# The Woman Who Found Things.

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## The Woman Who Found Things.

MY little sister had lost a button from her memory string and was searching for it on the floor.

"If Barb'ry Ann was here, she could find it with her eyes shut," said grandmamma, who sat before the fire sewing.

"Who was Barb'ry Ann?" asked Evelyn, while I closed my book.

"She was the woman who found things," said grandmamma. "I've known men and women and little girls who lost things,"—grandmamma looked over her spectacles, first at Evelyn, then at me. I looked at my work-basket, where a thimble should have been, and Evelyn sat on a stool beside grandmamma, and looked down at her finger where a little turquoise-ring should have been,—"but Barb'ry Ann had a talent for finding things."

"Did you know her?" asked Evelyn.

"No," said grandmamma, "she was an old woman when my grandmother was a little girl. Grandmother told me all about Barb'ry Ann. The name was one of her bywords when we were children, by which she would encourage us to search for lost things and not let little things escape our notice."

"Tell us about her," said Evelyn.

Grandmamma poked the fire into a blaze, and then said.

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You must remember, then, that I am speaking of a very long time ago. For my grandmother was a child in the early part of the eighteenth century. Her name, you know, was Nancy Herbert. Well, one day she was walking home alone and very sorrowfully from the log schoolhouse, wondering whether she should believe her wise and kind father, and the promptings of her own heart, or the terrible stories told her that day in whispers between sessions in the schoolhouse.

The trouble really began with Squire Billups's watch, and Nancy was especially worried because she had innocently had a hand in starting the terrible stories.

One snowy morning, some time before, little 'Mandy Billups had started to school with her father's silver watch on a ribbon around her neck. It was snowing hard, and when 'Mandy put her lunch pail and primer down, and unwound her comforter to thaw her hands before the stove, the watch was gone.

Now this was a very woful thing to happen to 'Mandy, for her father had lent his watch because the school clock was broken. 'Mandy cried nearly all the forenoon, and between sessions several of the children offered to return with her and search the path for the watch; but although they went all the way the snow had blotted the path entirely out, and the world was level and white all around them.

As they were returning to the schoolhouse they met a woman with a shawl over her head, and recognized her as Barb'ry Ann Emms, whom they had only seen once or twice in their lives, and who lived in a little cabin at the edge of the forest.

"What ails her?" said Barb'ry Ann, pointing to 'Mandy Billups, who was still crying.

When the children had told her about the watch, Barb'ry Ann dried 'Mandy's eyes, and tied her comforter and said, "Never mind. Don't cry. Go back to school and come hither this evening, and mayhap I can give thee the watch!"

So the children trotted back to school somewhat comforted, and in the evening Nancy Herbert, who went the same way, accompanied 'Mandy Billups up the road which led toward Barb'ry Ann's little cabin. Sure enough, at the fork of the roads stood the woman. She held the silver watch out to 'Mandy Billups, and then with a nod and a smile turned away.

The delighted children went their way with the watch, and Nancy Herbert, who was quick-witted, said, "Look, 'Mandy! On the path whither the woman came the snow is all melted, whereas here 'tis heavily covered!"

"Mayhap she's a witch!" said 'Mandy Billups, holding tight to the watch.

"Nay, my father says that witches do not exist, and that it is a sin to believe in them," said Nancy, severely.

The children told the story of the watch the next day at school, and also about the melted snow along the path which Barb'ry Ann had taken, and that day several others accompanied Nancy and 'Mandy half the way home to take a peep at the wonderful woman. She spied them, however, and greeted them with a pleasant nod and smile.

Gradually it grew to be quite the customary thing for Nancy and 'Mandy to stop and say good-morning to Barb'ry Ann, because Barb'ry Ann always seemed so glad to see them. After awhile the other children accompanied Nancy and 'Mandy, and they would smile and nod and call, "Good-day to you, Barb'ry Ann!" until they knew her so well that they would stop to chat awhile.

Then they discovered that Barb'ry Ann could do very wonderful things. She could make lovely baskets out of birch-bark, and find berries growing in the queer hidden places in the woods where no snow penetrated, and she could boil nuts in maple sugar in a most delicious manner.

Now Barb'ry Ann had rarely anything to say, for they who live their lives alone outgrow the habit of speech; but she showed such delight in her face when they exclaimed in enjoyment of her maple candy and nut cakes, that they felt as if they were really doing her a favor in partaking of them.

After awhile they discovered that the greatest of Barb'ry's talents was that of finding things. How it became so widely known is not here nor there. They say that when a whisper starts, the birds of the air carry it.

At any rate, some time after Squire Billups's watch was found, the children mentioned to Barb'ry Ann that Master Wynch had lost his finest mare. Barb'ry Ann inquired the mare's name and points, and then she said no more; but the next week when she returned from the neighboring town where she went to sell her eggs—a walk of ten miles or more—she was leading Master Wynch's mare. She drove it into his barn-yard without a word, and went her way with her usual smile and nod.

