

ELIZABETH GEORGE SPEARE



YEARLING

The Witch  
of Blackbird  
Pond



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## CHAPTER I

ON A MORNING in mid-April, 1687, the brigantine *Dolphin* left the open sea, sailed briskly across the Sound to the wide mouth of the Connecticut River and into Saybrook harbor. Kit Tyler had been on the fore-castle deck since daybreak, standing close to the rail, staring hungrily at the first sight of land for five weeks.

"There's Connecticut Colony," a voice spoke in her ear. "You've come a long way to see it."

She looked up, surprised and flattered. On the whole long voyage the captain's son had spoken scarcely a dozen words to her. She had noticed him often, his thin wiry figure swinging easily hand over hand up the rigging, his sandy, sun-bleached head bent over a coil of rope. Nathaniel Eaton, first mate, but his mother called him Nat. Now, seeing him so close beside her, she was surprised that, for all he looked so slight, the top of her head barely reached his shoulder.

"How does it look to you?" he questioned.

Kit hesitated. She didn't want to admit how disappointing she found this first glimpse of America. The bleak line of shore surrounding the gray harbor was

a disheartening contrast to the shimmering green and white that fringed the turquoise bay of Barbados which was her home. The earthen wall of the fortification that faced the river was bare and ugly, and the houses beyond were no more than plain wooden boxes.

"Is that Wethersfield?" she inquired instead.

"Oh, no, Wethersfield is some way up the river. This is the port of Saybrook. Home to us Eatons. There's my father's shipyard, just beyond the dock."

She could just make out the row of unimpressive shacks and the flash of raw new lumber. Her smile was admiring from pure relief. At least this grim place was not her destination, and surely the colony at Wethersfield would prove more inviting.

"We've made good time this year," Nat went on. "It's been a fair passage, hasn't it?"

"Oh, yes," she sparkled. "Though I'm glad now 'tis over."

"Aye," he agreed. "I never know myself which is best, the setting out or the coming back to harbor. Ever been on a ship before?"

"Just the little pinnaces in the islands. I've sailed on those all my life."

He nodded. "That's where you learned to keep your balance."

So he had noticed! To her pride, she had proved to be a natural sailor. Certainly she had not spent the voyage groaning and retching like some of the passengers.

"You're not afraid of the wind and the salt, any-

way. At least, you haven't spent much time below."

"Not if I could help it," she laughed. Did he think anyone would stay in that stuffy cabin by choice? Would she ever have had the courage to sail at all had she known, before she booked passage, that the sugar and molasses in the hold had been paid for by a load of Connecticut horses, and that all the winds of the Atlantic could never blow the ship clean of that unbearable stench? "That's what I minded most about the storm," she added, "four days shut away down there with the deadlights up."

