

The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms

or

Lost in the Wilds of Florida

By

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Chapter 1: Overboard



“All ready now! In position, everyone!”

Half a score of actors and actresses moved quickly to their appointed places, while overhead, and at the sides of them hissed powerful electric lights, and in front of them stood a moving picture camera, ready to be operated by a pleasant-faced young man.

“Ready?” came in questioning tones from Mr. Pertell, the stage director, as he looked sharply from one to the other.

A tall, well-built man, with iron-gray hair, nodded, but did not speak.

“Let her go, Russ!” Mr. Pertell exclaimed.

“Vait! Vait a minute!” called one of the actors, with a pronounced German accent.

“Well, what’s the matter now, Mr. Switzer?” asked the director, with a touch of impatience.

“I haf forgotten der imbortant babers dot I haf to offer mine enemy in dis play. I must have der babers.”

“Gracious, I should say so!” said the manager. “Where’s Pop Snooks?” and he looked around for the property man, who had to produce on short notice anything from a ten-ton safe to a hairpin.

“Hi, Pop!” called Mr. Pertell. “Make up a bundle of important, legal-looking papers, with seals on. Mr. Switzer has to use ‘em in this play. I forgot to tell you.”

“Have ‘em for you right away!” cried the property man, and a little later Mr. Switzer had his “babbers.”

“I guess we’re all right now. Start up, Russ,” ordered the stage director, who was also the manager of the troupe.

“That was a mistake on the part of Mr. Pertell; wasn’t it, Ruth?” asked one of the young actresses—a pretty girl—of her sister, who stood near her in the mimic scene.

“Yes, indeed, Alice. But it isn’t often he makes one.”

“No, indeed. Oh, we mustn’t talk any more. I see him looking at us.”

“Begin!” called the manager, sharply, and the play proceeded, while the young moving picture operator clicked away at the handle of his camera, the long strip of film moving behind the lens with a whirring sound, and registering views of the pantomime of the actors and actresses at the rate of sixteen a second.

The above was done several times a day in the New York studio of the Comet Film Company, which was engaged in making moving pictures.

The play went on through the various acts. Only part of it was being “filmed” now—the interior scenes. Later, others would be taken outdoors.

“Time out—hold your positions!” suddenly exclaimed the operator. “Film’s broken. I’ve got to mend it.”

Everyone came to a standstill at that. In a few seconds the damage was repaired, and the play went on. It was, in the main, a “parlor” drama, and there were to be only a few outdoor scenes.

“That will do for the present,” said Mr. Pertell. “You may all take a rest now. This will be our last New York play for some time—that is, after we get the outdoor scenes for this.”

“Where are we going next?” asked the elderly actor before mentioned. He spoke in very hoarse voice, and it was evident that he had some throat affection. In fact, it was the ailment which had forced him to give up acting in the “legitimate,” and take to the “movies.”

“We are going to Florida—the land of the palms!” announced the manager. “You know I spoke of tentative plans for a drama down there when we were in the backwoods. Now I have everything arranged, and we will leave on a steamer for St. Augustine one week from to-day.”

“Hurrah for Florida!” exclaimed a young actor, with a strikingly good-looking face. “There’s where I’ve always wanted to go.”

“So have I!” exclaimed a young girl who stood near him,—a girl with merry, brown eyes. “Will you take me out after oranges, Paul?” she asked, mischievously.

“Certainly, Alice,” he answered.

“Why don’t you say orange blossoms while you’re about it?” inquired another actress, with a pert manner.

Alice blushed, and her sister Ruth looked sharply at Miss Laura Dixon, who had made the rather pointed remark.

“I’m willing to make it orange blossoms!” laughed the young fellow. “That is, if they’re in season.”

“Ah, stop all this nonsense!” exclaimed Alice. “I want to ask Mr. Pertell a lot of questions about where we’re going, and all that. Oh, to think we are really going to Florida!”

“Yes, we are all going,” went on Mr. Pertell. “I think—”

“One moment, if you please!” interrupted a middle-aged actor whose face seemed to indicate that he lived more on vinegar than on the milk of human kindness. “We are not all going, if you please, Mr. Pertell.”

“Who is not going, Mr. Sneed, pray?” the manager wanted to know.

“I, for one. I have gone through many hardships and dangers acting in moving pictures for you, but I draw the line at Florida.”

“Why, I think it’s perfectly lovely there!” exclaimed Miss Pearl Pennington, a chum of Miss Dixon.

“Do you call alligators lovely?” asked Mr. Pepper Sneed, who was known as “the actor with the grouch.” He was always finding fault. “Lovely alligators!” he sneered. “If you want to go to Florida, and be eaten by an alligator—go. I’ll not!”

Some of the younger members of the company looked rather serious at this. They had not counted on alligators.

“Now look here!” exclaimed Mr. Pertell. “That’s all nonsense. We are going where there are no alligators; but I’ll pay anyone who is injured in the slightest by one of the saurians a thousand dollars!”

