The last scene is among the most romantic and satisfying I have ever read. Likewise the trial and the testimony of Prudence are also written so flawlessly. I often think of Kit and Nat and Mercy and Judith and John Holbrook and Aunt Rachel and Mathew and Prudence and Hanna. They all stepped off the pages and became my friends. Sometimes the smell of New England will bring me back to the book as will apple pie, kittens, boats and the sound of the ocean. Please read this book.childhood classics educational September 16, 2012Kit, Katherine Tyler, is a free spirit. When her grandfather dies, she sells off his giant home in Barbados and sets sail to find her only remaining family in Connecticut colony. She weathers a storm, avoids seasickness, and even manages to wrangle two entire conversations out of the blue-eyed son of the ship's captain.However, the Connecticut mainland has a sharper edge than any of the challenges on board ship. How can Kit bear the insidious patience required to drop cornmeal in a bowl one pinch at a time? And the agony of spending her entire Sunday on a hard paw in church service? And the spiteful tongue of her cousin Judith? But there are far greater things to fear in the colonies than boredom.And when Kit begins sneaking away to find her own happiness.The real danger begins. I love Kit! And Nat (the captain's son)! And Hannah (the Quaker woman who shares soft kittens and blueberry pie). And Prudence (the little girl who needs Kit almost as much as Kit needs her). This is one of my favorite books. Full of wonderful historical detail but also fun, alive characters that you feel as though you would love to meet. I've read The Witch of Blackbird Pond at least a dozen times—maybe two-dozen. And now may have to read it again.February 22, 2017This book got me into historical fiction which is the genre perhaps closest to my heart. The conflict between freedom and responsibility, between individual and family and community ring as clear today as they did when I first read this book as a kid.January 6, 2019My wife Barb had read this back in the 90s, and mentioned to me at the time how much she liked it, which had put it on my radar. So last fall, when I was considering a new book to read aloud to her, I selected this one, guessing rightly that after the lapse of 25 years or so, it would be like a new read. The very short Goodreads description for this edition says it "brings to life the witch hysteria of Puritan New England." That's true as far as it goes, but very incomplete; one plot strand depicts the witch hysteria of that day, rising to an intense climax that evokes considerable drama and suspense, but there's significantly more to the book than that. (The cover blurb tends to be more lurid and Gothic than the book itself justifies, as well.) It's solid historical fiction (the kind that earned a Newbery Award, at a time when quality was required for that) rather than schmaltzy melodrama. The 16-17 year old heroine/viewpoint character will appeal to teens, but adults can thoroughly appreciate the novel as well. Our setting is the fictional town of Wethersfield in the colony of Connecticut in 1687-88, on the cusp of England's Glorious Revolution, a time when New England history buffs know that royal governor Sir Edmund Andros was pushing the envelope of royal absolutism to its limit. (Speare does an excellent job of working this historical backdrop into the fabric of the story.) But we see it through eyes that can view it with more than slight detachment: those of Katherine "Kit" Tyler, born and raised on Barbados, in a very different milieu. Orphaned young, she was raised by her now dead, wealthy grandfather, but misuse of his trust by a thieving overseer replaced the wealth with a plethora of debts, and after his passing the plantation had to be sold to pay them. As our story opens, Kit's now sailed to Connecticut—without sending any advance word ahead of her!—with only any money except what paid for her passage, to seek a home with her mother's surviving sister, Rachel Wood (whom the niece has never seen), and her family. Both she and the Wood family are in for future shock galore.IMO, this is a wonderful novel, without any significant downside that I could see. It's a nuanced and fascinating portrayal of human relationships, across cultural and generational lines; and Speare avoids the pitfalls of caricaturing Puritan society or creating cartoon characters depicted as entirely good or entirely bad. Kit's a basically likable person, free-spirited and kind-hearted, smart and book loving (her grandfather taught her to read, and had an extensive library), appreciative of beauty. But she's also, at 16, got a definite lazy and entitled streak, a product of her upbringing; she takes for granted the slavery-based economy she's benefited from all of her young life, and she views the Crown with a rather naive servience. (For all that they tend to be more narrow, both religiously and culturally, than Kit, the New Englanders she meets tend to be more on what we would recognize as the right side of those issues.) The author also makes it clear that New England society isn't monolithic; aged