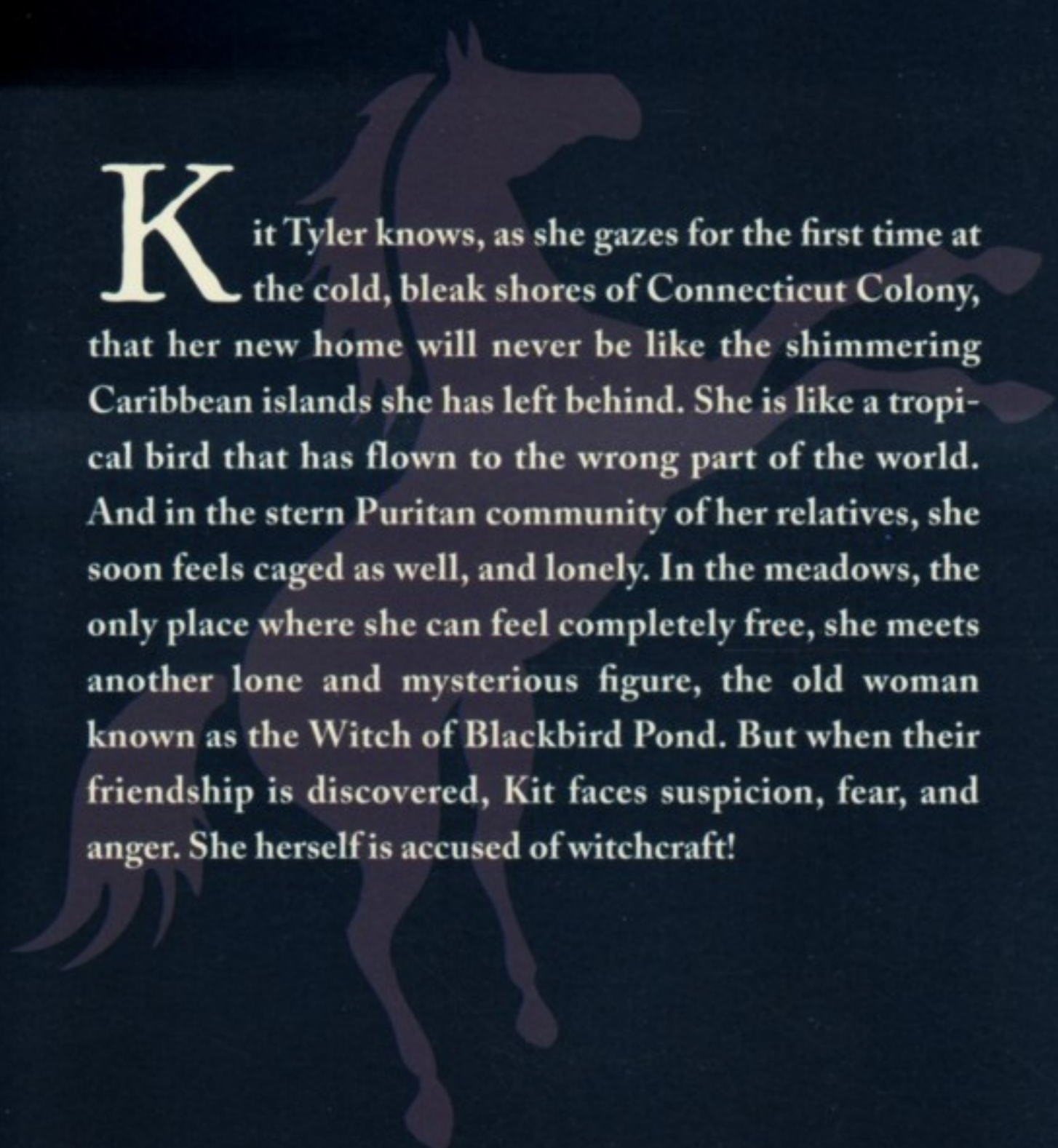
"Were you scared?"

"Scared to death. Especially when the ship stood right on end, and the water leaked under the cabin door. But now I wouldn't have missed it for anything. 'Twas the most exciting thing I ever knew."

His face lighted with admiration, but all for the ship. "She's a stout one, the *Dolphin*," he said. "She's come through many a worse blow than that." His eyes dwelt fondly on the topsails.

"What is happening?" Kit asked, noting the sudden activity along the deck. Four husky sailors in blue jackets and bright kerchiefs had hurried forward to man the capstan bars. Captain Eaton, in his good blue coat, was shouting orders from the quarterdeck. "Are we stopping here?"

"There are passengers to go ashore," Nat explained. "And we need food and water for the trip upriver. But we've missed the tide, and the wind is blowing too hard from the west for us to make the landing."



**K**it Tyler knows, as she gazes for the first time at the cold, bleak shores of Connecticut Colony, that her new home will never be like the shimmering Caribbean islands she has left behind. She is like a tropical bird that has flown to the wrong part of the world. And in the stern Puritan community of her relatives, she soon feels caged as well, and lonely. In the meadows, the only place where she can feel completely free, she meets another lone and mysterious figure, the old woman known as the Witch of Blackbird Pond. But when their friendship is discovered, Kit faces suspicion, fear, and anger. She herself is accused of witchcraft!

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