

***EDWARD
STRATEMEYER***



***THE OUTDOOR
GIRLS AT FOAMING
FALLS***

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The Outdoor Girls at Foaming Falls

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CHAPTER I

MAD DOG

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Mollie Billette was searching impatiently about the pretty grounds of her house. Her mouth was pouted most becomingly and her brow was wrinkled in a prodigious frown that boded no good for Irene Moore, the absent one.

“She is the most aggravating thing!” Mollie stamped her foot and was aggrieved that it made no sound on the soft turf. “Just as everything is ready she has to go and run away. She ought to be put out of the club—bad child!”

“Ah, now, you could never do a thing like that to me, darling,” said a laughing, coaxing voice from somewhere over Mollie’s head. “You’ve a good heart, despite the fact that it’s well hid!”

Mollie discovered that she was standing beneath one of her mother’s cherished apple trees. She looked up, still wearing her threatening frown, and found among the branches of the tree the smiling and wholly unrepentant face of Irene Moore.

“Come down out of that!” she commanded, her frown deepening. “What do you think you are—a tree toad?”

Irene made a mournful face.

“Am I as ugly as all that?” she complained. “I always knew my beauty was nothing to rave over, but a tree toad!”

“Don’t be silly.” Mollie was smiling in spite of herself, as one frequently did at Irene’s nonsense. “Have you given a thought, young lady, to the fact that you are holding up a very important meeting of the Outdoor Girls?”

“Am I, now?” Irene’s tone was deceitfully penitent. “Who would be thinkin’ it? Out of the way, darlin’, while I leap to yon mossy bank.”

Although Mollie could see no mossy bank, she took the precaution to step out of the way, just the same. It was lucky she did, for the next moment Irene landed in a laughing heap on the ground exactly on the spot where Mollie had stood but a moment before.

The latter tried to frown and succeeded only in giggling joyously.

“Come along, you bad thing,” she said, with an arm about the younger girl. “Some day you’re going to break your neck, climbing apple trees promiscuously like that.”

“Now, you needn’t go insulting me with your long words,” Irene retorted. “And I’ll have you know I’m not a bit promiscuous. I’m very careful about the apple trees I climb.”

“You’re hopeless,” declared Mollie, with a shake of her head. “I’m afraid, Irene Moore, that you will never see the serious side of life.”

“Well,” returned Irene, voicing a rare bit of philosophy, “what you can’t see never will hurt you. It’s a good thing to be blind to some things, Mollie Billette!”

They had passed around the Billettes’ vine-covered house and invaded the grounds to the rear of it. There was a garden here, bright with early flowers, and there were great old shade trees dotting the bright lawn with splashes of shadow.

As Mollie and Irene approached they could see the other three Outdoor Girls lazing in characteristic attitudes in the pretty rose arbor at the extreme end of the grounds.

Amy Blackford was seated cross-legged on the slatted floor of the arbor, making a sweet-scented wreath of spring flowers. Stella Sibley was busy with pencil and paper, sketching Grace Ford who lolled luxuriously in the old porch swing that stood just without the arbor beneath the shade of a wide-spreading tree.

Surely, the right kind of setting for a meeting of the Outdoor Girls of Deepdale!

Mollie and Irene paused at the entrance to the pretty spot, drinking in the picture. However, at sight of the two missing members the scene changed abruptly. It became imbued with activity.

Amy pushed her flower wreath to one side and scrambled to her feet, and even Grace Ford sat up in the swing, looking expectant.

“Hey! How do you expect me to make a good drawing when my model won’t sit still?” It was Stella Sibley who made the complaint. Grace grinned at her.

“Who said anything about a *good* drawing, old dear?” she drawled.

“Just for that I’m going to exhibit the sketch.” Stella pushed her pad over toward the newcomers. “Picture of Grace,” she announced with deep gravity. “Subtitle, Laziness Complete and Unashamed.”

The two girls chuckled as they bent over the sketch. The girl reclining in the swing was undoubtedly Grace, though the posture of repose and the blissful expression on the face were so cleverly accented as to make the whole thing irresistibly funny.

The chuckle swelled into a gale of laughter and Grace jumped up and snatched the picture from them.

