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**THE OUTDOOR  
GIRLS ON A HIKE**

**Edward Stratemeyer**

# **The Outdoor Girls on a Hike**

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# CHAPTER I

## HIKE AHEAD

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“Hand me that book, Carolyn, will you? There’s a dear!”

Carolyn Cooper, blond and pretty and delightfully lazy, regarded the speaker reproachfully.

“Always, just when I am comfortable, you think up something for me to do, Lota Bronson. Here—take your old book!”

“Thanks for the manner,” laughed Lota, catching the book as it was flung toward her. “If you ask for the truth, Carolyn——”

“Which I don’t and never did,” sighed Carolyn.

“*I’d* say you were getting abominably lazy.”

“Speak for yourself,” retorted Carolyn. “I don’t see you dancing any Highland fling yourself!”

“It’s the weather,” said Irene Moore, wrinkling her funny little nose. “We’ve all got spring fever.”

Stella Sibley sat up with sudden energy.

“How convenient it is to blame the weather,” she said. “But I’ll tell you what’s the matter with us, girls. It isn’t spring fever. It’s just plain laziness, spelled with a large L.”

“It’s a plot,” protested Carolyn, from the mass of pillows in the porch swing. “She’s trying to stir up something, girls. Don’t let her!”

But Stella found support from an unexpected quarter.

“I think Stella is exactly right.” This from Meg, the second of the Bronson twins. “We are all getting soft, sitting around eating candy and going to dances——”

“We play tennis sometimes!” Irene protested.

“How often?” Meg sniffed. “Once or twice a week. And I noticed after that last singles set I beat you——”

“Ouch! Don’t remind me!” begged Irene. “The memory hurts!”

“You were puffing like a fat little——”

“Don’t say it!” begged Irene. “Not if my friendship means anything to you!”

“Just the same,” Stella Sibley took up the theme where she had left off, “the fact remains that as athletic girls and members of the Outdoor Girls Club, we haven’t been exactly living up to our reputation.”

“Well, what do you want us to do?” Carolyn definitely abandoned her pillows and regarded Stella with the air of one who is willing to be reasoned with. “Are we to start skipping rope or making passes at a punching bag?”

“Not so bad for exercise,” chuckled Stella. “But hardly what I had in mind. I was thinking that what we needed was more road work.”

“Girls,” giggled Irene, “she wants to make us into lady pugilists.”

“Oh, well,” said Stella, offended, “if all you can do is laugh——”

“*I’m* not laughing,” said Carolyn Cooper virtuously. “I think it’s a mighty fine idea.”

“Listen who’s talking!” mocked Irene.

“But I really am in earnest,” protested Carolyn. “Hiking is the best kind of exercise and it’s apt to prove mighty interesting, too.”

“The trouble is that you can’t go far enough in one day to have any real fun,” Lota Bronson objected. “By the time you reach new, interesting places you have to turn round and trot home again. Not so good.”

“Oh, but I’ve an idea!” Irene clapped her hands. “A perfectly scrumbumptious idea! Why not take a real hike—an overnight hike?”

“A several overnights hike,” amplified Carolyn, slightly incoherent in her sudden enthusiasm. “Then we shouldn’t have to turn around and come home just when things began to get interesting.”

“And we could camp overnight wherever we happened to be,” added Irene. “We could pick out a route that wouldn’t be too lonely and where there would be plenty of farmhouses that would take us in for the night.”

Stella considered the idea seriously.

“That would be fun, girls, real fun. We would be gypsies for a while. What a lark to start out in the morning without knowing where we would end up at night.”

“Or how!” finished Meg, with a chuckle. “I’m right with you, girls, although Lota and I are more used to traveling on horses’ feet than our own. We ought to be good, though, for a considerable cross-country hike.”

The Outdoor Girls were holding their meeting at the beautiful Deepdale home of Stella Sibley. They had chosen the summerhouse in the garden because it was the coolest spot anywhere about. The summerhouse was completely and comfortably furnished with its swing, its small tables and inviting chairs, and the girls were fond of holding their meetings there.

“I think it’s a marvelous idea,” agreed Lota, continuing the discussion of the proposed hike. “Only I don’t think we ought to leave too much to chance. We ought to agree to hike so many miles a day for a certain number of days.”

