

The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms
or

Lost in the Wilds of Florida

By

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Chapter 20: Lost



Pushing her bow up sluggish streams—up rivers that flowed under arching trees, heavy with the gray moss, went the Magnolia. The party of moving picture players had been on the move for three days now, without a stop for taking of pictures, save those Russ made of the negroes cutting wood for the boilers. No dramas were to be made until they reached a certain wild and uninhabited part of Florida, of which Mr. Pertell had heard, and which he thought would be just right for his purpose.

They had left the vicinity of the alligator hunt, and were pushing on into the interior. In reality it was not so many miles from Sycamore, but it seemed a great way, so lonely was it in the palm forests and cypress swamps.

“Seems to me this is lonely enough to suit anyone,” observed Miss Pennington as she sat on deck with the others, and looked up stream.

“It surely is—I feel like screaming just to know that there is something alive around here,” added Miss Dixon.

“Go ahead!” laughed Russ. “No one will stop you!”

“Really the silence does seem to get on one’s nerves,” put in Mr. Towne. “It—er—interferes with—er—thinking, you know.”

“Didn’t know you ever indulged in that habit!” chaffed Paul.

“Oh, why—er—my deah fellah! Of course I do—at times. I find—I really find I have to give a great deal of consideration—at times—to the suit samples my tailor sends me. And really I shall not be sorry to get back to deah old N’York and renew my wardrobe.”

“If he has any more suits he’ll have to get a man to look after them,” remarked Alice.

“Oh, hush!” chided Ruth.

Then silence once more settled down over the company on the upper deck of the Magnolia. An awning protected them from the hot sun, and really it was very pleasant traveling that way. Of course it was lonesome and the solitude was depressing. For days they would see nothing save perhaps the boat of some solitary fisherman, or alligator hunter.

Occasionally they saw some of the big saurians themselves, as they slipped into the water from some log, or sand bar, on the approach of the steamer. Now and then some wild water fowl would dart across the bows of the boat, uttering its harsh cries.

Russ got a number of fine nature films, but the real work of making dramas would not take place for another day or two. Meals were served aboard, though once or twice, when a long stop had to be made for the cutting of fuel, a shore party was made up.

Then they would take their luncheon with them, seek out some little palm-shaded glade, and there feast and make merry. Ruth and Alice, with Paul and Russ, always enjoyed these trips.

“I think this will about suit us,” said Mr. Pertell, one evening, as the Magnolia made a turn in the stream, and came to a place where another sluggish river joined it. “This is the spot spoken of by Jed, and the surrounding country will give us just the scenery we want, I think. We will tie up here for the night, and you and I will make an examination to-morrow, Russ.”

“All right, sir. It looks like a good location to me.”

It was so warm that supper really was almost a waste of effort on the part of the cook that evening, for few ate much. Then came a comfortable time spent on the deck, while the night wind cooled the day-heated air.

“Oh, isn’t this positively stifling!” complained Miss Pennington as she dropped into a chair beside Ruth. “How do you ever stand it? I’ve bathed my face in cologne, and done everything I can think of to cool off.”

“Perhaps if you didn’t do so much you would keep cooler,” Ruth suggested with a smile. “And really that is a very warm gown you have on.”

“I know it, but it’s so becoming to me—at least, I flatter myself it is,” and she glanced in the direction of Mr. Towne, who as usual was attired “to the limit,” as Russ said.

Ruth and Alice, in cool muslins or lawns, were quite in contrast to the rather overdressed former vaudeville actresses.

“I can lend you a kimono,” offered Alice.

“No, thank you!” replied Miss Pennington. “I believe in a certain refinement in dress, even if we are in the wilds of Florida.”

“I believe in being comfortable,” retorted Alice.

Miss Dixon came up on deck, redolent of a highly perfumed talcum powder.

“It seems to keep away the mosquitoes,” she murmured in explanation, though no one had said anything, even if Russ did sniff rather ostentatiously.

