

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott  
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel  
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen  
Weber Freiligrath Frey  
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel  
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas  
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach  
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil  
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London  
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer  
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup  
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff  
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt  
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier  
Garschin Defoe Descartes Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder  
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Schopenhauer Bebel Proust  
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot  
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy  
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius  
Chamberlain Langbein Schiller Iffland Sokrates  
Brentano Claudius Schilling Kralik Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Raabe Gibbon Tschechow  
Gerstäcker Klee Hölty Morgenstem Gleim Vulpius  
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Goedicke  
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstem Gleim Goedicke  
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil  
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus  
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus  
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke  
Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht  
Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntatz  
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**The Outdoor Girls at Wild Rose  
Lodge Or, the hermit of Moonlight  
falls**

Laura Lee Hope

# Imprint

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## CHAPTER I

### JUST FUN

"Did you ever see a more wonderful day?"

The four Outdoor Girls, in Mollie Billette's touring car and with Mollie herself at the wheel, were at the present moment rushing wildly over a dusty country road at the rate of thirty miles an hour. Grace Ford was sitting in front with Mollie, while Betty Nelson and Amy Blackford "sprawled," to use Mollie's sarcastic and slightly exaggerated description, "all over the tonneau."

"You look as if you had never done a real day's work in your life," said Mollie, with a disapproving glance over her shoulder at the girls in the tonneau.

"We never have," returned quiet Amy, with a grin.

"And we are proud of it," added Betty, as she defiantly settled her feet still more comfortably on the foot rail. "Why should we be energetic when it is so much easier to be lazy?"

"There the proper spirit speaks," applauded Grace Ford from the front. "I think I shall have to change places with you, Betty. It's far too exciting up here with Mollie. She insists upon staging near collisions every few feet! thus keeping me awake!"

"Great heavens!" cried Mollie, pressing an impatient foot upon the accelerator to which the great car responded with an eager purring, "did any one ever give us the mistaken title of Outdoor Girls, I wonder? They should have called us the Rip Van Winkle club, instead."

"Now she's getting sour-castic," commented Grace lazily. "Have some candy, honey, and sweeten up."

She passed the ever-present box of delicacies over to Mollie, to which overture the young driver responded with so indignant a stare that Grace quickly withdrew the box, tucked it behind her, and strove to look unconscious.

"Please, ma'am, I didn't mean to do it," she said meekly.

"Well, don't do it again, that's all," returned Mollie, uncompromisingly, her eyes once more on the road ahead. "I've eaten so many chocolates this week that I've had indigestion and mother threatened to cut down my allowance."

"Goodness, it's my allowance that suffers," retorted Grace, ruefully, "since it is my candy that you eat."

"Stop quarreling, girls, and answer my question," said Betty, sitting up straight and regarding delightedly a vista of flying hills and woodland greenery. "I asked you a few minutes ago if you had ever seen so wonderful a day?"

"Yes, plenty of 'em," returned Mollie, as she took a sharp curve on two wheels. "If you weren't too lazy to notice anything, Betty Nelson, you would see that there is a storm coming up. Look at those clouds over there in the east."

"Oh, you're a kill-joy!" cried Betty, cocking an optimistic eye up at the sky. "It's only one teeny little cloud anyway, and who cares for clouds when the boys are coming home?"

Both Amy and Grace felt a breathless little tug at their hearts at the joyful challenge in Betty's words, but Mollie, with a perverseness that was sometimes characteristic of her, refused to be too happy.

"Who says they're coming home?" she asked. "Now you're only guessing."

"Guessing!" cried Betty indignantly. "What do you mean! guessing? The war is over, isn't it?"

"Yes; and has been for quite a while," Mollie responded dryly. "But that doesn't say that the boys are coming home right away!!"

"We don't care about the right away," interrupted Amy, with a quiet happiness in her face that made Betty hug her impulsively. "We can wait patiently, now that we know they are safe."

"It's all right for you to talk about patience, Amy," retorted Mollie, throttling her engine and sliding at breakneck speed down a long hill without the thought of using a brake. A brake to Mollie meant something to be used at the last minute when she couldn't think of anything else to do. "You're an angel, but I'm not!"

