

The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms
or

Lost in the Wilds of Florida

By

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Chapter 10: The Motor Races



With wildly beating heart, Alice watched the approach of the colored man, and then, somehow or other, it came to her in a flash that she need not fear him.

His bearing was most deferential, as of some old slave toward a cherished mistress. His manner was gentle and, after advancing a short distance toward her, he stopped, bowed again, placed his battered hat over his heart, and said:

“I knowed I’d find yo’ some day, Missie, an’ now I has. Yo’ ain’t gwine t’ send po’ ole Jake away; is yo’, Missie?”

Alice, having repressed the desire to scream, was now more calm and, as quietly as she could she said:

“You must go out of here, Jake. Go out, and I will come out, too.”

“Yes’m, Missie, dat’s what I’ll do,” he said. “Ole Jake’ll do jest as his missis says. Oh, but it’ pow’ful good t’ see you’ once mo’, Missie!”

“You must go now,” repeated Alice, firmly.

And, without another word, he turned and shuffled out. But he had no sooner reached the entrance to the dungeon than Alice, who had remained behind the table, not knowing whether to go out or not, saw the old colored man seized by a soldier—one of those detailed at the fort.

“Here now, Jake!” the soldier exclaimed, “haven’t I told you time and again to keep away from here? You know you haven’t any right to come in this part of the fort!”

“Yais, sah, Cunnel, I knows it, sah,” replied the aged negro, with a low bow. “But yo’ see, I done found mah li’l Missie what I’s been lookin’ fo’ so long! Dat’s why I come heah!”

“Great Scott! Have you been bothering some of the women visitors?” cried the soldier and, wheeling about on his heel, he hurried into the dungeon, which Alice had just decided to leave. He met her coming out, and by her agitated manner must have guessed that something had happened.

“I beg your pardon, Miss,” began the soldier, with a salute, “but has old Jake annoyed you?”

“Oh, not at all,” she answered, as calmly as she could. “He only startled me for a moment; that is all. I was here alone, foolishly, perhaps—”

“Oh, no, that’s all right,” interrupted the soldier. “We want the visitors to go about as they please, alone or in company. Old Jake’s as harmless as a kitten. He isn’t just right up here,” he said, touching his head, and speaking in low tones.

“I thought as much,” responded Alice, with a smile.

“He’s perfectly harmless,” went on the soldier, looking out to see the aged negro shuffling off. “You see, he used to be a slave in some Southern family,” the army man explained. “He was given his freedom, but never took it, and they say he went insane when his mistress died. He had taken care of her since she was a baby, and he took it very much to heart.”

“Poor old man,” murmured Alice.

“Yes, we all like him around here,” the soldier continued. “He has a notion now that his ‘little mistress,’ as he calls her, is only lost, and he keeps searching for her. Sometimes he scares the lady visitors, so we try to keep him out of the lonely parts of the fort. But he must have slipped in here when no one was watching. I’ll give him a good lecture.”

“Oh, please don’t be harsh to him!” pleaded Alice. “Really he did nothing!”

“But he scared you, Miss.”

“Oh, not much. Only for a second. Then I guessed what his trouble was. Please say you won’t scold him!” she pleaded.

“Well, I guess I’ll have to, if you ask me that way, Miss,” said the soldier with the air and manner of a Southern colonel. “We can’t refuse the ladies anything, you know,” and he bowed and smiled in a frank manner that pleased Alice.

“Then you won’t punish him?” she asked.

“Punish him? Oh, no, Miss. Old Jake is just like a child. He sort of lives in the fort. No, I won’t do any more than tell him to keep away from here, for them’s the captain’s orders, Miss.”

“All right,” she answered. “And now I think I had better join my friends. What a horrible place this is!” she added, with a backward look at the dungeon.

“You may well say that, Miss. But it isn’t so bad now as it must have been in the old days. It’s a queer world, that men would make such a place to put a fellow creature in,” and with this somewhat philosophical remark the soldier saluted again, as Alice bade him good-bye.

“Why, where have you been?” Ruth asked, as sister appeared. “We have been looking all over for you. Where were you?”

“In jail!”

“Jail! Alice, don’t joke about such things.”

“No, sister mine, I was only in a deep, dark dismal dungeon, and I had such a romantic adventure.”

“Oh, do tell us about it!” begged Miss Pennington.

“Did you meet a handsome prisoner?” asked Miss Dixon.

“Yes, a regular Othello.”

“Othello? Who speaks of Othello?” interrupted Mr. Bunn. “I have played him many times!” and he threw back his shoulders, and tried to give himself the airs he was wont to assume in the theater.

Alice told her story, minimizing her fright as much as possible.

“It was romantic,” said Ruth, softly, as her sister concluded. “Only, dear, you musn’t go off in any more strange dungeons alone.”

“I won’t,” was the promise, given readily enough.

The making of moving pictures was soon over for the day, and the company returned to the hotel. Some of the members went to their rooms, while the others sat about in the beautiful tropical garden, listening to the mingled music of the band and the fountain.

“Good stunt on for to-morrow,” said Russ, coming up behind Ruth, and taking a chair near her.

“What is it?” asked Paul, who was with Alice. “Any more fort stuff?”

“No, but it’s out near the fort. Mr. Pertell is arranging for a motor boat race, with you girls in rival boats. You know there is a speed course on Mantanzas Bay, and he’s hired two of the fast boats. It’s going to be a regular race, for the two fellows who run the boats are real water rivals.

“Mr. Pertell has induced them to act the parts for him, and there’ll be some fun. Part of our company is to be in one boat, and part in the other, and some will be on the fort wall, outside the old moat, watching the boats come up. It ought to make a dandy picture.”

“I’m sure it will,” declared Ruth, who was always interested in the mechanical end, as well as in the artistic side. Russ had taught her considerable about the technical part of the business of making moving pictures.

“A motor boat race will be simply fine!” Alice exclaimed. “I hope the boat I am in wins.”

“There’s no telling,” Russ went on. “As I said, the men who own the boats are real rivals, so each will do his best to come out ahead. There’ll be no fake about this—if you’ll excuse the use of slang,” he added.

That evening, seated in the palm garden, Mr. Pertell explained to his company something of the plans for the next day, telling of the plot of the play in which the motor boat race was to figure.

“That sounds interesting,” commented Mr. DeVere.

“Do those boats go very fast?” inquired Mr. Sneed.

“Rather—they are two of the fastest boats in the world,” answered the manager.

“Then there’s sure to be an accident,” predicted the grouchy actor. “I think you may count me out of this play, Mr. Pertell. I have had enough of water stuff.”

“Well, you’re due to have a bit more,” observed Mr. Pertell, drily. “For you fall overboard from one of the boats, at the conclusion of the race.”

“I fall overboard!” was the startled exclamation.

“Yes, and Mr. Bunn dives in after you. You are both good swimmers—you remember you told me so.”

The use of the dock of the St. Augustine Power Boat Club had been loaned for the making of the moving picture, and next day, with such of his company as were to go in the boats, Mr. Pertell went to the float. Others of the players took their places on the wall of the fort.

Two cameras were to be used, Russ working one to show the start and finish of the race, and Pop Snooks the other, to depict the action of the players not in the boats.

The motor boats were powerful and handsome craft. The skippers of each were at the wheel as the players took their places, and each boat carried a blackened and greasy mechanic, as looking after high-powered motors was no simple matter.

“Well, are we all ready?” asked the manager, as he assigned the players to their places.

“All ready, sir,” answered Mr. DeVere.

Alice was in one boat, well up in front beside the captain-owner, while Ruth occupied a similar position in the other craft.

“You may start, if you please,” said the manager, with a nod at Russ and another at the skippers.

A moment later the air was filled with the thundering, rattling exhaust of the motors as the boats swept away from the float.

The motor race was on.