

# *The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms*

*or*

## *Lost in the Wilds of Florida*

By

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Chapter 19: Into the Wilds



Had there been any convenient mode of running away Ruth and Alice would certainly have taken advantage of it just then. But they were out in a boat, in the middle of a wide, sluggish stream, and all about them, swimming, diving, coming up and crawling over a long sand-bar, were alligators—alligators on all sides. They were surrounded by them now, and the girls would no more have gotten out of the boat, even if there had been a bridge nearby on which to walk to shore, than they would have dived overboard.

“Oh, isn’t it awful!” gasped Ruth, covering her eyes with her hands.

“Can they get at us?” asked Alice, more practically.

“Not if you stay in the boat, I should say,” declared Paul. But he was not altogether sure in his own mind.

As for Russ he said nothing. But he was busy focusing the small moving picture camera on the unusual scene. True, he had views of the saurians at the alligator farm near St. Augustine, but this was different. The views he was now getting showed the big, repulsive creatures in their natural haunts.

“This sure is a big piece of luck!” cried Jed Moulton, as he brought his rifle up from the bottom of the boat. “It is a rare bit of luck! I didn’t know there was so many ‘gators in this neighborhood!”

“Oh, are you going to shoot?” cried Ruth, as she saw the old hunter prepare to take aim.

“Well, that’s what I was countin’ on, Miss,” he replied. “I can’t exactly get a ‘gator without shootin’ him. They won’t come when you call ‘em, you know. But if it’s goin’ to distress you, Miss, why of course I can—”

“Oh, no!” she cried hastily. “Of course I don’t want to deprive you of making a living. That was selfish of me. Only I was afraid if you shot from the boat it might upset, and if we were thrown into the water with all those horrid things—ugh!”

She could not finish.

“I guess you’re right, Miss,” assented Jed. “It will be better not to shoot from the boat, especially as we’ve got a pretty good load in, and my gun is a heavy one, though it don’t recoil such an awful lot. Now we’ll take you girls back to the steamer, and then I’ll come here and make a bag—an alligator bag, you might say,” he added with grim humor.

“Oh, I want to stay and see you shoot!” cried Alice, impulsively.

“Oh, no, Alice!” cried her sister. “Daddy wouldn’t like it, you know.”

“Well, perhaps not,” admitted the younger girl, more readily than her sister had hoped. “Shooting alligators is not exactly nice work, I suppose, however much it needs to be done, for we have to have their skins for leather.”

“Then suppose you take us back,” suggested Ruth. “I’m sorry to make so much trouble—”

“Not at all!” interrupted Paul. “I think it will be best. But if I can borrow a gun I’m going to get a ‘gator myself.”

“And get one for me; will you, Paul?” begged Alice. “I’ll have my valise after all!”

“Surely,” he answered.

“Just a few minutes more,” requested Russ. “There’s a big one over there I want to film. I guess he must be the grandfather of this alligator roost.”

“I never saw such a nest of ‘em!” exclaimed Jed. “I can make a pot of money out of this. None of the other hunters has stumbled on it. I’m in luck!”

Ruth and Alice had lost much of their first fear, and really the only danger now was lest one of the big saurians upset the boat, which it might easily do, by coming up under it. The alligators showed no disposition to make an attack. Indeed, most of them swam past the boat without noticing it, though a few of the smaller ones scuttled off when they came up and eyed the craft and its occupants.

Out on the sand bar, sunning themselves, were nearly a score of the big creatures. Now and then one would crawl over the others, or plunge into the sluggish stream with a splash.

“Some fine skins here,” commented Jed, with a professional air. “When we come back, boys, we’ll have a lively time.”

“Isn’t it dangerous?” asked Ruth, with a shudder.

“Alligators ain’t half so dangerous as folks think,” said Jed. “I’ve hunted ‘em, boy and man, for years, and I never got much hurt. One I wounded once nipped me on the leg, and I’ve got the scar yet.”

“I thought it was the tail that was the dangerous part of an alligator,” said Russ, who now had all the pictures he wanted for the present, though he intended coming back with the larger camera and filming the alligator hunt.

“Well, I’ve read lots of stories to the effect that an alligator or crocodile could swing his tail around and knock a man or dog into his mouth with one sweep, but I don’t believe it,” the hunter said. “Of course that big tail could do damage if it was properly used, and you didn’t get out of the way in time. In India I reckon the crocodiles are dangerous, if what you read is true; but I don’t reckon a Florida alligator nor crocodile ever ate a man.”

“I thought there were no crocodiles in this country,” said Russ, who, with a skillful movement of the oars, avoided hitting a big alligator.

“That’s a mistake,” said Jed. “There are both alligators and crocodiles in Florida, and some of the crocodiles grow to be nearly fifteen feet long. There ain’t so much difference between crocodiles and alligators as folks think. The main point is that a crocodile’s head is more pointed than an alligator’s.”

“They’re all horrid enough looking,” observed Alice.

“Wa’al, I grant you they ain’t none of ‘em beauties,” returned the hunter, with a chuckle, “though I have heard of some folks takin’ home little alligators for pets. I’d as soon have a pet bumblebee!” and he laughed heartily.

The two girls were becoming almost indifferent to the alligators now, though in turning about for the return trip to the steamer they several times bumped into the clumsy creatures, and once the craft careened dangerously, causing Alice and Ruth to scream.

And once, when they were almost out of the haunts of the saurians, an immense specimen reared itself out of the water and thrust its ugly nose over the bow.

“Oh!” cried Alice, shrinking back.

In an instant Jed fired, aiming, however, along the keel of the boat, and not broadside across it, so there was no danger from the recoil.

The alligator sank at once.

“I hit him!” cried the hunter, “but it wasn’t a mortal wound. I’ll come back and get him.”

“Please don’t shoot again!” begged Ruth.

“I won’t, Miss, and I beg your pardon; but I really couldn’t help it,” he apologized.

There was considerable excitement aboard the Magnolia when the party returned with word about the alligators, and when Paul and Russ went back with Jed, Russ taking a large camera, another boatload of men with guns was made up for the hunt.

Even Jed was satisfied later with the day’s work, and Russ got a film that created quite a sensation when shown, for never before had an alligator hunt been given in moving pictures.

“Well, I can’t go on with you folks any longer,” said Jed that night, as Mr. Pertell, aboard the *Magnolia*, was talking of further plans. “I’ve got to stay and take care of my alligator skins,” he added. “It means big money to me.”

“I wish you could come,” said the manager. “For we are going into the wilds, and we may need your help.”

“Into the wilds?” echoed Mr. Sneed. “Do you think it safe?”

“I don’t know whether it is or not,” responded Mr. Pertell, and he spoke half seriously. “But we have to go to get the views I want. I hope none of you refuse to come.”

No one did, but there was not a little apprehension.

“Those two girls went into the wilds—and did not come back, you know,” said Ruth to Alice in a low voice.

“Oh, don’t think of it,” was the rejoinder. “We are a large party—we can’t get lost.”

But neither Ruth nor Alice realized what was before them.