"No, indeed!" said Grace, so emphatically that the girls in the tonneau chuckled and Mollie looked at her threateningly.

"For goodness' sake, don't waste time looking at me," Grace pleaded, as they bounced into a hole in the road and out again, fairly

jouncing the breath from the girls' bodies. "Keep your eyes on the road, Mollie dear, We're not ready to die yet."

"Well, look out, or you may! ready or not," threatened Mollie darkly, as the car skidded around another precipitous turn and the girls saw with relief a long stretch of flat road before them.

"Just the same the boys must be coming home before very long," said Amy, quietly returning to the subject. "And when they do come we'll have to give them some sort of big party or something, girls."

"Of course we will," said Grace, munching contentedly on a chocolate. "Something that will make the people in Deepdale sit up and take notice."

"We-el! I don't know," objected Betty thoughtfully. "They say that the few soldier boys who have come home object to any sort of fuss being made over them. They seem to want to forget everything that has happened 'over there,' and any sort of celebration brings the whole thing vividly before them again."

"Yes, that's true, too," Mollie agreed. "I remember our doctor telling mother that if people only wouldn't try to force confidences from the boys and would try to keep all thought of the awful things they had been through out of their minds, there would be fewer cases of nervous breakdowns."

"Pop!" said Grace, snapping her finger resignedly. "There go all our hopes of a good time, Amy. When the boys come home all we shall be allowed to do will be to smooth their fevered brows and hold their hands

"Well, we might do worse things even than that," said Betty, with a light laugh, and Mollie shot her a malicious glance.

"Just watch Betty objecting to that," she said wickedly. "Before we know it she will be sighing that Allen has only one fevered brow to smooth!"

Amy and Grace looked at Betty mischievously! at Betty who could not for the life of her look as unconcerned as she would have liked.

"Don't be so foolish," she said hastily, at which the girls only laughed the more.

"Never mind, honey," said Amy, putting an arm fondly about her chum. "I guess we will all be crazy with joy to get the boys home again,"

"Well, you needn't think you can hold hands with Will and smooth his fevered brow all the time," said Grace unexpectedly. "Because I

really have some share in him myself, you know. Remember, mine was one of the three pictures he kept under his pillow." Readers of previous volumes in this series may recall that joyful letter written to Betty not so long ago in which Sergeant Allen Washburn! now Lieutenant Allen Washburn! had spoken of the three pictures which Will Ford had kept under his pillow during his long convalescence in one of the army hospitals over there. These readers may also remember that one of the pictures was of the boy's mother, another of his sister, Grace, and the third of shy little Amy Blackford, who now was blushing so furiously at the mere mention of it.

"How about poor Frank and Roy?" asked Mollie, mentioning the other two boys who made up the quartette of the girls' boy chums. "Who will attend to their fevered brows?"

"Oh, you and Grace can take turns at that," said Betty, lightly adding, with a little sigh: "Try as we can, Amy and I never know quite how to pair you four off. We can't for the life of us find out which of you likes Frank best and which inclines to Roy."

"That's right, kid! keep 'em guessing," said Mollie slangily, as she turned on power and challenged a steep grade. "Grace and I believe in scattering our favors! as 'twere. See that hill just ahead of us? What do you bet I make it without changing gears?"

"If you make it without changing our looks, I'll be happy," said Grace ruefully, as they bumped and rumbled to the top of the steep grade. "Look out, Mollie!" she added suddenly, indicating a big pile of brushwood that jutted out almost into the center of the road. "For goodness' sake, slow down!"

But Mollie did more than slow down. She stopped! and with such suddenness that the girls were all but thrown out of the car and Betty bumped her nose on the seat in front.

They had scarcely regained their poise when they were startled by a shrill cry from Amy.

"Girls!" she almost screamed, clutching Betty's arm in a grip that hurt, "look at that tree. It's going to fall! Oh, we'll be killed!"

The girls followed the direction of her pointing finger and looks of horror sprang to their eyes. Slowly, its descent retarded somewhat by the branches of other trees, a towering giant of the forest tottered and crashed its destructive way downward. And they were directly in its path!

## CHAPTER II

### THE FALLING TREE

For a moment the Outdoor Girls sat fascinated, paralyzed, without the power to move a muscle. Then suddenly Grace seemed galvanized to action, She leaned toward Mollie, grasping the steering wheel of the motionless car frantically.