“We could make it a two-weeks’ hike,” Stella suggested, “and we could cover, well, say something like ten miles a day.”

“Lovely!” cried Carolyn. “Fourteen days at ten miles a day makes something like one hundred and forty miles in the two weeks. Not bad for girls who have grown ‘soft’!” She made a face at Stella.

“We haven’t done it yet,” Stella quickly reminded her.

“I have another idea,” Irene announced suddenly.

“She’s running mad with them to-day,” observed Lota, with a lazy grin.

“Why wouldn’t it be possible to visit the married girls while we’re about it?”

“Great!” exclaimed Stella approvingly. “Mollie and Roy have that darling bungalow in the woods——”

“Newlyweds!” chuckled Irene Moore. “Maybe they wouldn’t be glad to see us.”

“Maybe they wouldn’t!” scoffed Stella. “I’d be willing to take a chance on that.”

“Then we could go on to the seashore and stay overnight with Grace and Amy and the boys,” Carolyn proposed. “And then travel on to Betty’s.”

“Up in the hills,” agreed Irene contentedly. “I call that a pretty nice itinerary, if you ask me.”

“Then it’s settled?” asked Stella, in her capacity of president. “There is no dissenting voice?”

“Not one dissenting voice!” the others assured her in a solemn chorus.

“Then,” added Stella, assuming a very businesslike manner, “I think it’s about time we called the meeting to order and got on with the business of electing officers. That’s what we are here for, you know.”

“Oh, bother business,” protested Carolyn Cooper. “I move we save time by reëlecting the same officers we had last year. I’m sure we all want Stella to go on being president —”

“Hear! Hear!” cried Irene, the irrepressible. “Second the motion!”

“Carried unanimously,” added Meg Bronson, grinning.

“And I’m sure,” Carolyn continued, looking prettier than ever as she twinkled at them mischievously, “Irene has made a most excellent, honest, and praiseworthy treasurer —”

“Irene for treasurer!” was the clamorous cry, while Stella rapped in vain for order. “We’ll have no one else! We want Irene!”

“Unanimously elected!” laughed Carolyn. “For myself,” she lowered her eyes modestly, “I say nothing. As your secretary, I have honestly tried to give satisfaction. It is for you to decide whether or not I have succeeded.”

“We want Carolyn!” the others chorused obligingly. “We want Carolyn! Carolyn Cooper for secretary!”

Carolyn rose and bowed gravely about the circle.

“I thank you all,” she said.

“Well, I must say,” cried Stella indignantly, “I never saw such an unbusinesslike meeting in my life! What I want to



know is, am I the president of this——”

“Didn’t you just hear yourself elected?” asked Carolyn, with much gravity.

“You must have been asleep or something,” giggled Irene.

“Well, of all the unbusinesslike——”

“Oh, bother!” drawled Meg. “Who wants to be businesslike on a day like this? Listen!” she added, sitting at attention. “Do you hear an airplane or am I imagining things?”

Silence descended on the summerhouse; a silence invaded by the unmistakable roar of an approaching plane.

“Oh!” Carolyn jumped to her feet and ran out into the open. “Maybe it’s Hal. Oh, I hope it is!”

The rest of the girls joined Carolyn and gazed up at the plane, now directly overhead.

“What do you mean by ‘maybe it’s Hal’?” Lota Bronson demanded. “Don’t tell me Hal has taken up flying!”

“Oh, hadn’t you heard?” Carolyn tried to look innocent. “Hal has gone crazy over aviation. He has been up in a plane several times and he told me that he is considering taking up flying—seriously, you know.”

“You little wretch!” cried Lota. “Of course you wouldn’t tell us about it!”

Hal Duckworth was a nice lad, who had become interested in the Outdoor Girls—in general; and in Carolyn Cooper—in particular. It would not be giving away a secret to admit that Carolyn returned this interest.

“I think it’s thrilling,” observed Irene. “If Hal gets to be a demon air pilot, maybe he’ll take us for a ride once in a

while.”

The plane winged its swift way into the distance, the whine of its motor died on the soft summer air.

As the girls turned to reënter the summerhouse they saw that some one had come into the garden. An unprepossessing old crone, dressed in the colorful garb of a gypsy, shuffled along the gravel drive. Two younger women with dark, brooding faces, followed her.