Quaker Hannah Tupper, who becomes Kit's fast friend, and seaman Nat Eaton, with his travel-based broader outlook, are also part of its fabric, and even among the Puritan congregation of Wethersfield, there are differences in personalities and attitudes. Most of them aren't genuinely malevolent (though Goodwife Cruff certainly is, and Speare also depicts the insidious way that mob psychology, given a chance, can work); they're just regular people, with the same range of moral and psychological qualities we'd find in a small town today, and most prove to be sympathetic. Speare has also created, in many cases, dynamic characters—that is to say, characters who can learn from each other and from experiences, and change some attitudes and perspectives. And while Kit understandably doesn't relate well to the ultra-long, tedious monologue sermon-centered Puritan church services twice on Sundays, and doesn't support the bigotry against Quakers, there's no anti-Christian attitude on her part, and no anti-religious propaganda in the book.Speare's plotting is perfectly-crafted, and her prose style felicitous; at just 223 pages, this is an absorbing, fast-paced read that held my interest throughout. If a reader could devote time to reading it without much interruption (Barb and I couldn't, of course), it would actually be a quick read. A lifelong New Englander herself, her love for and knowledge of the beauties of New England's natural world is evident in many places in the text. Finally (and which is an important consideration for this genre) her historical accuracy and faithful reconstruction of the life and ethos of the times are impeccable. This book really gives you an appreciation of the back-breaking, monotonous labor that filled
daily life, for both sexes (though the focus is on females), as well as the community spirit and some of the folkways. Some might say I give too many books five star ratings, but in all honesty, I couldn't give this one any less/books-I-own historical-fiction|January 8, 2021This is one of my favorite books in a middle grade range. This, Heidi, little prince, Secret Garden, and Little Women are some of the best books the grade level has to offer. We meet Kit who is on a boat heading to the colonies with a group of Puritans. Her parents died and she is moving to live with her strict uncle. She wasn't a puritan and so the life she comes into is difficult and people don't trust her. The genius of the books is the old woman who lives next to Blackbird pond. This is a marshy area and it can flood so she lives alone, but the woman loves the area because of the beauty. The rest of the town see her as a witch. So of course Kit finds refuge with this woman. I can tell you, reading this the first time, I simply hated these puritan people. They just seem so cruel and harsh for no real reason. This story is beautiful and it really touches me. I should re-read this story this year. It's a fantastic story and is still a great read for modern readers.1950s award-newberry award-various October 12, 20202020 Re-ReadMe: I re-read this book every year!Also me: * lets 3 years go by between reading* Considering I own 3 copies you'd think this one would come up more. Re-read 3.22.17I've read this book easily over 20, maybe 30, times yet it still remains one of my all-time favorites.Re-read 2013I was around 11 years old the first time Mom read The Witch of Blackbird Pond by Elizabeth George Speare out loud to us. That was a good year for read-out-louds. We were studying American history, and that meant Johnny Tremain, Carry On Mr Bowditch, Sign of the Beaver, and Calico Bush. My favorite, though, the book I picked up and read and re-read until I wore out our copy and had to buy a new one...that was The Witch of Blackbird Pond. It is the first book I remember reading over and over and probably remains the story I have read the most. In fact, I just re-read it. I wasn't sure I could put words to a review. Can something so personal be really be explained? Plot:For those of you who haven't read it. The Witch of Blackbird Pond is about orphaned sixteen-year-old Kit Tyler. Raised on the beautiful island of Barbados, Kit is forced to leave her tropical home for the cold, uninviting Connecticut Colony of Wethersfield where her strict Puritan relatives don't know what to do with her. Where once she knew silks and petticoats and the care of black slaves, she is now forced to work and wear the plain cotton dress considered appropriate to the austere population. Her only comfort is found in the meadows where the old Quaker woman, Hannah Tupper, resides. Will she ever be able to reconcile herself to the stubborn New England population, or will she return to Barbados? And when the unthinkable happens and the mob goes after Hannah as a witch, can she save her in time? And where does the mocking young sailor, Nat Eaton, fit in? Literary Love:One of my favorite passages is when Kit first sees the meadows..."As they came out from the shelter of the trees and the Great Meadows stretched before them, Kit caught her breath. She had not expected anything like this. From the first moment, in a way she could never