"For heaven's sake, Mollie, get out of the way! Start the car!" she screamed.

"I can't!" Mollie answered, tight-lipped. "Something's wrong. The motor's dead."

But with Grace's scream, Betty had come to her senses and had scrambled out of the car, dragging the still paralyzed Amy after her.

"Grace, get out! Mollie, are you crazy?" she shouted wildly. "You'll be killed!!"

Automatically Grace started to clamber to the road, but Mollie still fussed with brakes and levers, her lips in a tight line, her eyes blazing.

"Something's wrong! but I'll get her started," she muttered over and over to herself while Betty raged at her from the road.

"Get out! get out!" fumed the Little Captain, "Jump, or I'll come after you and we'll both be killed. Mollie!"

Luckily for Mollie's suicidal stubbornness, the great tree had been halted for a moment in its downward plunge by some particularly heavy foliage and branches, but the girls could see that it was only a matter of seconds until the giant should tear itself loose and come plunging down upon them.

And still Mollie fumbled with levers in a vain and foolish attempt to save her beloved car at the risk of her own life.

Betty had just jumped upon the running board in a wild attempt to drag her chum from the car when suddenly help came to them from an unexpected quarter.

An elderly man came running from the woods, evidently attracted by their excited cries. He gave one look at the toppling tree, even now tearing itself loose from the impeding branches, another at the

machine with the two girls still in it, and then, with a speed and decision which seemed to belie his age, went to the rescue.

"Come! help me push!" he cried to Amy and Grace, who were still standing dumbly in the middle of the road. A moment later he had thrown himself with all his might against the machine, striving to push it out of the path of the falling tree.

In an instant of time the girls had added their strength to his and the automobile was moving slowly down the road. Luckily the car was on a down grade or they never could have managed it. As it was, there was just time to get out of the way when the great tree came crashing down, its outermost branches just brushing Amy's skirt. The giant had fallen on the very spot where the car had been only a moment before!

"Girls," breathed Betty, with a shaky little attempt at a laugh, "I guess we've never in our lives been nearer death than we were just then."

And while the girls are marveling at their almost miraculous escape from a terrible death, time will be taken to introduce the Outdoor Girls to those readers who have not yet met them and also to review briefly a few of the exciting and interesting adventures they have had up to the time of this present narrative.

There were four of them, Betty Nelson, or the "Little Captain" as the girls often called her because she had such a decided talent for knowing just the right thing to do at just the right moment, was eighteen, dark-haired and dark-eyed. She had a fund of vitality and more than her share of sense and good judgment! all of which went toward making her what she was, the most popular girl in Deepdale.

Grace Ford, tall, slender and willowy, was almost the same age as Betty, but that fact and her love of the outdoors were the only things she had in common with the "Little Captain." Her father, James Ford, was a lawyer, and her mother, Mrs. Margaret Ford, a rather dressy lady who spent a good deal of her time at clubs, was quite a figure in the society of Deepdale. However, all through the war Mrs. Ford had worked with an untiring enthusiasm for the "cause," a fact which had made her many more friends than her social popularity could ever have done.

Next in the little quartette came Mollie Billette. Mollie was seventeen, French-American, and impulsive, with a quick temper that

made more trouble for herself than for any one else. She and Betty were alike in their splendid vigor and vitality. Mollie, or "Billy" as she was sometimes called by her chums, had a very lovely widowed mother and an extremely mischievous young brother and sister, Paul and Dora (nicknamed "Dodo"), who were twins and six. Although the twins were pretty nearly always in trouble, they were really adorable children, whom everybody loved.

Amy Blackford, shy, sweet, pretty, completed the quartette. There had been a mystery about her past which had recently been cleared up, and it may have been this mystery that caused the girls to treat her with a little more consideration and gentleness than they did each other. Her guardian was a broker in the city who knew very little of the past except through letters.

The four boys who were close chums of the girls and had added to the interest and excitement of more than one of their adventures were Allen Washburn, who was very much interested in Betty, and in whom Betty was very much interested; Will Ford, Grace's brother, who had carried Amy Blackford's picture all through the war; Frank Haley, Will Ford's closest chum, and Roy Anderson who had not much distinction of any kind except that he was "lots of fun" and a chum of the other three boys.

