

THE STORY OF
Henry Wadsworth
LONGFELLOW

Catherine Owens Peare



THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY



Margaret Ayer.



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CHAPTER 1

DELIGHT IN THE WOODS AND SEA

IT WASN'T far from here," said Grandfather Wadsworth, waving his hand toward the stretch of woodland, "where Captain John Lovell and his men met up with the Indians." "Did any of them escape?" asked Henry, who sat at his feet. "A few," put in Henry's brother Stephen, who knew the story by heart.

"Lovell's men were badly outnumbered," Grandfather Wadsworth went on, "and nearly all of them were killed in the fight."

Grandfather Wadsworth's house stood on a huge piece of land in Maine, almost in the wilderness, where Indians had roamed just a few years before. The big wooden house was new then because Grandfather had built it after the American Revolution.

Grandfather Wadsworth had wonderful tales about his adventures in the Revolution. His grandsons begged him to tell, again and again, about how he had raised a company of minutemen, how he had been captured by the British soldiers, and how he had escaped from prison. His stories about the Revolution seemed very real because he still wore his three-cornered hat, ruffled shirt, knee britches, white stockings, and shoes with silver buckles.

But his experiences with the Indians were the most exciting for Henry. Grandfather knew endless stories about Indian

chieftains and the tribes that once lived in Maine. Henry Longfellow never tired of hearing them.

“Tell the story of Lovell’s Pond again,” he begged.

The nearby forests were safe enough in 1812, when Henry Longfellow was five and his brother Stephen was seven, but the boys could pretend that dangers lurked there. After listening to Grandfather’s stories, they could run through the woods and be minutemen or scout for Indians.

Henry liked best to roam through the forests alone. They were mysterious. The branches stirred and rustled and whispered. Indian maidens stepped out from behind trees. Stephen was too noisy to hear these imaginary sounds that Henry heard or to see the imaginary people that Henry saw.

Grandfather Longfellow was almost as interesting as Grandfather Wadsworth, and sometimes the boys spent part of their summer with him. His farm was near Portland, and there Stephen and Henry could play in the fresh hay, pick wild strawberries, and watch Grandmother Longfellow churn milk into butter. They could help with cornhusking or bring the cows home from pasture.

Most exciting of all for Henry was the blacksmith’s shop that stood across the road from Grandfather Longfellow’s house.

The blacksmith was a tall, strong man with big muscles in his arms, and he always turned around and smiled when he saw young Henry.

“Ho, there!” he would call. “Want to be a blacksmith someday?”

Henry nodded yes, but he wasn’t sure he would ever be strong enough.

He stared into the fire while the blacksmith blew on it with his bellows and made it flame up around a piece of iron. Sparks flew all over the shop. The iron grew hot, as hot as the fire, until it turned red and soft. Then the blacksmith laid it on his anvil and hammered it into a horseshoe.

The dancing sparks and the glowing metal lived in Henry's memory as he raced away down the road.

But visits to Grandfather Wadsworth and Grandfather Longfellow were only for the summer. When vacation came to an end, Mrs. Longfellow gathered up her children—Stephen, Henry, four-year-old Betsy, and the infant Anne—and hurried them into a carriage with their packages to drive back to Portland, back to school, and back to Mr. Longfellow.

Imaginative Henry could find just as much adventure in Portland, because Portland was on the sea. As soon as their carriage stopped in front of the house, he jumped out and ran down to the wharves to watch the sailors—tall, strong sailors who strode back and forth. Some of them had rings in their ears. Some had bright red handkerchiefs tied around their heads. Some had thick black beards.

They came from everywhere, sailing into Portland Harbor in tall-masted ships. They laughed and shouted as they carried great kegs of molasses and sugar off the ships and stacked them on the shore. They laughed again as they loaded Maine lumber aboard the ship. Sometimes they waved to the small boy with brown hair and blue eyes as he sat upon the wharf, or they called greetings to him in languages he couldn't understand.

He liked to watch the black seawater, too, as it lapped against the soggy, wooden pier. The water smelled salty and fishy. If he sat there long enough, the water would come up, up, up, as the tide rose.

"Henry!" he heard his mother call, as he ran farther out on the pier and squatted down behind a keg.

It was no use. His mother found him and led him back.

"I want to watch the sea!" he protested. "I want to watch the tide come up."

"You're too small to be down here alone!" said his mother.

The sea was mysterious. It whispered just the way the pine trees in Grandfather's forest did, but Henry didn't have the words to explain.

Mrs. Longfellow held his hand as they walked back to the big brick house on Congress Street.

“May I go down and watch the ships again?” he asked.

“You won’t have time,” his mother told him. “Don’t forget that school starts tomorrow.”

Henry found Stephen sitting in a wide window seat in the front room, and he scrambled up beside his brother. If this were only the upstairs window, he would be able to see the ships from there, because the house wasn’t far from the waterfront.

“Will we study about ships at public school?” Henry asked Stephen.

“Of course not!” said Stephen.

“About Indians, then?”

“You will learn to read and write in public school,” said Mrs. Longfellow.

Henry had been to nursery school, but now that he was five he would go to the public school on Love Lane with his brother.

“Maybe they will teach us about ships and the sea,” he sighed.

“You will have to learn spelling, writing, and arithmetic,” Stephen told him.

Public school was even more disappointing than that, Henry found out the next day and in the days that followed. The boys in public school were rough, and they played hard.

“Do I have to go to school?” he would ask anxiously.

“The big boys always knock him down!” remarked Stephen.

“You have to learn to play with other boys,” Mrs. Longfellow explained to Henry, and she made him go back each day.

Henry couldn’t learn to play hard, rough games, and he couldn’t learn to like public school. He grew more and more unhappy.


“I’ll write to your father about it,” his mother said at last.

Mr. Longfellow was a member of the Legislature of Massachusetts, which met in Boston.









THE STORY OF
Henry Wadsworth
LONGFELLOW

*"I want to be a writer.
My whole soul burns most ardently for it."*



No one loved rambling through the woods and watching ships come and go from the port near his home as much as young Henry Longfellow. As he observed the world around him, words danced in his mind, and his very first poem, written at the age of thirteen, was a published success! Henry's father, however, had other plans for his son. He wanted him to practice law. While respecting his father and persevering in his studies, young Henry found the way to follow his heart and become a great poet. His life was a grand though sometimes heartbreaking adventure, and the lessons he learned contributed to the greatness of his writing.



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