“Let me see that thing!” she cried. Then, gazing upon her own slightly cartooned though still graceful and pretty self as drawn by Stella’s skillful pencil, a reluctant smile forced itself to her lips.

“What it takes to do that, you’ve got,” she acknowledged, handing the picture back to its author. “I declare, no one can even think around here, Stella Sibley, but what you have to put it down on paper!”

“If your thoughts are good ones,” said Mollie sententiously, “you have nothing to fear.” At this they all giggled again.

As a matter of fact, they were all immensely entertained by this talent of Stella’s.

Stella Sibley and Irene Moore were younger than the other Outdoor Girls, and had only recently been admitted to membership in their club. Stella had been quiet and a little shy at first and not until her formal initiation into the Outdoor Girls’ Club had she given her new friends any intimation of her unusual skill with the pencil.

Now Mollie assumed a serious expression—with difficulty—and called the meeting to order.

“We’ve wasted time enough,” she announced. “If we are ever going to select a new leader to take our Little Captain’s place we had better do it right away.”

There was a brief pause while the four girls looked at Mollie and the expression of their merry faces sobered almost to sadness.

“We can’t do that, really, Mollie.” It was Amy Blackford who put the general thought into words. “We never could find any one to take Betty’s place.”

“Don’t you suppose I know that?” Mollie spoke sharply because of the treacherous tears that were gathering in her eyes.

She glanced away for a moment and when she spoke again her voice was serious—almost solemn.

“Betty has been the leader of the Outdoor Girls for so long that it seems, now she is married——”

“And gone forever!” came mournfully from Grace.

“And gone forever!” agreed Mollie, with a faint smile. “It really seems as though nothing could be the same again.”

“But of course we can have Betty with us sometimes——”

“When Allen lets us,” again from Grace.

“So that it isn’t like losing her altogether,” Amy finished.

“Of course.” Mollie threw Amy a grateful glance. “And since our Outdoor Girls’ Club is still very much alive, having even,” with a glance at Stella and Irene, “recently added unto itself two new members, I think you will all agree that we need some sort of leadership.”

Grace sat up suddenly in the swing and leaned toward Mollie. She looked very eager and unusually in earnest.

“What’s the use of beating around the bush, Mollie?” she asked abruptly. “We all know who is the logical one to step into Betty’s shoes. You were always second in command under the Little Captain and now we want you to be first. Isn’t that so, girls?”

The others replied enthusiastically in the affirmative.

As she looked about at them something caught in Mollie's throat and it was a moment or two before she could say anything at all.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you all," she said at last. "But, of course, I can't ever take Betty's place—" She sat down, suddenly overtaken by that choking feeling in her throat and, to use her own disgusted phrase, "proceeded to make a complete baby of herself."

It was all over in a moment, being, at most, an April shower, and the girls fell to discussing the next important subject of the meeting. This was the imminence of Betty's birthday and the all-important problem of a suitable gift for her.

"Wouldn't it be nice to give her a surprise party?" Irene suggested. "We could say nothing to any one about it and make it a complete surprise."

The girls were in the act of unanimously acclaiming this suggestion when their attention was diverted in a sudden and alarming manner.

From somewhere close by came a series of short, sharp barks and the next moment a yellow streak burst through the shrubbery surrounding the arbor.

Somebody yelled, "Mad dog!" and five Outdoor Girls darted for cover.

CHAPTER II

MR. WAGS

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“Down, Hesper! Down, you bad dog!” Irene shrieked. “What do you mean, coming out this way without leave? Down, I say!”

The other Outdoor Girls from vantage points of comparative safety watched the scene with amazement.

“It’s Irene’s collie, Hesper,” said Mollie.

“And if he’s mad, so am I,” added Irene as she fondled the great golden head of her pet. “Come on out, girls. Hesper’s as safe as a maiden aunt!”

They giggled and came forth. Hesper greeted them all with a friendly, though dignified, wave of his brush.

“What I want to know is how he got loose,” said Stella.

“That’s bothering me, too,” Irene admitted. “We never let him out unless he’s with one of the family. Aren’t you the bad dog!” She turned on him with a ferocious scowl. The collie whimpered and gazed so wistfully at his mistress that Irene relented and tapped him on the nose.