“I should think it would attract them,” chuckled Paul.

“Oh, indeed!” said Miss Dixon, and changed her mind about taking a seat near him.

Returning from a little exploring party next day Russ and Mr. Pertell reported the locality to be just what was wanted.

“We start work to-morrow,” said the manager. “And I want everyone to do his or her best, for this will bring our Florida stay to a close.”

“And what next?” asked Mr. DeVere.

“I haven’t made up my mind yet. But there will be plenty of other pictures to make.”

During the next few days every member of the company, from Mr. DeVere to Tommy and Nellie, had their share of work. There were romantic plays filmed, and in these Ruth had good parts. As for Alice she rejoiced when she had humorous “stunts” to do.

“You are getting to be a regular ‘cut-up’,” laughed Paul at the close of one of her performances.

“Yes, and I hope she doesn’t get too much that way,” said Ruth.

“No danger, sister mine, with you to keep me straight,” was the answer, as Alice put an arm around Ruth.

Some comic films were made, and in a few of these Mr. Sneed and Mr. Towne had to do “stunts” such as falling in the mud and water, or toppling down hills head over heels. But Mr. Pertell was careful to warn them not to run dangerous risks.

Mr. DeVere, as usual, did more dignified work, and Mr. Bunn was delighted when told that he might do a bit of Shakespeare. And to do him credit, he acted well, much better than some of his associates had supposed he could.

“I have a new idea for to-day,” said Mr. Pertell one morning, as the day’s work was about to start. “In one drama I wish to show a little picnic scene, with two girls and their mother. You will be the mother, Mrs. Maguire, and with Ruth and Alice will go off up a side stream in a boat. Russ will go along, of course, to manage the camera, and I think I’ll send Paul to help row the boat. Take a gun along, Paul, for you can pretend to shoot some game for the lunch.

“You will also have a regular picnic lunch along—real food, by the way, and you will spread it out in some picturesque spot and eat.” Mr. Pertell then went on giving directions for the acting of the drama that was to center around the little picnic.

In due time the boat was loaded with the camera and provisions, and Paul helped in Ruth, Alice and Mrs. Maguire. Then he got in with the gun.

“Better take your raincoats along,” advised Mr. DeVere to his daughters, “it looks like a shower and you won’t be back before night.”

Accordingly the garments were tossed into the boat, and then, leaving the Magnolia moored to the bank, the small craft started off up a little side stream that was to be followed for a mile or two.

Russ picked out a likely spot for the picnic scene and after a bit of rehearsal Ruth, Alice, Mrs. Maguire and Paul went through the little play.

“This is more fun than acting,” remarked Alice, as she reached for another chicken sandwich.

There was more to do after the meal, and when what food remained had been packed up for a luncheon later in the afternoon, they entered the boat again, and started still farther up stream.

The last film had been made and as the shadows were lengthening the start back was made.

“My, it’s getting dark very quickly, and it’s only three o’clock,” said Paul, as he looked at his watch.

“Going to rain, I guess,” said Russ. And rain it did a little later, the drops coming down with tropical violence.

“Oughtn’t we to be at the steamer by this time?” asked Mrs. Maguire, when they could hardly see.

“Well, maybe we had,” agreed Paul.

The light was set aglow, and then the young men shouted and called:

“Magnolia ahoy!”

Echoes were their only answer, save the bellow or grunt of some distant alligator, or the screech of some disturbed wild fowl.

“This is queer,” observed Russ. “I’m sure we have rowed back far enough to be at the place where we left the steamer. I wonder—”

But he did not finish.

“What do you wonder?” asked Alice, searchingly.

“Oh—nothing,” Russ hesitated.

“Yes, it is something!” she insisted.

“Well, then, I was wondering if we possibly could have come down some wrong creek. There were a number of turns, you know.”

“Do—do you mean, we are—lost?” faltered Ruth.

“Well, I’m afraid I do.”