They saw the girls standing at the entrance to the summerhouse and came toward them. The old crone’s face lighted with what was evidently intended to be an ingratiating smile.

“Have your fortunes told, pretty ladies?” she mouthed, showing toothless gums. “Pretty fortunes for pretty ladies. Come, cross my palm with silver and you shall look into the future.”

“Send them away!” Carolyn whispered to Stella. “I don’t like the looks of them. Do send them away!”

# CHAPTER II

## A GYPSY NAMED HULAH

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Stella Sibley did not like the looks of the gypsies any more than Carolyn Cooper did. There was something in the old crone's smile, in the sullen faces of the other two that repelled her. She knew, however, that kind words are often more effective than threats. So she said, answering the gypsy's smile:

"We don't care to have our fortunes read just now. We are busy with something else."

The eyes of the old crone roved to the summerhouse, luxuriously appointed and with every evidence of recent occupation. She leered at Stella, again displaying toothless gums.

"We can wait," she said, "until you are finished with your —business."

Stella glanced swiftly at the other girls. She could see that they were all half-dismayed, half-angered by the gypsy's presumption.

"No," said Stella, with a decided shake of the head. "We thank you very much, but we shan't want our fortunes read to-day. You would only be wasting your time by staying here."

Instead of retreating, the gypsy shuffled closer.

"To a gypsy time is nothing, pretty lady," she persisted. "We will wait."

"No; you will go," said Stella quietly. "I've told you we don't want our fortunes read and I mean it. If you do not go

at once, I shall have to call some one from the house.”

This threat appeared to have no effect upon the old crone. She stretched out her skinny old hand toward Stella.

“The pretty lady would not do that,” she whined. “She has too kind a heart. I am an old, old woman, but I can see into the future—aye, better than most. Give me your hand, dearie, and I will tell your fortune.”

Stella shrank back, her hands outflung in a gesture of unconscious loathing.

“Go away!” she cried. “Go away!”

While Stella Sibley is wondering how she can drive the impertinent gypsies from the garden, it may be well to take a moment to introduce the Outdoor Girls to those who are not already acquainted with them.

The adventures of the Outdoor Girls had been interesting and varied from that first, never-to-be-forgotten camping and tramping trip, in which the girls had many thrilling and exciting events befall them before they arrived home safe and sound. There had been later adventures in Florida, at Wild Rose Lodge, at Cape Cod and other interesting places. A summer spent at Spring Hill Farm carried with it adventures that would long live in the girls’ memory.

Just the previous summer the Outdoor girls had made the acquaintance of two charming girls, Meg and Lota Bronson, and had spent a thrilling vacation as the guests of Daniel Tower on the latter’s Western ranch. Daniel Tower was the guardian and self-styled uncle of Meg and Lota Bronson, recent members of the Outdoor Girls Club.

Of the four original Outdoor Girls, Betty Nelson, Molly Billette, Grace Ford and Amy Blackford, there was now none

left in the club, they having all deserted it in favor of marriage.

One by one, during the years, they had dropped out. First, Betty Nelson, the much-loved Little Captain, had married Allen Washburn, a young Deepdale lawyer. Then Amy Blackford had married Will Ford, Grace's brother. Still later Grace had paired off with Frank Haley, another Deepdale boy.

But as the older girls had dropped out, new members were initiated; first Irene Moore and Stella Sibley, then Carolyn Cooper and the Bronson twins. So when Mollie Billette finally decided to take the "big step" and had married Roy Anderson, long her fervent admirer, there were still five Outdoor Girls, though none of the original number remained in the club.

Naturally, as new Outdoor Girls took the place of old, new boys were admitted to the magic circle.

First there was Clem Field, a cousin of Stella Sibley. Clem was a likable lad and from the first had been attracted to the Outdoor Girls and to all that their club stood for. He had liked Mollie Billette particularly well, and for a time their close friends had found themselves unable to predict whether Roy or Clem would be the lucky one chosen by dark-eyed, dark-haired, vivacious Mollie. Since Mollie had definitely turned to Roy Anderson, however, Clem had seemed to find it possible to transfer his admiration to Irene Moore.

Then there was Hal Duckworth, a fine lad who made no secret of his admiration for Carolyn Cooper.

Dick Blossom, a young giant of a fellow, with great hands that seemed continually to get in his way, was another good friend of the Outdoor Girls. During the previous summer he had appeared greatly taken with both the Bronson twins and had created great merriment for the rest of the young folks by his inability to tell them apart.

Deepdale, where the Outdoor Girls lived, was a thriving city of some twenty thousand inhabitants and was situated on the banks of the Argono River. This river emptied into Rainbow Lake, some miles below.

Now to return once more to the Outdoor Girls as they face the impertinent gypsies in the Sibley garden.

The aspect of the three gypsies had grown threatening. The leer had faded from the lips of the ancient crone. She mouthed wrathfully, muttering something beneath her breath.

One of the younger women said angrily:

“Make them do as you say, Hulah, or call down the curse of the tribe upon them!”

The woman called Hulah raised a skinny arm above her head. Her sunken eyes fixed themselves upon Stella with a disconcerting intensity.

“For the last time,” she shrilled. “Will you let us read your fortune?”

“No!” cried Stella, frightened but thoroughly angry. “Go away, you horrible old woman!”

The old crone raised both arms above her head. The expression of vindictive hate on her withered old face was horrible to see.

“Then,” she cried, in a shrill, piercing voice, “may the curse of——”

“Dick!” shouted Meg suddenly, in a round full young voice that drowned out the shriek of the gypsy. “Dick Blossom! Come here! Quick!”

A stalwart young fellow had been passing along the side street. Meg had seen his head and shoulders above the hedge that guarded the Sibley property.

Her shouted command was received and obeyed instantly.

Dick vaulted the hedge lightly, for all his bulk, and loped across the lawn with the grace of a young elephant. He stopped beside the girls and regarded the queer scene with a look of bewilderment.

“For the love of Pete——” he began, but paused as the gypsies, after one good look at his height and breadth of shoulder and the ham that served him as a fist, turned and scuttled down the pathway, the old crone muttering and mouthing savagely at those in the summerhouse.

“Well,” said Dick whimsically, “I may be dumb; but tell me, somebody, what it is all about.”

“Oh, those horrible gypsies!” cried Stella, clinging to Dick’s arm. “They wanted to read our fortunes, Dick, and when we wouldn’t let them they got nasty and threatened to put a c-curse upon us.”

“Nervy beggars!” cried Dick. “Wish I’d known that a few seconds earlier. I wouldn’t have let ’em get off so easily.”

“All we wanted them to do was to get off,” Stella explained, with a nervous giggle. “And they wouldn’t. Oh, Dick, I’m glad you came!”

Dick grinned.

“For once I’m really welcome,” he said. “Think I’ll stroll down to the gate, ladies, and see if those gypsies have really taken themselves off.”

He returned a few moments later to report that the gypsy women were mere specks in the distance.

He was all for going on about his business then, but the girls would not part with him so easily. Quite apart from their genuine liking for the young fellow, they found his stalwart presence extremely reassuring and comforting at that time. The evil influence of the gypsies still seemed to hover above the garden.

Carolyn linked her arm within Stella’s as the Bronson twins and Irene dragged Dick into the summerhouse.

“That horrible old crone!” she said, with a shudder. “I may be silly, Stella, but I’m glad she didn’t have time to finish that curse!”



# CHAPTER III

## ROBBERS

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Dick Blossom was told about the Outdoor Girls' proposed hike and listened with flattering attention.

"Bully!" he said, and added, with a grin: "Nothing better for reducing, I've been told."

Lota and Irene made a dash for him and he ducked adroitly from the summerhouse.

"I was going, anyway," and he grinned as he avoided their laughing attack. "Don't hurry me! It isn't polite!"

As he dodged among the bushes, Stella called after him:

"Come on over to-night, Dick. I think Hal and Clem will be here."

Dick paused and glanced back.

"Will you treat me right?" he demanded.

"We'll pet and pamper you to your heart's content," Stella promised recklessly. "Only come."

Dick nodded.

"Try to keep me away," he retorted, and vaulted over the hedge.

After he had gone, the girls exchanged uncomfortable glances. Stella went to the doorway of the summerhouse and stood there uncertainly.

"It's time for refreshments, girls," she said, in what she hoped was a matter-of-fact voice. "Shall we have them here or up at the house?"

"At the house!" was voted unanimously, and then all exchanged shame-faced glances.