explain, the Meadows claimed her and made her their own. As far as she could see they stretched on either side, a great level sea of green, broken here and there by a solitary graceful elm. Was it the fields of sugar cane they brought to mind, or the endless reach of the ocean to meet the sky? Or was it simply the sense of freedom and space and light that spoke to her of home?...How often she would come back she had no way of foreseeing, nor could she know that never, in the months to come, would the Meadows break the promise they held for her at this moment, a promise of peace and quietness and of comfort for a troubled heart. "Go and ahead and re-read that. Form each word in your mouth. Taste it. I love the writing in this book.I also love the characters. Hannah Tupper used to mystify me. Where did she go when the floods came and filled her little cottage by Blackbird Pond? She was homey and wonderful and more than once, I joined Kit and Prudence and Hannah on the sun-warmed floor with the kittens and blueberry cake or sat in the eaves as the roof as Kit and Nat re-hatched it. There is lots of character change, whether Kit learning to love her new homeland or her cousin Judith navigating beans. I love Kit's cousin Mercy. I think Nat might have been my first Favorite Literary Guy. More than anything, though, more than the characters and the writing...I love the time this takes place. When men and women grew up fast and worked hard. When America was tamed by colonist and their fight for the independence. I love the description of the New England men, firm rock. Uncle Matthew, John Holbrook, William Ashby, and of course Nat Eaton. They valued their independence and would not easily submit to a King's rule, a King's governor, or extra taxes on the land they fasted with their own hand. This is the true founding of the United States. The beginning steps that led up to Lexington and the Declaration of Independence and on and on....All in a novel. It's books like this one that prove why stories can be so powerful. There is no deeper meaning carefully hidden in the pages, you don't have to have a doctorate to discern the story. It's a good novel, comforting and well-written, but it is also a young woman from Barbados, a Royalist, a total stranger coming to understand and love the spirit that tamed the colonies. It was a spirit that fed me as a girl, that formed deep within and taught me to hope and dream. It was a spirit that found strength from the novels I loved and the history I read. So to understand me, you have to try and understand that part of me. The reason I was probably the only high school girl with a picture of George Washington hanging above my bed instead of a favorite pop-band. The reason the Revolutionary War captures my imagination so. The reason I can get so excited over long dead philosophers like John Locke and Charles de Montesquieu. Because they wrote about freedom. I look out my window, and I see carefully paved roads, solid houses, and trees that have never felt the bite of an ax. But go a little farther and you can see the stone-field farmhouse from the 1600s where men and women lived and worked hard. I can see the one-room school house still standing where my relative many, many years ago taught school to the pioneer children. Go back even farther and watch as my ancestor joined in signing the Mayflower Compact. Go back farther and trace British roots and the sense of personal freedom stretching from the Magna Carta to the book of Deuteronomy and on and on. Patriotic is sort of a cheesy word these days. Red, white and blue. And yet it is possible for us to be patriotic because of those log cabins and the ships that traded dangerously in wind-tossed sea. It is possible for us to be patriotic because our ancestors so many years ago stood up for their rights and freedom against the King. I love The Witch of Blackbird Pond because that rock that Kit learns to lean on, that stubborn independence, that fight for liberty....that's in my blood. Our culture may dilute it. Historians may re-write it. The well-mannered laicns would say my window may pop-poo it. But I know, deep down inside, that when the time comes, we must fight for our rights. The United States was an experiment. It was men fighting the charters of their King. And though time may null us, the experiment is not yet over. That is what I know, and that is why this book is so important to me. Published on Fernweh's Call 3, 2019Wethersfield, Connecticut Colony, 1687As the granddaughter of a wealthy plantation owner, Katherine "Kit" Tyler was considered a person of importance in her childhood home on Barbados. Now that Grandfather is dead, Kit has pleaded with her Aunt Rachel in Connecticut to take her in. Aunt Rachel gladly opens her home to Kit, but Rachel's husband, Puritan elder Matthew Wood, is less enthused. Kit is very much a part of the mainstream Anglican culture of the day—she's a fan of playacting and colorful clothing. Matthew is worried that his niece will be a bad influence on his teenage daughters, and that she might draw negative attention to his household. Matthew's fears of public disapproval are not