Soon after this a little child was missing from the village. It was a baby-girl, and when last seen was playing at the edge of the forest with some older children near Barb'ry's cabin. There was great consternation, but the child could not be found. The next day, however, Barb'ry Ann appeared in the village with the baby in her arms. She put it down at its father's door-step, and went away without explanation.

After this every one for miles around who had lost things went in search of the woman who could find them. Girls who had lost their finger-rings, farmers whose stock had strayed away, people who had lost money or treasure, children who mislaid their pennies, all went, by and by, to ask Barb'ry Ann where to find them.

Barb'ry Ann was not in the least vain of her powers. Where she could render aid she did so, as a matter of course, and would take nothing in payment; and she was totally unaware, by and by, of the excitement which grew and spread around her. Marvellous stories began to be told and exaggerated tenfold.

If Barb'ry Ann had been in the habit of going to people's houses she would have heard of these stories, no doubt. You ask me why she didn't visit among her neighbors? Well, that was partly because her mother had been a half-breed Indian, but more because she had been put to death on the accusation of witchcraft in days when the craze for witch-finding had raged strongly in that district.

In childhood Barb'ry Ann had been shunned and slighted by other children; therefore she was as a woman used to living alone. She felt out of place in company, and so she did not visit. She worked her own way, asking nothing and receiving less.

She had toiled over her little patch of ground, and made more of it than many a man did of an acre. Through thrift and perseverance, and a strange sort of natural intelligence and farsightedness, she had discovered a use for wild herbs and plants of the forest of which others never dreamed; and there was about Barb'ry Ann that lack of suspicion which is only found in noble souls.

Now when the village began to be excited about the woman who found things, there was a young man named Ethan Fearwell who sought Barb'ry Ann, claiming to have lost some gold coin with which his father had entrusted him. He belonged to a rather shiftless and carping family in the village, and after he had seen Barb'ry Ann alone in her cabin, he left very surly and angry.

To all questioning he replied that the woman who found things was a witch.

This made some shake their heads gravely, for at that time all sorts of misfortunes, such as sickness, and blighted crops, and losses by sea, had visited the village. Therefore it began to be whispered that the evil eye was in their midst.

Now the father of little Nancy Herbert was a newcomer in the place, and one of those who had the wisdom and courage to go against the opinion of a great many others, and refuse to believe in any such thing as witchcraft.

So one night my Great-grandfather Herbert called his daughter Nancy to him, and inquired carefully into all that she knew about the woman who found things. Nancy wondered a little, and told him of Barb'ry Ann's kindness to the children, and of her clean cabin and her little garden-patch, which had so much growing therein, and of all the wonderful things that Barb'ry could make.

Her father listened in silence, and then said, "My daughter, never fail to believe what thy heart tells thee is right and true, despite the tales of others."

Nancy Herbert did not then know what this had to do with Barb'ry Ann, but the very next day she found out.

There was great excitement among the school children. One of the Fearwell girls had held a secret meeting between sessions, and told some terrible and mysterious stories. It was said that the evil eye was in their midst, and that the one who had caused all the sickness and disaster was no other than Barb'ry Ann Emms.

In vain did Nancy Herbert protest that her father said that witches did not exist. In vain she reminded them that Barb'ry Ann had made them nut candy and birch baskets; all the stories could not be untrue, said the other girls. Therefore by evening little Nancy Herbert walked alone and sorrowfully up the road near Barb'ry's cabin. She was quite a little girl, and she could not help thinking, "Suppose it should be true?"

But Nancy Herbert was not a timorous maid, and when she spied Barb'ry Ann digging away in her garden plot—for 'twas now April—and looking the same as ever, she remembered what her father had said about following her own heart. Therefore her steps lagged.

Then Barb'ry Ann, never stopping her trowel, said, "Good-day t' ye, Mistress Herbert! But I haven't a cake left."

"It isn't a cake I want, Barb'ry Ann," said the child, trembling a little.

"And what then?" said Barb'ry Ann. "Hast lost aught? Thou'rt a nice little maid, and I like thee."

Thus emboldened, Nancy drew a step nearer to where Barb'ry Ann was digging away at the root of a bush, and said softly, *"Barb'ry Ann, art thou a witch?"*

Barb'ry's trowel paused, and then she stood upright and laid a hand upon Nancy's shoulder. "Who hath put the words in thy mouth?" she said.

"Well-nigh everybody," said Nancy, innocently.

For an answer, Barb'ry Ann gathered up her trowel and shook the dirt from her woollen skirt and turned little Nancy Herbert around facing the road, saying, "Thou'rt a brave lass and a good one, but go home! If this is what they are saying, thy mother would not have thee come hither."

Little Nancy Herbert went home crying to her mother; but her tears were in vain. One week later Barb'ry Ann was arraigned upon the charge of witchcraft, and summoned to appear on trial at the log schoolhouse.

Her accusers were a large crowd of persons, who were in an unnatural state of superstitious fear and excitement, which no reasoning could subdue.

