



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Longstaff, Pinepuller And Rockheaver

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Long ago there lived a blacksmith upon whose strong right arm there swelled great muscles and whose big hairy fist was capable of delivering so heavy a blow that all the men in the village and nearby countryside stood in awe of him. He had a hot temper as well as a strong right arm and his pretty young wife grew so afraid of him that she ran away into the forest, taking her baby son with her. The blacksmith had become crosser and crosser of late because the baby sometimes cried at night and disturbed his rest.

In the deep forest the young wife found nuts and herbs and wild fruits to eat. The baby boy thrived most marvelously. Soon he was big and strong, able to kill wild beasts to add to their food. At last his strength was so great that he could lift big rocks and pull up huge trees.

One day he said to his mother, "Dearest one, I'd like to leave you for a little while. I want to go back to the village where I was born. The stories you have told me about it keep ringing in my ears. I must see the place for myself. Do you mind, mother dear, if I take this journey?"

His mother had long foreseen that a day would come when he would no longer be content to live alone with her in the deep forest. Her heart ached but she gave her consent to the expedition.

When the lad reached the village he went straight to the shop of the blacksmith. His mother had described it to him so often that he had no difficulty in finding it. He knew at once that the man at the forge was his father. He looked exactly as he had always imagined his father looked.

"Good day," said he. "I'd like you to weld an iron bar for me, a bar as tall as the tallest tree in front of your shop."

The blacksmith glanced at the lad and then at the tree.

"You must have made a mistake in your measurements," he replied. "You don't know what you are talking about."

The boy from the forest smiled quietly and stepped a trifle nearer to the blacksmith.

"You are quite right," he admitted. "Thank you for pointing out to me my

mistake. I should have said that I want this iron bar made twice as tall as the tallest tree before your door. I want it to be of good thickness, too. I plan to use it as my staff."

The blacksmith looked the lad over more carefully. In truth he appeared as if he might be able to use the staff after all. The blacksmith hastily agreed to make it at once, and he didn't say a word about arranging the price in advance according to his custom.

"Have my staff ready for me next week," commanded the boy as he bade the blacksmith good-by.

When at last the lad was once more with his mother in the deep forest he told her all that had passed. "When I return for my staff I want you to go with me, dear mother," were his words when he had ended his story.

"I!" cried the woman in alarm. "I'd be afraid to go! From your description I am sure the blacksmith is in truth your father, and I fear that his disposition has not improved with the years."

"Don't be afraid, dear heart," said the son. "I'll be there and I'll take care of you. I'll see that he does you no harm."

They started out on their journey, and just a week from the day of the lad's first visit to the blacksmith shop he stood once more in the door. He had left his mother hidden behind the bushes and shrubs.

"Good day," he said to the blacksmith. "Is my staff ready?"

"Yes, indeed. It is entirely completed," replied the blacksmith more politely than he was in the habit of speaking even to the parish priest himself. "I have just sent for two yokes of oxen and enough men to drag it out of my shop."

"That is quite unnecessary," responded the boy. "I'm sorry indeed to hear that you have inconvenienced yourself."

He picked up the staff and tossed it about as jauntily as if it had been a slender cane. The blacksmith stared at him in amazement, his mouth wide open and his eyes bulging out of his head.

"May I ask who you are?" he asked as soon as he could catch his breath.

"My name from this day forth shall be Longstaff," replied the lad. "And it so happens that I am your own son."

The blacksmith listened in surprise while the boy told the story of the years he and his mother had lived in the deep forest. He embraced his son tenderly.

"You are indeed a son to be proud of!" he cried. "Come and live with me. We

shall have a happy life together."

The blacksmith was thinking that a strong young man like this would be a great help around the shop.

Longstaff shook his head. "Thank you, but I cannot tarry here," he said. "I must go away and see the world a bit. My mother, however, is waiting behind the bushes. I fear she will be very lonely while I am away."

When Longstaff's mother came in response to his call her husband embraced her lovingly and kissed her. "I've really missed you about the house while you have been away," he told her.

"If you are not good to her you'll hear from me," said, his son as he looked him straight in the eye.

Longstaff then set out to see the world, travelling from one country to another. After a time he came to a place where there was a man pulling up pine trees by the roots as easily as if they were the weeds in your garden.

"Good day," said Longstaff. "What is your name?"

"I am called PINEPULLER," was the reply. "I'm very strong, as you can see for yourself, but I've heard that there is somebody stronger than I am. His name is LONGSTAFF, I am told."

Longstaff gave his iron staff a gay toss into the air and caught it again in his hand.

"That happens to be my name," he said. "I like you. Won't you join me in my travels about the country? We two would have a jolly time together."

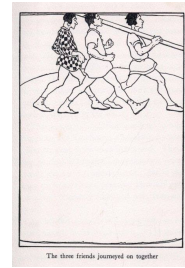
Pinepuller accepted the invitation and together they journeyed on. Soon they came to a place where there was a man picking up great rocks and tossing them about as lightly as if they had been rubber balls.

"Good day," said Longstaff. "What is your name?"

"My name is ROCKHEAVER," replied the other. "You can see for yourself that I am very strong. I've heard, however, that there is somebody stronger than I am. His name is LONGSTAFF, I am told."

"That happens to be my name," said Longstaff, "and this is my friend Pinepuller. You are just the man to complete our little party. Won't you join us as we travel about the country?"

Rockheaver accepted the invitation with glee and the three friends journeyed on together from that hour. Everywhere they went they had everything their own way because of their great strength.



One day Longstaff, Pinepuller and Rockheaver sat on a rock by the sea. Suddenly they spied two pretty girls tossing glass balls back and forth and catching them. They had not stood there on the sand a moment before when the three friends had passed that way. Possibly they had been bathing and had only just come out of the water. Longstaff ran to speak to them. He put out his hand and caught their two glass balls at once. Then a strange thing happened. The two beautiful maidens disappeared the very minute Longstaff put their two glass balls into his pocket, and he was left standing alone on the sand by the sea

"That is queer," he complained as he told Pinepuller and Rockheaver what had happened.

Not far away there was a little house. There were no signs of life about the place and consequently the three friends entered. Inside the house there were beds, beautiful furniture and a kitchen completely furnished with pots and pans.

"I like this house," said Longstaff, as he seated himself in the largest chair. "I'm going to rest a bit and you two can go hunting. When you return I'll have the dinner cooked for you."

Accordingly, Pinepuller and Rockheaver went away to hunt for game. Longstaff rested for a while in the big chair and then he went into the kitchen to light the fire. Soon the fire was burning merrily and the water in the kettle was bubbling away cozily. Longstaff cooked the dinner exactly as his mother had taught him long ago in the deep forest. Just for a minute he turned his back to hunt for the salt. When he turned around the pots and the frying pan were gone from the fire. There was a tiny dwarf with red boots disappearing through the kitchen floor with Longstaff's good dinner.

Longstaff gasped. He was not at all accustomed to having his dinner stolen from under his very nose, as it were.

Soon Pinepuller and Rockheaver came back with the hares they had killed in the hunt. They looked at the dying fire, at the empty pots and frying pan, and at the dazed expression on Longstaff's face.

"Where's the dinner?" asked Pinepuller. "I'm as hungry as a bear. You said you'd have it ready when we got back."

"I know what he's done!" cried Rockheaver. "He has eaten all the dinner and

hasn't left a single mouthful for us!"

When Longstaff told them the story of the dwarf with red boots who had stolen the dinner it was difficult to make them believe it.

"Very well," said he, "if you won't take my word for it, why doesn't Pinepuller stay in the kitchen and cook these hares? Rockheaver and I will go away and you can see what happens."

Accordingly, Longstaff and Rockheaver went away and Pinepuller made a stew of the hares. While he was hunting for the salt the little dwarf with red boots came out from under the table and stole the stew. Pinepuller turned around just in time to catch him at it. He raised his big arm to seize him, but the dwarf, in the twinkling of an eye, vanished into the floor, taking the stew with him.

When Longstaff and Rockheaver returned Pinepuller told what had happened. "I believe you now," said he to Longstaff. "I ask your pardon for doubting your word."

However, Rockheaver was not convinced. "I know what has happened," said he. "You were so hungry you couldn't wait for us and you ate up the stew. You and Longstaff have plotted that I shall go with an empty stomach this day."

"Let Rockheaver, then, be the one to stay in the kitchen," suggested Longstaff. "We have brought back other hares from the hunt. Let him cook them and see what happens."

Longstaff and Pinepuller went away, leaving Rockheaver to cook the hares. Again the dwarf with red boots jumped out from under the table and stole the dinner. When his two friends returned Rockheaver begged their pardon for his moments of distrust.

"These are surely queer doings," said Longstaff. "I'm going to make an investigation. I'll not rest in peace until I find out where this red-booted dwarf lives and where these three dinners have gone. Come and help me dig up the ground under the kitchen."

At once Rockheaver dug up the floor of the kitchen and Pinepuller pulled out the earth beneath. Soon they had a deep well-like hole reaching down into the ground. While they had been digging, Longstaff had made a ladder out of the branches of the trees, a ladder so long that it could reach very far into the earth.

"I'm going to be the one to descend into this hole," remarked Longstaff when he thought that it was quite deep enough.

Indeed his two friends were entirely willing that he should.

He lowered the ladder he had made and very cautiously he crept down into the

earth. At the foot of the ladder he came to what looked like a heavy barred door. He had brought his big iron staff with him, of course, and with this he knocked hard at the door.

"Who is there?" called out a voice from within.

"I am Longstaff." "Open."

"Go away as fast as you can," said the voice. "This is the home of the seven-headed serpent. If he catches you it will be serious. You'll be enchanted and can never get away."

"I'd like to meet this serpent for a minute or two," said Longstaff.

The heavy door swung open and Longstaff stepped inside. Immediately he heard a rushing like a great wind. With his big iron staff he struck a mighty blow at the seven-headed serpent. He hit him just in time to avoid being enchanted. The huge seven-headed serpent fell to the ground completely stunned by Longstaff's blow.

At the first drop of blood which fell from the wounded monster a beautiful maiden appeared near the door. Longstaff recognized her at once as one of the two girls he had seen on the seashore tossing and catching the two glass balls. He took the balls out of his pocket.

"Do you recognize these?" he asked the maiden.

"Indeed I do," she replied. "One of these glass balls belongs to me and the other belongs to my sister. She, too, has been enchanted and is behind the next door you see ahead of you."

"I'll get you away from this evil place," said Longstaff, "and then I'll see what I can do to help your sister."

He lifted her in his arms and started to carry her up the ladder.

"Wait just a minute," she said. "I think I'd better give you back this glass ball. I'll not be able to speak a word while you have it, but I think you need it more than I."

She gave him back the glass ball and then they hastened up the long ladder. When Pinepuller and Rockheaver saw the lovely maiden in Longstaff's arms they were filled with amazement.

"She is a princess who has been enchanted," explained Longstaff. "Take good care of her while I return for her sister. Then we will restore these fair damsels to their father, the king, who has long mourned them as dead."

Once more Longstaff crept down the ladder into the depths of the earth. The

seven-headed serpent was still lying where he had fallen and Longstaff stepped past him and knocked at the door which barred his way.

"Who is there?" called out a voice from within.

"This is Longstaff! Open!"

"Hurry away as fast as you can. This is the home of the dwarf with red boots," said the voice.

"That red-booted dwarf is exactly the person I want to see," answered Longstaff, holding fast to his heavy iron bar which his father had made him long ago in the blacksmith's shop.

The door slowly swung open and Longstaff stepped inside. At once he heard the footsteps of the red-booted dwarf. The tiny dwarf looked up at him in surprise.

"We'll fight and see who is the best man," stormed he. "You fight with the black sword and I'll use the white one."

"No indeed," said Longstaff. "I'll use the white sword and you the black. Otherwise I'll not wait to fight with swords but will choose my own weapon which happens to be this iron staff of mine."

The little red-booted dwarf looked up at the heavy iron staff in Longstaff's hand. It could crush him very easily indeed.

"Very well!" said he. "Just as you like!"

Longstaff fought with the white sword and the dwarf with the black one, and soon the dwarf had fallen, though his great agility made up for his lack of size. With the first drop of blood which fell from the red-booted dwarf the beautiful princess was disenchanted.

She gave her glass ball back to Longstaff after she had recognized it as her own; and, safe in his arms, she was borne up the long ladder to the place where her sister was awaiting her with Pinepuller and Rockheaver.

"I've left my staff behind!" cried Longstaff in alarm. "I must go down once more and get it."

He had never been without his staff near at hand even when he was asleep. Hastily he again descended the ladder. There was his staff lying where he had dropped it when he took the white sword. When he turned around to go up the ladder again, it had disappeared. His friends had forgotten all about him, so interested had they become in the two beautiful maidens. Even at that moment they were on their way to the king's palace. They had pulled up the ladder, never giving another thought as to how Longstaff was going to get out of the hole.

Longstaff shouted in vain. Then he remembered how the dwarf had appeared in the kitchen. Evidently the red-booted dwarf knew how to get up to the surface of the earth. A drink from Longstaff's flask quickly revived him. He reached for the white sword ready to fight again.

"Wait a minute, my friend," said Longstaff. "You are now my prisoner. I'll let you go as soon as you perform a little service for me. Just take me up to the surface of the earth."

"That is easy," answered the dwarf. "Take hold of my hand."

As soon as Longstaff had taken the hand of the red-booted dwarf he felt himself rise. In a moment he was safe outside the hole.

"There's another thing I want you to do for me before I let you go," he said. "Take me to the king's palace."

Longstaff took hold of the dwarf's hand and in a moment more they were at the palace. It was only a minute after the king's daughters had been restored to him. The royal palace was wild with joy. Even the fact that the two lovely maidens were dumb was almost overlooked.

When Pinepuller and Rockheaver saw Longstaff's angry eyes they ran away as fast as they could. They were never seen near the royal palace again.

Longstaff drew the two glass balls from his pocket and gave one to each of the two beautiful princesses. At once they could speak, and together they told their story to their father, the king.

"You may wed whichever princess you prefer," said the king to Longstaff when he had heard how he had made the bold rescue.

Longstaff wedded the princess who was more beautiful than her sister, and when the king died he reigned over the whole kingdom.

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