In the first volume of this series the girls went on a camping and tramping tour, tramping for miles over the country and meeting with many adventures on the way.

Later they had more fun at Rainbow Lake, in a motor car, in a winter camp, in Florida, at Ocean View, then at Pine Island where the girls and boys together had cleared up a mystery surrounding a gypsy cave.

Later the girls and boys found themselves caught in the meshes of the great war, as many hundreds of thousands of others had been. The boys responded eagerly to the bugle call, and the girls, too, were eager for Army service and finally went to a hostess house at Camp Liberty. Though the girls had never worked harder in their lives, they found that the task had a stirringly romantic side as well. Then in the volume directly preceding this, entitled "The Outdoor Girls at Bluff Point" the girls had had perhaps the most exciting adventure of all.

The Hostess House at Camp Liberty having burnt down, the chums found themselves forced to take a much-needed, although not en-

tirely welcome, vacation and had decided to spend it at a romantic spot near the ocean called Bluff Point. The cottage on the bluff had been loaned to the girls by Grace's patriotic Aunt Mary, who declared that she owed something to the chums for having worked so hard for the good old Stars and Stripes. Mrs. Ford, worn out with war work, had gone with the girls to chaperon them.

Bad tidings at first threatened to overwhelm the chums. The Fords received word that Will was seriously wounded "somewhere in France," and later Mollie received a telegram from her mother saying that the twins, Dodo and Paul, had disappeared. Still later, while everything was at its blackest, Betty read Allen Washburn's name among the missing. However, everything cleared up later when the twins, who had been kidnapped, were recovered and their kidnapper sent to justice. Still later Allen proved that the report that he had been missing was an error by writing to Betty himself and in the letter he also spoke of Will Ford and the fact that he was getting over his wound splendidly. Of course there had been great rejoicing and the vacation had proved a happy one after all. And now, at the time of this story, the war was over and the first regiments of soldiers had arrived from the other side and the girls were expecting a joyful reunion with the boys at any time.

They had not yet made definite plans for the summer and were just in the position of waiting for something to happen when something had happened with a vengeance! but not at all the kind of something which the four girls had expected.

"I think you are right, my dear," said the man who had saved the lives of at least two of the girls, rubbing his hands fussily together and peering out of small, near-sighted eyes, first at the tree and then at the girls. "It was a close call! a very close call. I declare, it was very nearly the closest call I ever saw!"

For the first time the girls really looked at him. He was a rather small man, slenderly built, with long sensitive hands and a very bald head, in the center of which a tuft of hair stood comically upright. These characteristics, coupled to the squinting eyes, gave the man a very odd appearance.

He was so queer a figure standing there in the center of the road that the girls found themselves staring unduly. Realizing something of this, Betty jumped down from the running board where she was still standing and held out her hand to the little man, thanking him

in a voice that still trembled a little for the great service he had done them. The other girls followed suit and so overwhelmed their rescuer that he seemed quite embarrassed and looked around nervously as if for some means of escape.

Betty, seeing his embarrassment, was about to take pity upon him when something happened that they had not bargained for. It began to rain, not gently, but in a deluge, taking the girls completely by surprise.

Instinctively they turned toward the car, but Mollie suddenly began to laugh in a half-hysterical manner.

"This is what I call fun," she said. "Engine dead, caught in the rain, and I've even left the side curtains at home! I guess we're in for it, girls."

### CHAPTER III

## THE QUEER LITTLE MAN

While the girls stood looking wildly at each other their unknown rescuer seemed suddenly galvanized to action.

"This won't do at all!" he cried, raising both hands to his bald head which was by this time very wet and more shiny than ever. "You will get your death of cold, young ladies, you surely will. You must come with me. Here, right along this path I have a cottage!" All the time he was talking he was hustling them fussily ahead of him, for all the world like some old hen with a brood of chickens.

The girls, not knowing what else to do and being in rather a bewildered frame of mind, allowed themselves to be hustled. The rain was sheeting down in a terrific cloud burst, so that their clothes clung to them damply and they began to shiver.

They circled the fallen tree which had so nearly been their undoing, and a moment later found themselves upon a narrow footpath which seemed to lead into the very heart of the woods.