Possibly the serenest person to be found at the time was Barb'ry Ann herself. She appeared promptly and willingly at her trial, dressed in a short woollen skirt of her own weaving, gray stockings of her own knitting, a spotless kerchief, and her white hair was uncovered.

To Nancy Herbert's surprise, her father bade her attend the trial, and bring with her any child who was a friend of Barb'ry Ann.

We all know the game of gossip: how when a thing is repeated in a whisper it grows to something which is wholly unlike the first utterance, so that Barb'ry Ann herself must have been terribly astonished at the mysterious deeds laid at her door.

I could not begin to remember all the things of which she was accused, but first and last among the accusations was that her mother had been a witch, and that Barb'ry had inherited the black art; otherwise how could she find things?—a gift which she herself had never explained. This caused great excitement, and things looked very badly for Barb'ry Ann.

When the magistrate asked her if she had anything to say for herself, Barb'ry Ann shook her head, and her gray eyes rested keenly upon the crowd before her.

"Nay," she said, "but I've somewhat to say for my neighbors. I'm not overgiven to words at any time, but if I had known that they wanted to know how I find things, 'twere easy enough to tell them indeed. And as I'm to die for a witch I'll tell ye now. I just go look for 'em, that's all. And then I don't stop till I find 'em!

"Thy horse, Master Wynch, I surmised had been stolen. I marked a mare tied in the lane o' the public house when I went thither with my eggs to the next town. It had all the marks o' thine, and when it answered to its name, I untied it and rode it home. So much for that.

"Thy baby, Mistress Quince—had I not been seeking for roots that day ye'd never seen it again. 'Twas in the forest in a cave, and a bear's cub lay beside it.

"Thy watch, Squire Billups, which thy lass lost, was easy finding. I poured boiling water in the snow that the little maid had walked over, and I found the watch beneath.

"Thy ring, Mistress Wytchell,—I told thee to cut into the two remaining loaves which thou hadst baked, thinking that the ring mayhap didst go into the bread which thou wert kneading at the time. And it was so.

"Thy father's gold, Master Fearwell, thou hast perhaps ere this discovered, for, as I told thee, ofttimes only they who lose can find." She turned her keen gaze upon the youth in the crowd before her, and he hung his head and crimsoned.

Then quickly, one after another, Barb'ry Ann singled out those whose possessions she had found by her wit and common sense.

"And now," she said in conclusion, "as thy will is to hang me for a witch, I have naught to say about the matter. But I would ask to be given one request. That Master Herbert be allowed to appoint my executioners. For he is a just man, and will see that I am not dealt with more harshly than is necessary."

At this Nancy Herbert's father, who had been biding his time, asked the consent of his neighbors to this appointment; and they consented. Therefore he stepped upon an elevation and addressed them somewhat in this manner:

"As ye are determined to put to death this woman, Barb'ry Ann Emms, on the plea of witchcraft and black art, I first call upon any one here present to whom she hath done a kindness to stand forth."

Up got his little daughter Nancy and two school children, and Nancy Herbert slipped close to Barb'ry Ann and took her hand. There was a stir in the crowd at this, and old Master Wynch came forward.

"The dame found my mare," he said.

Then Great-grandfather Herbert said, "As this woman is already condemned for witchcraft, it can do little harm to carry the trial through in a regular manner. I therefore demand that every one present to whom this woman hath done a kind favor step forward."

There was a movement of the whole crowd at this, and Nancy Herbert's father rapidly questioned one after another as to what Barb'ry Ann had done for him or her.

Then he spoke out: "As ye have all had dealing, it seems, with this woman, and are ready to accuse her, I take the right of appointing her executioners, and having none others put her to death."

Therefore, he being a lawyer, this was granted.

"I appoint as the executioners of Barb'ry Ann Emms six men among you, her accusers, who have suffered aught but kindness at her hands."

But the crowd facing great-grandfather grew much confused at this, for among them there were not six men to be found who had suffered aught but kindness at the hands of Barb'ry Ann, or indeed for whom she had not done a favor. Many of the witnesses grew sheepish and unwilling to proceed when faced with their own farfetched and fabulous stories.

"So," said great-grandfather, "ye purpose to hang for witchcraft one who hath done you naught but kindness! For shame! Shame upon ye, one and all!" And then great-grandfather made such a speech as was remembered for many a year, and which did, I believe, put an end to all talk of witchcraft in those parts then and there. When he was finished the crowd had dwindled to a mere nothing.

Barb'ry Ann went out of the log schoolhouse with Great-grandfather Herbert beside her and

Nancy holding her hand. Afterward she went to live in the Herbert family, and was their life-long servant and friend. For the best thing that Barb'ry Ann ever found was that for which she never sought—love.

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As grandmamma stopped she took up her sewing.

"And please, grandmamma," said Evelyn, "give me the very best button you have to put on my string in memory of the woman who found things!"

VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD.