

LEVELED BOOK • Q

The Castaway Pines



Written by Stephen Cosgrove
Illustrated by Carolyn LaPorte

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The Cast:

NARRATOR

POPPA PINE

MOMMA PINE

BABY PINE

LOGGER

NARRATOR:

Deep in the woods stands a family of three pine trees. Their branches are deep green and their limbs are straight. Two of the pines are fully grown, but the third is tiny—barely more than a shrub. Most of the forest has been cut down around them. The larger evergreen trees have been harvested, and they are the last.



The sleeping pines have their heads bowed and their eyes closed. The gentle sound of whispering wind blows through their branches.

The Logger discovers the three pine trees, standing out in the nearly empty forest.

LOGGER:

Wow! Three pines, castaways, in a sea of evergreens. I never would have known they were here, until we harvested the Douglas firs and the blue spruce. Well, have I got a use for them!

NARRATOR:

The Logger rushes away, as the tallest of the three pines shakes himself awake.

POPPA PINE:

Oh, what a wonderful, brisk winter's morning. No snow yet, but it's still early winter. I love snow. Tickles my boughs.

NARRATOR:

Poppa Pine stretches, as well as a tree can stretch, and looks around.

POPPA PINE:

Oh my, oh my! Psst! Momma? Are you awake?





NARRATOR:

Momma Pine shakes her boughs and yawns. She looks down at the sleeping baby pine.

MOMMA PINE:

Yes, Poppa, now I am awake. Oh, isn't it the cutest thing? Seems like only yesterday that it was just a cone hanging in my branches.

NARRATOR:

Poppa Pine looks nervously over his shoulder.

POPPA PINE:

We may have a problem. I mean, a really big problem.



NARRATOR:

Momma Pine looks at the baby, distracted. Eyes opened wide, she looks around but sees nothing.

MOMMA PINE:

And just what could that be, Poppa? It's not those pesky root weevils, is it? I just hate when they come buzzing around. They are so boring. I want to think that all creatures have their place in Nature's plan, but I don't know—weevils just get under my bark. Then it's nothing but itch, itch, itch.



POPPA PINE:

No, Momma, it's not the root weevils. It's much worse than that. It's the loggers.

MOMMA PINE:

The loggers? Are you sure? It just can't be the loggers. We are hidden so deep in this sea of evergreens. Are you sure it's the loggers?

POPPA PINE:

Shhhh! You're going to wake the baby. Yes, I'm sure. Look, there aren't any big evergreens left around us. They're all gone! Next thing you know, the loggers will come to chop us down, too.

MOMMA PINE:

But good loggers or bad loggers?

POPPA PINE:

I don't know. One way or the other, we will be used for something. Could be something good—maybe a wooden chair or a wooden porch or . . . a Christmas tree.





MOMMA PINE:

Oh, Poppa, don't get that hope up and running. Only the best of the best can become Christmas trees. I have always been realistic—maybe a hand-carved rocking chair or an end table.

It won't be so bad. Actually, it may not be bad at all.

POPPA PINE:

But it could be very bad.

MOMMA PINE:

Poppa, I do declare. You do exaggerate so!
It just makes my sap run cold when you talk
like that. What possibly could be worse than
a timber logger?

POPPA PINE:

It could be . . . presto loggers.

MOMMA PINE:

Presto loggers who will . . .

POPPA PINE:

. . . grind us into sawdust and make presto
logs out of us!





NARRATOR:

The shouting wakes up Baby Pine.

BABY PINE:

What's going on? How come you're yelling?

MOMMA PINE:

We're not yelling, dear. Now suck some nutrients from your roots, collect a little sunshine on your leaves, and make some food while you go back to sleep.

BABY PINE:

Oh, Mom! I don't want to go back to sleep. Today you promised me you'd teach me how to make the wind sing through my branches.

POPPA PINE:

Look, Baby, we've got some grown-up tree things to discuss. It would just be better if you were asleep, that's all.