"I wonder where he is taking us," whispered Grace in Betty's ear.

"Maybe he's a murderer or something."

In spite of her discomfort, Betty giggled.

"Did you ever see a murderer with a bald head like that?" she asked.

It seemed to the girls as if the path must be at least a mile long, but just as they were despairing of ever reaching the end of it, they came out into a partially cleared space and through the trees caught a glimpse of something that looked like a house.

Their new acquaintance, who up to this time had been bringing up the rear, now took the lead and led them over tangled underbrush, stones and foot-bruising rocks, to his strange little dwelling.

"It's a house, it's a house!" cried Grace thankfully, as they hurried after the little man. "I guess somebody will have to wring me out when we get inside. I'm soaked through!"

"Goodness, why don't you tell us something we don't know?" grumbled Mollie, but nobody was listening to her. They had reached the house and the man had swung the door open hospitably.

"Step inside, step inside, do," he urged with a nervous gesture that reminded the girls once more of the proverbial hen. "You will find it dry at least, and I will have a fire for you in a hurry. Just a moment till I get some wood! just a moment!!"

And while he rambled on, suiting his words with quick nervous action, the girls crowded inside the cottage and looked about them curiously.

The room they had entered was large and scrupulously neat. At first glance it seemed a queer combination of hunting lodge and museum of natural history. The rough clapboards and beams of the ceiling and walls had never been plastered, and this very crudity seemed somehow to give the room an air of warmth and homelikeness that was very inviting.

Hung on the walls were several fairly large skins of animals, a gun or two, and over the huge open fireplace, which very nearly covered one end of the room, hung the magnificent head of a buck.

On the wall opposite the fireplace was a set of rudely-erected shelves, one beneath the other, and these shelves were covered with specimens of butterflies, beetles and other bugs of every size and description. That the specimens had been mounted by an expert even an inexperienced eye could see.

The girls, who had been regarding the oddities of the room with growing interest, were brought back to a realization of the discomfort of wet clothes by the owner of the place himself.

The latter had brought firewood from somewhere, and, with the aid of half a dozen matches, had succeeded in getting a fairly good blaze.

Then with a smile of satisfaction he turned to the girls, rubbing his hands together genially.

"Come nearer to the fire! come closer! do," he urged in his quick nervous way. "I am sure you are chilled through! quite chilled through. I will bring chairs." He stopped abruptly and looked about him with an embarrassed air, his gaze coming to rest on the only chair which adorned the room.

Betty, seeing his confusion, was trying to think of something helpful to say, when the little man suddenly found a way out of his quandary.

"Ah, I have it!" he cried, seizing enthusiastically upon a long bench that stood on one side of the room. "Four can sit upon this quite easily, I am sure. A happy thought! a very happy thought!" and he pulled and tugged at the bench until he succeeded in moving it close to the fire,

Afterward it occurred to the girls that they might have helped him, for it was a very heavy bench and he was rather a frail old man. But at the time they were too interested in this unusual place and their rather extraordinary host, to think of anything very rational.

However, they seated themselves dutifully in a row upon the bench, "for all the world like an orphan asylum out for an airing," as Mollie said later, and gratefully stretched out their sodden shoes to the blaze.

They were cold and they were wet and they were fast becoming very hungry, all of which might have been expected to form a very good reason why they should have been miserable, But they weren't miserable! not at all. To the Outdoor Girls the thrill of an adventure always more than counterbalanced the possible discomforts attending it.

Their host started to draw up the one chair in the room, hesitated a moment then, as though he had just thought of something, turned and darted through the door, closing it with a little click behind him.

For the space of half a second, the girls looked after him. Then they looked at each other. Then they drew a long breath and let loose the

flood of curious questions which had been struggling for expression for the past twenty minute

"Well, isn't this a lark?" cried Mollie, her eyes dancing. "Half an hour ago we were awfully bored, and now look at us."

"Yes, look at us," said Grace with a little sniff. "I'm sure we're not very much to look at right now with our hair wet, and our clothes!"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, who cares about such things?" cried Betty gaily. "I think this is a darling place and I'm having the time of my life. I wonder who he is?"

"He seemed kind of scared just now, didn't he!" chuckled Mollie, feeling her shoe to see if it was drying out any. "It was funny the way he bolted out of the room."