“Then I’ll go!” cried Mr. Sneed, who was rather “close,” and fond of money. “But I’m not going to stand a very big bite for that sum!” he stipulated, while the others laughed.

“I’ll grade the payments according to the bites, at the rate of a thousand dollars a big bite,” declared the manager, also laughing.

“Now then, you may make your plans accordingly. As I said, we leave by steamer for St. Augustine by way of Jacksonville this day week.”

“And will all the scenes be taken in St. Augustine?” asked one of the company.

“No, we shall go into the interior. I expect we may go to a place near Lake Kissimmee, and there—”

“Lake Kissimmee!” exclaimed Alice DeVere, in surprise.

“What about it?” asked Mr. Pertell. “Are you afraid to go there?”

“No, but two girls whom we met on the train going to Deerfield, when we were preparing to make the ice and snow dramas, were going to a place near there. We may meet them.”

“That’s so!” agreed Ruth.

“I hope you will,” went on Mr. Pertell. “Lake Kissimmee, however, is only one of the interior places we shall touch. I will tell you more detailed plans later.”

“I—ah—er—presume we shall have a little time to—er—see the sights of St. Augustine; will we not?” asked one of the actors, in affected, drawling tones.

“Oh, yes, plenty of time, Mr. Towne,” answered Mr. Pertell. Claude Towne was a new member of the company, rather a “dudish” sort of chap, and not, as yet, very well liked. He dressed in what he considered the “height of fashion.”

The week that followed was a busy one for every member of the Comet Film Company. Not that they were required to do much acting in front of the camera; for, after the outdoor scenes in connection with the current play were made, Russ Dalwood, the operator, packed up his belongings ready for the Florida trip.

The others were doing the same thing, and Mr. Pertell was kept busy arranging for transportation, and hotel accommodations, and for the taking care of such films as he would send back from the interior of Florida, since none would be developed there. This work would have to be done, and positives printed for the projecting machines, in New York. This custom was generally followed when the company went out of town.

“Well, are we all here?” asked Mr. Pertell one morning as he reached the steamer, which lay at her dock in New York, ready for the trip to the land of the palms.

“I think so,” answered Russ, who had with him a small moving picture camera. He had an idea he might see something that would make a good film.

“No one missing?” went on the manager. “That’s good. Oh, by the way, did Mr. Towne arrive? He ‘phoned to me that he might be a little late.”

“Yes, he’s here,” answered Russ. “The last I saw of him he was looking in a mirror, arranging his necktie.”

“Humph! He’s too fond of dress,” commented the manager, “but he does well in certain society parts, and that’s why I keep him.”

The confusion of the passengers and late freight coming aboard gradually grew less. Whistles sounded their bass notes, and gongs clanged.

“All ashore that’s goin’ ashore!” came the warning cry, and there was a hurried departure of those who had come to see friends or relatives off on the voyage.

The moving picture company were gathered together in one place on the deck, and they waved to other members of the company who were not to make the trip, for Mr. Pertell employed a large number of actors, and only a comparatively few of them were going to Florida. The others would continue to work in New York.

The steamer moved slowly away from the dock, in charge of a fussy tug, but presently she began forging ahead under her own steam, moving slowly at first. Soon, however, the vessel was well down the harbor.

Alice and Ruth DeVere, with Russ Dalwood and Paul Ardite, were standing amidships, on the port side, looking down into the water. A little in advance of them stood Mr. Towne and Miss Pennington. The latter had been much in the new actor’s company of late.

“They seem quite interested in each other,” remarked Russ, in a low tone.

“Yes, they have something in common,” added Alice—“a love of good clothes.”

“I like nice things myself,” put in Ruth, straightening a bow she wore.
“You shouldn’t say such things, Alice.”

“Oh, but you like them in the right way—so do I, for that matter. But I don’t go to the extremes they do, and neither do you.”

“Hush! They’ll hear you,” cautioned her sister, for Alice was very impulsive at times.

Indeed the dudish actor and Miss Pennington were glancing rather curiously in the direction of our friends. Then Miss Dixon came along, whispering something that caused the other to laugh.

“Fawncy that now! Only fawncy!” exclaimed Mr. Towne, in his exaggerated English drawl. “That’s a good joke—on them!”

“I wonder if they mean us?” spoke Paul. “If I thought so I’d go ask them what the joke was, so we could laugh, too.”

“Oh, don’t,” begged Ruth, who disliked “scenes.”

The mirth of Miss Dixon and Miss Pennington seemed to increase rather than diminish, and Mr. Towne was now fairly roaring with merriment. He laughed so hard, in fact, that he coughed, and leaned back against the rail for support.

And then something happened. Just how no one could explain, but Mr. Towne went overboard, his arms and legs wildly waving, and his cane flying far out into the river. He struck the water with a splash, just as one of the deckhands yelled:

“Man overboard!”