“Don’t look like that,” she entreated. “It makes me sad.”

“I have an idea. It came to me just like that!” Stella, who had been making a rough sketch of Hesper, looked up, her pencil poised.

The girls stared.

“About a present for Betty,” she explained. “We were talking of that, you know, when Hesper so rudely interrupted us.”

“If you have an idea,” drawled Grace, “let’s have it.”

“Why not get her a dog as a present from us all?”

The girls were silent for a moment, thinking this over.

“I don’t see why we couldn’t,” said Mollie thoughtfully. “Just the other day Betty said something about wanting a dog.”

“A good watch dog—she said once she wanted one—one that will guard all her wedding presents,” giggled Irene.

“I’m afraid the one I have in mind wouldn’t be much good as a watch dog,” said Stella. “But he’s awfully cute.”

“Goodness, listen to the child!” Grace was so interested that she forgot for the moment the candy box, so temptingly open beside her. “I believe she has one picked out already.”

Stella looked slightly embarrassed as the attention of all was focused upon her.

“Well, I did sort of have one in mind,” she admitted. “His name is Mr. Wags and if I didn’t have a big fat tabby cat at home I’d buy him for myself.”

“Oh, now I know what you mean!” Irene was eagerly interested. “You were thinking of that auction sale out near us, where even the family animals are to be auctioned off!”

Stella agreed, and she and Irene explained about the auction at the big house on the hill not far from where the two girls lived.

The owners of the big house, it seemed, had been called across the continent on a business trip of indefinite duration and were anxious to dispose of their possessions in Deepdale as soon as possible. As Irene said, even the family animals were to be auctioned off. Since there was quite a menagerie, including a canary bird, a black cat, goldfish,

and the aforementioned Mr. Wags, this fact had aroused considerable interest among the neighbors of the big house on the hill.

“What kind of dog is this Mr. Wags?” inquired Mollie. “His name doesn’t tell much.”

“Except that he has a good disposition,” chuckled Irene.

“He’s a cocker spaniel and he’s a beauty,” replied Stella. “I had to go up there on an errand one day and he sat up on his hind legs for me. I never saw anything so cute.”

“It will be a wonder if Mr. Wags ever gets any further than Stella’s front door,” chuckled Grace.

Irene gave an exclamation and got to her feet.

“What seems to be the matter now?” queried Mollie.

“I just happened to think! That auction starts to-day.”

Stella looked positively distressed as she pocketed pad and pencil and jumped up.

“Mr. Wags will be sure to go the first thing!” she cried. “Oh, let’s hurry.”

“We shall have to have some money,” said Mollie practically. “Wait a moment while I go in and gather up the sad remains of this week’s allowance.”

A few moments later, armed with her purse, Mollie rejoined the girls at the front of the house.

“Why didn’t I think that the auction started to-day?” complained Stella as she hurried them on. “If Mr. Wags is gone I’ll never forgive myself.”

Stops were made at the homes of the other girls along the way, each one procuring what funds she could for the purchase of Mr. Wags.

Hesper accompanied them, trotting along with dignity at Irene's side. When they reached the latter's home, the collie was shut indoors by his mistress and strict orders given the new cook that he was not under any circumstances to be let out before the return of his mistress.

Then, the last stop having been made, they reached the foot of the hill and above them the big white house loomed majestically.

"Oh, do let's hurry!" came from Stella. "I have a horrible feeling that Mr. Wags has gone forever!"

A crowd had gathered at the scene of the auction, and among these people the Outdoor Girls recognized and greeted many acquaintances.

This was not strange since the Outdoor Girls and their friends were perhaps the best known group of young people in Deepdale.

The club had originally consisted of four girls, Betty Nelson, Mollie Billette, Grace Ford, and Amy Blackford.

Betty Nelson, bright, full of vigor and sense, had been the natural leader of the girls. Because of her resourcefulness in cases of emergency, her chums had affectionately dubbed her their "Little Captain." Betty when a mere girl had been friendly with Allen Washburn, a rising young lawyer of Deepdale. The friendship ripened into something stronger until, as told in the story directly preceding this, the two young people had married, thus to a large extent robbing the Outdoor Girls of their beloved Little Captain.

Mollie Billette, dark-haired, dark-eyed, with a touch of Latin in her make-up, inherited from her charming French

mother, had always been second in command to Betty. Now, as the others had decreed, she was about to take over the leadership of the Outdoor Girls, relinquished by their Little Captain.

Grace Ford, tall, graceful and very lovely, and Amy Blackford, a quiet, sweet-tempered girl, complete the original quartette of Outdoor Girls.

It was after Betty's marriage that their ranks had been augmented by the acquisition of the two new members, Irene Moore and Stella Sibley, whom the Outdoor Girls had met on their trip to Cape Cod.

It is hardly possible to introduce the Outdoor Girls without mentioning the boys, who had shared so many of their adventures.

Allen Washburn had, of course, with Betty, deserted the "happy family," as the girls were wont to call it. But there were three of the boys left—Will Ford, brother of Grace and for a long time admirer of quiet Amy Blackford; Frank Haley and Roy Anderson, two thoroughly fine young fellows and friends of Will Ford's.

The boys had formed the habit of accompanying the girls on their various adventures, a habit of which the girls quite approved.

The first adventures of the girls began with that never-to-be-forgotten tramping trip, during which they hiked happily across the country, encountering many interesting incidents on the way. The details of this trip are related in the first volume of the series, entitled "The Outdoor Girls of Deepdale."

Since then many interesting and sometimes thrilling adventures had come to them. During the World War they served at a hostess house, thus doing their bit for their country in her time of need. Then there was that delightful summer in the saddle when as “cow girls” they had encountered a series of thrilling adventures and later still a happy vacation spent camping in their beloved woods.

In the story directly preceding this the Outdoor Girls motored to Cape Cod. It was on this trip that the older members first made the acquaintance of Irene and Stella. During their stay at the Cape they also fell in with a girl named Sally Ann Bevins. With Allen’s help, the girls had been able to aid materially the unfortunate Sally Ann, and by so doing had gained a life-long friend. As the climax to this summer’s fun and adventure had come the marriage of Betty to Allen, a pretty ceremony at which the three remaining Outdoor Girls had acted as bridesmaids. Stella and Irene had been present also, and had later definitely joined the Outdoor Girls, thus swelling their diminished ranks to five.

This resumé brings us to the time of the present story, with the new leader selected for the Outdoor Girls and the Outdoor Girls themselves on the way to secure a suitable present for their former little captain, now the bride of Allen Washburn, attorney-at-law.

As the girls ascended the porch steps of the big white house on the hill they found that the large old-fashioned hall was full of people.

They paused for a moment, looking on at the scene, then pushed forward again as they heard the auctioneer’s voice.

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, we come to one of the family’s most precious possessions and one which they found extremely hard to relinquish. Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor to present to you—Mr. Wags!”

CHAPTER III

THE LEASH GOES, TOO

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The auctioneer reached down and produced from a cushioned basket at his feet a soft, black ball of silky hair. A ripple of amusement passed over the room as the little cocker spaniel backed suddenly and in panic. In another moment he would certainly have fallen off the auctioneer's table had not the man stretched out a not-ungentle hand and pushed the small dog back into prominence.

Then Mr. Wags, sensing that something extremely unusual was afoot and hoping, perhaps, to disarm his enemies by a proper display of humility, sat up wistfully on his hind legs, his small black forefeet dropped in a prayerful attitude.

There were numerous feminine exclamations.

"Just look at that perfect pet of a dog!"

"Isn't he a darling?"

"I'd just love to take him home to Nina! Wouldn't she have a fit!"

Hearing these exclamations, the Outdoor Girls despaired. The girls knew that some of the women, if they so desired, could easily outbid their humble, combined capital.

"If worst comes to worst, I'll draw on next week's allowance," Stella whispered in an uneasy aside to Mollie. The latter nodded and raised a hand for silence. The bidding had begun.

"Ten dollars!" said one of the women in the crowd, a pleasant-eyed woman, but one with two double chins—all of