"Poor old dear! no wonder he was scared," commented Grace, as she took off her hat and tried to do something with her hopelessly bedraggled locks. "The way we look we're enough to scare anybody. Oh, dear, hasn't any one a comb?"

"Why, of course, we carry a complete beauty parlor outfit just for your benefit, dear," giggled Mollie. "The rest of us don't need it though. We are too beautiful naturally."

"You know I like him a lot, the queer little man, I mean," said Amy, evidently following out her own train of thought. "He seems kind of fussy and peculiar but he has an awfully nice smile."

"Trust Amy to find the smile," said Betty, putting an arm fondly about the younger girl. "And of course we all like him," she added seriously. "If it hadn't been for him we probably wouldn't be feeling so happy right now."

"Yes, we would probably be in some hospital with our unhappy relatives weeping over our mangled remains," said the irrepressible Mollie, and laughed at the shriek that went up at her gruesome remark. "There probably wouldn't have been enough of us left to recognize," she added by way of good measure, and they shrieked again.

"For goodness' sake, let's talk of something pleasant," said Grace, rising suddenly and going over to the window. "If you want to sit on that old bench all day, you can."

It appeared that the girls had no intention of sitting on the bench all day. They got up and sauntered about the room, examining the skins on the walls and looking, but without much curiosity, at the rifles. They lingered longest before the shelves of butterflies and

beetles, for some of the specimens were really beautiful and very rare.

After they had examined everything in sight they began to grow restive. They must have been in the place nearly an hour and it suddenly occurred to them to wonder where their host had been keeping himself all this time.

"I wish we could get started," worried Mollie, looking out upon the sodden landscape. The rain was apparently coming down just as hard as ever. "I hate to leave the car all by itself out there. Somebody might steal it."

"I wish I knew where that man was," said Grace nervously. "I never trust strange men. He may set the house on fire for all we know." The words were hardly out of her mouth when the door opened and the topic of conversation himself entered, carrying a tray so big and heaped so high with sandwiches that one could scarcely discover the man behind it.

Betty and Amy ran to his assistance, and between them they got the tray safely to the bench. In one delighted glance the girls saw that not only sandwiches, but a steaming pot of coffee and the remains of what had been a great, three-layer chocolate cake were on the tray.

At thought of the fussy little man taking all this time and trouble, for it must have taken a good deal of work to make all that formidable array of sandwiches! the girls were sincerely touched and regarded their host with a new interest.

"There, there," he was saying, regarding the heaped-up tray with evident pleasure, "you must sit down and eat at once. You must be nearly starved! famished. I hope this will be enough."

He looked at them so anxiously that Betty felt like hugging him! and nearly did it.

"Enough! Well, I guess it is enough," she said heartily, as the other girls seated themselves on the bench either side of the tempting tray and began enthusiastically to help themselves. "It would be plenty for an army. We can't thank you enough."

"Indeed we can't," added Mollie.

"It's awfully good of you," said Grace, as she took a bite of her ham sandwich.

"Awfully good," added Amy, like an echo.

The little man waved aside their thanks and drew up the one chair in the room, talking all the time in his quick, jerky fashion.

"It was no trouble, I am sure! no trouble whatever," he said, adding as though he wished to change the subject: "You didn't tell me your name!!" he hesitated, looking at Betty, who of course did tell him her name on the spot. This proved a signal for mutual introductions, and the girls learned that their new friend was a college professor, Arnold Dempsey by name. They also learned that he had taken up woodcraft in the hope of recovering his health. And while they contentedly munched sandwiches and sipped steaming coffee the girls learned a good deal more about Arnold Dempsey, and the more they learned of him the more they felt drawn to him.

And when he started to tell them of his two sons who had fought so nobly in the army of democracy, their eyes began to shine and they leaned toward him with an interest that was intensely real.

"Oh, it must be wonderful to have two big soldier sons," cried Amy, forgetting her shyness in her enthusiasm. "Aren't you dreadfully proud?"

A gleam came into Professor Dempsey's eyes and his thin shoulders straightened.

"Yes, yes," he said. "Of course I'm proud of my boys! very proud.