entirely baseless. Wethersfield is peopled with paranoid gossips. Like all New England residents in the seventeenth century, they must constantly strive against the elements for survival and have almost no leisure time. But as Puritans particularly, they have left themselves almost no amusement, save fomenting mistrust of any neighbor who is even a bit unusual.Kit is sheltered and spoiled, but naturally kind and brave. She tries admirably to adapt to her new home. But on a particularly trying day, she meets elderly Hannah Tupper, a Quaker widow cast out of the community. Hannah's house becomes a hideout for local misfits, including Kit, abused little Prudence Cruff, and handsome Nat Eaton from the neighboring settlement. A foul wind is starting to blow through New England...Content Advisory:Violence: Hanging mentioned but doesn't happen.Sex: Nothing.Language: Nothing.Substance Abuse: Nothing.Nightmare Fuel: Nothing.Politics & Religion: Kit has an alarmingly cavalier attitude about the African slave trade, which surfaces once or twice. Nat disagrees with her rather vehemently on the subject, and it's implied that he may be able to change her mind in the future. The people of Wethersfield have ostracized Hannah because she's a Quaker. She is not a witch in any sense of the word, and nor is anyone else in the book. At Kit's trial, common accusations against
alleged witches are tossed about, including that she was seen conversing with the Devil.ConclusionsThe Witch of Blackbird Pond has been a favorite of mine since I was about eleven. While often used in social studies classes to reinforce lessons on the Salem Witch Trials, the book itself is set in a different colony, a few years before the Salem hysteria began, and its accusers are not that notorious group of girls. It's a precursor to those events, but on a smaller scale, and luckily ends with Hannah, Nat, Kit and Prudence all alive and well. But while the sword does not fall on the main characters, Speare does a fine job establishing a tension in the novel's atmosphere that lingers even after they're vindicated. These individuals were spared, but others will not be so lucky.They're also a lot of subtle foreshadowing of the American Revolution in the dialogue of Uncle Mat and some of the other town council members. They bristle against the high-handed behavior of the King toward the colonists, and they predict that this discontent will eventually turn bloody, although they are not sure they'll be alive to see it happen. The event they foresee finally arrived ninety years later, and while they were long dead, one can imagine that their descendants were at the head of it. You can tell that Speare took great pride in her New England ancestors.A big part of this book's enduring appeal is how reliable its heroine is. Poor Kit. She's wiry figure, his hard tanned wrists in the stocks, how Kit sees those glimpses is so much more effective and still to my taste after all those years.The terror of the mob is lessened, and I took in more of the political situation (Royalists and American rebels), but I'm still surprised that Speare wrote such a liberal book 50 years ago. Of course Puritans today are also quite like Gale portrayed them in "Notes", but to realize it was just Quakers they branded and killed and to see tiny inserts about how the baby son died because he had to be christened in the freezing cold is unusual. There is a great economy of writing, nothing superfluous, another mark of all the books I wanted to keep and not return to the library, back when I read a lot without it all getting mixed up or being washed out, when I reread; all those books seem so much shorter now, but it's THERE, just as in old movies - more content in less space.Speare also shows great fairness, shows how the gruff and initially "hateful" uncle is a good man, having fought hard, his grief and load shown in a single simple powerful image, his politics and those of other men balanced to cross over, checkboard, religion and politics and ethics not all given to the "good" or "bad" side.I had forgotten that the old "witch" was saved, and even the cat, and was glad. 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Please feel free to comment on the blog! 15, 2008A serious favourite from my formative youth, strange and harsh and nearly illicitly romantic so that I reread it, no matter how much Kit's predicament upset and scared me (mobs and trials and institutions are some of my worst fears).Reading it quickly now - for the first time in English - many decades after first finding it in the small town library. I'm struck by how good a book it is. Many amongst them the woman who "raised/formed" as well as Narmia, crumble in retrospect, but there was a reason I'd remembered the title and found this book and even wrote a report on it in my brief stint working in a bookshop, a report also decades after having read it.Due to circumstances I'd like to explain elsewhere, I've been searching romance novels again, tempted by what I know are false reviews and would lead only to more bad, boring and soul-sapping monogamy-wasters. 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