BABY PINE:

I just won't listen. Ninner, ninner, ninner. I can't hear you.

MOMMA PINE:

Stop it!

NARRATOR:

Baby Pine's lower lip begins to tremble. It presses its branches to its eyes.





POPPA PINE:

Oh, don't cry. I just can't handle crying!
Windstorms. Snowstorms. Anything but
crying.

MOMMA PINE:

It's okay, little seedling. It's okay. Momma's
sorry!

NARRATOR:

Sobbing, Baby Pine slowly sinks, branches
leaning to the ground as it falls asleep,
exhausted from crying.

POPPA PINE:

Is it asleep?

MOMMA PINE:

Yes, finally. I don't know if I want any more saplings. Having pinecones is one thing, but maintaining a nursery of seedlings is exhausting.

POPPA PINE:

Shhh! Something's coming.

NARRATOR:

Both older pines freeze in place, silently.
The Logger returns, carrying his ax.





NARRATOR:

The Logger walks up to the trees and leans the ax against his leg. He spits on his palms and rubs them together. He grips the ax and looks at the trees.

He decides that the biggest tree is the one he wants and tries to swing his ax, but the little tree is in the way. He tries to work around it, but no matter how he stands, he cannot swing the ax. He becomes increasingly frustrated.



LOGGER:

Stupid shrub!

NARRATOR:

He grabs Baby Pine. Holding it up by its top, he lifts his ax to chop the little tree down.

POPPA PINE:

Hey, there! I wouldn't do that if I were you.

LOGGER:

Who said that?

NARRATOR:

There is nothing but the sound of wind. Again he starts to swing the ax.



MOMMA PINE:

You do that and I'll fall on you so hard they will never find you.

LOGGER:

What is going on? Who said that?

NARRATOR:

The two adult trees bring their branches together, forming an impenetrable barrier that shields Baby Pine from the Logger's ax.

MOMMA PINE AND POPPA PINE:

We did!

LOGGER:

Trees don't talk.

POPPA PINE:

Not unless we've got something to say.

MOMMA PINE:

And now we've got something to say. Leave Baby Pine alone!

LOGGER:

I'm sorry. I didn't think. I just needed some room.





MOMMA PINE:

Isn't that always the case? Loggers always need a little room, so they chop down tiny, defenseless trees.

LOGGER:

That's not true!

MOMMA PINE:

I am so angry I could just smack you.

POPPA PINE:

Look, we know why you're here, you, you . . . presto logger!

LOGGER:

I am not a presto logger. Where did you get that idea?

MOMMA PINE:

Well, uh, we thought because all the trees . . .

POPPA PINE:

You know, the forest is gone almost overnight, and we just thought that, you know, uh, just like that, presto! Presto log.

We don't want to be ground up into presto logs. We won't go!





LOGGER:

Well, I'm not going to take you if you don't want to go. But I always thought that you guys wanted to be Christmas trees. I guess I was wrong.

POPPA PINE:

Hey, hey, no rush here. I mean heh, heh! Christmas trees, you say?

NARRATOR:

Momma Pine primps her upper branches with her boughs.

MOMMA PINE:

You mean Christmas trees, as in lights and tinsel and garland?

LOGGER:

Yeah. But if you guys don't want to go, I'll just be on my way.

MOMMA PINE:

No! No! Of course we're . . . we're flattered and all. This is the biggest of big for a tree. But what about Baby? We can't leave Baby.

LOGGER:

Look, I'm sorry about that. I wasn't thinking. The little Pine will be cared for and fed and watered. We'll let it sleep through the winter. Come spring, I'll be with it most every day. Baby's pinecones will grow an entire new forest full of castaway pines around here. And I promise you, a few years from now, Baby will be a Christmas tree, too.





BABY PINE:

Hey, what's going on?

NARRATOR:

In response, the two older pines lock branches and begin to sing "O, Christmas Tree."

LOGGER:

May you all find the best in this, the season of snow. Happy holidays.

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