And I hope," a look of absolute happiness came into his eyes and he smiled contentedly, "that before very long I shall see them."

"Oh, I'm sure you will!" cried Betty eagerly.

"That's what we are all hoping for, anyway," said Grace, adding with a sigh: "The boys have been gone so *dreadfully* long."

"Look," cried Mollie presently, rising suddenly to her feet and pointing toward the window. "We have been so busy talking that we never noticed the sun had come out."

"And doesn't it look good!" exulted Betty.

In spite of their reluctance to leave their newfound friend, the girls were anxious to be off, for they knew their parents would be worrying about them.

Professor Dempsey insisted on seeing them safely back to the road although they protested that there was absolutely no need of it.

"There are two or three paths that lead to the road," he explained, as he flung wide the door, letting in a flood of sunshine, "and I wouldn't have you lose your way for the world! not for the world!"

The woodland was beautiful after the rain, and the girls sniffed the fragrant air eagerly as they followed Professor Dempsey along the path. It was not till they had almost reached the road that Mollie had a disquieting thought.

"How do we know but what we're stuck here for good?" she asked the girls. "The car stopped dead, you remember, just under that horrible tree, and I'm sure I don't know what in the world made it. If I can't find out the trouble!!"

"Oh, but you've got to find it," protested Grace, while Betty and Amy looked worried. "We can't stay here all night, and it may be a dozen miles to the nearest garage."

"I know that just as well as you do," grumbled Mollie. "But if I can't, I can't, that's all."

By this time they had reached the road and Mollie went straight to the car. While she and Betty were trying to find out what was wrong the other two girls and Professor Dempsey looked on anxiously.

"Well, as far as I can see there is absolutely nothing wrong with it," snapped Mollie at last, lifting a face flushed with exertion. "Get in, girls, and I'll start the engine! or try to. Then if she won't go we'll have to make up our minds to stay here all night or walk to the next garage."

Accordingly the girls got in and Mollie pressed the self-starter. To her great surprise, the engine purred a response, and as she shifted her gears the car moved slowly forward.

"Oh, goodie, we're going," cried Amy, and the faces of the other girls showed relief.

"Must have been a drop of water in the gasoline," hazarded Mollie, and then she throttled the engine once more while she and her chums turned to say good-bye to Professor Dempsey. The latter was still standing in the road, looking up at them rather wistfully.

"I'm glad that I had an opportunity of helping you, young ladies! very glad," he answered, in response to their repeated thanks. "You conferred a great favor on me also, for I have little company. Good-bye! and good luck to you."

The girls responded gayly, and as they started forward Betty leaned far out of the machine to call back an encouraging: "Keep hoping hard for your boys to come home. I am sure they will be back soon."

"Thank you, young lady, thank you," said Professor Dempsey, but the words were too low for Betty to catch and she was too far away to see the mist that sprang suddenly to his eyes.

## CHAPTER IV

### GOOD NEWS

Deepdale, the home of the four Outdoor Girls, is a thriving little city with a population of about fifteen thousand people. It is situated on the Argono River, a pleasant stream where a great many of the young folk of Deepdale, and some of the older ones too, keep motor boats and canoes and various other types of pleasure craft.

Farther on, the Argono empties into Rainbow Lake, which is picturesque in the extreme. It has several pretty and romantic looking islands, chief of which is Triangle Island! so called because of its shape.

There is a boat running from Deepdale to Clammerport at the foot of Rainbow Lake, and this boat is almost always crowded with pleasure seekers. In addition to this Deepdale is situated in the heart of New York state and is only a hundred-and-fifty-mile run from the city of that name. Thus one can easily see that Deepdale is a very desirable place in which to live.

At least that is what the four Outdoor Girls thought. And since they had spent most of their lives there, they certainly ought to know! On the morning of this day, some ten days or so after their strange encounter with Professor Dempsey, the girls were gathered on Betty's porch, talking over their plans for the summer.

"I am only waiting to hear from Uncle John," Mollie was saying, as she swung lazily back and forth in the couch swing. "The last time I saw him he said that he was almost sure to go north this summer and he told me that as soon as he made definite plans he would let me know."

"You told us that two weeks ago," Grace reminded her. "And we haven't heard from him yet."

"It does seem to take him a long time to make up his mind," sighed Amy.