

The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms
or

Lost in the Wilds of Florida

By

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Chapter 6: By Wireless



For a moment no one spoke, after the portentous words of Captain Falcon. Men and women looked at each other. The members of the moving picture company glanced from face to face. What would come next?

“Does this mean—does it indicate that we are to take to the boats?” asked Mr. DeVere, solemnly.

“Not necessarily,” the captain replied. “I have come to put the matter plainly to you. The fire gained, in the night, and it reached the engine room compartment. We are, therefore, temporarily disabled, and cannot proceed, as we could have done had not this occurred. For we had the first blaze out.

“Now, those who wish will be put into life boats, with such of their belongings as it is practicable to take with them.”

“What is the other alternative?” asked Mr. Pertell, as the captain paused, thus indicating that he had another proposition to make.

“The second question is—Will you wait for the Bell to come up? She is within about fifty miles of us, I should judge, and can reach us inside of three hours.”

“In the meanwhile—the fire may gain?” suggested Mr. Sneed in gloomy tones.

“It may—yes. It probably will, if it reaches the coal bunkers. That is what I am afraid of, and why I speak thus plainly.”

“Then I’m going to take to a boat!” exclaimed the “grouch.”

“So will I!” put in Mr. Bunn.

“Wait,” advised Mr. Pertell. “If possible I wish to keep all the members of my company together. I have not the fear that some of you have. I trust Captain Falcon.”

“Thank you!” exclaimed the commander, evidently greatly pleased with this mark of confidence. “At the same time I stand ready to lower boats for those who may wish it. The sea is comparatively calm, and you will have to use boats anyhow, if you are taken off by the Bell.”

“Must that be done?” asked Alice, in a low voice.

“If we cannot subdue the fire, I am afraid so, Miss DeVere,” answered the captain. “But there is no danger in that. It is often done.”

“Then I say, let’s wait for the other vessel,” decided Mr. DeVere. “There may finally be no necessity for leaving our own ship, I take it?” he asked.

“There may—it’s a chance.”

“Then let’s take it!” cried Russ. “How will you summon the Bell?”

“By wireless. I was only waiting for your decision to write out the message. She has been expecting a call from us, but she has probably drifted farther off than she was last evening. I will summon her.”

A little later the wireless began crackling out its call to the unseen Bell, and preparations were made to lower away the boats promptly, in case the fire should suddenly gain greater headway. Then there was nothing to do but wait, and fight the flames.

“I insist, though, on being put in a boat!” cried Mr. Sneed. “I want to get off this dangerous ship.”

“I do, too!” exclaimed Mr. Bunn.

“I advise you both to stick to this ship,” spoke Mr. Pertell, seriously.

“Never!” cried the grouch, and the former Shakespearean actor echoed the word.

“Let them go,” decided Captain Falcon, in a low voice to the moving picture manager. “I can send them away in a boat, with some sailors, and tell my men to row slowly, so as not to take them too far away from us. Then, when the Bell comes up, they can go aboard her, if our fire is not out by then. Let them go.”

“All right,” agreed Mr. Pertell, and orders were given to lower a boat. Mr. Bunn and Mr. Sneed got together what belongings they could, and entered it.

“I must get a moving picture of this!” cried Russ.

“Do!” said Mr. Pertell.

“I forbid it!” exclaimed Mr. Sneed. Perhaps he did not want to be shown deserting the ship and the company.

But Russ brought out his camera, and soon the film was moving, as the boat was lowered to the surface of the sea. Then it was soon pulling away from the Tarsus, and Russ got those views too.

“Wait! Wait for me!” cried a voice, and up on deck came Mr. Towne. He had a valise in each hand, which probably contained his best suits.

“Wait!” he cried. “I want to be saved, too.”

“There’s no danger; you’ll be saved more by staying here than by going with them,” said Mr. Pertell. “Besides, you might soil your clothing if you went in the small boat. Another ship is coming for us.”

“Oh—er—I certainly would not like to spoil any of my suits—the one I fell overboard in is almost ruined. I—er—I ah—shall stay!” and he went below again.

The wireless was still crackling out its call for aid, and soon an answer was received, saying that the Bell was on her way.

“She’s coming!” cried the operator, as he gave the dispatch to the captain. Russ, who had enough of the pictures of Mr. Bunn and Mr. Sneed leaving in the boat, filmed the captain in the act of receiving this message of good cheer. Later it was worked into a stirring drama, called “The Burning Ship.”

With all else that was going on, the work of fighting the blaze in the hold was not for a moment given up. Water and live steam were turned in among the cargo, the pumping apparatus fortunately not having been disabled when the rest of the machinery went out of commission.

Russ made more moving pictures, since he now had a good light, and as the fire-fighting was in another part of the ship it made a different series of views.

“Oh, isn’t this the most awful thing you ever saw, or heard of?” cried Miss Pennington, coming on deck where Ruth and Alice stood. “Fate seems to be against us at every turn!”

She was very pale, and looked wretched, as did her chum Miss Dixon.

“I guess they didn’t take time to make up their complexions,” whispered Alice.

“Hush!” cautioned her sister.

“I could cry!” declared Miss Dixon. “I never slept a wink all night.” She looked it, too.

“Oh, we’ll be all right,” said Paul. “The other ship is coming for us, and if necessary we can be transferred to her.”

“Will we have to go in one of the small boats, like that?” Miss Pennington wanted to know, as she pointed to the one in which were Mr. Bunn and Mr. Sneed, some distance off, now.

“That’s the only kind they have on board,” said Mr. DeVere, who had shortly before joined his daughters.

“Oh, I never could go in one of those—never!” the former vaudeville actress cried, tragically.

“Ha! Dose is goot boats! I in der German nify vos,” put in Mr. Switzer, “und dey are fery safe.”

“Oh, but they look so small, and they hold so little. How can one get enough to eat in them?” asked Miss Dixon, clasping her hands, and looking with her rather effective eyes, first at Mr. Towne, and then at Paul.

“Ha! You dakes along vot you eat!” exclaimed the German. “Pretzels iss fine! Haf one!” and he extended a handful of small ones. Since the company had been snowbound he had always a few in his pocket. He called them his “mascots.”

“No, thank you. I never eat them!” declared Miss Dixon, with turned-up nose.

“Let’s go see if there is any further report by wireless from the Bell,” suggested Ruth, who saw kindling wrath in the eyes of her sister. Alice never could get along well with the two actresses, and she was very likely to say something that might lead to a quarrel.

“I’ll come along,” said Paul.

“So will I,” echoed Mr. Towne. In spite of his affected mannerisms, he could be “nice,” at times. It was Ruth who had said this, but then Ruth had such a kind heart that she generally found a good quality in nearly everyone, whatever their failings.

“Yes, she’s coming on at full speed,” reported the wireless operator. “She’ll be with us in about an hour, now. And I guess it’s time, too,” he added in a low voice.

“Why?” asked Russ, when the girls had passed on.

“Because I believe the fire is gaining. I think it’s in one of the coal bunkers now, and that means it will burn steadily, and may eat through the side of the ship.”

The operator turned to his apparatus, for he had been told to keep in constant communication with the oncoming rescue ship.

As Paul rejoined the girls, there sounded through the Tarsus a dull explosion, that made the ship tremble.

The commander was hurrying along the deck. Many of the passengers, who had gone below to pack their belongings in anticipation of being transferred, now came rushing out of their staterooms.

“What was it?”

“Are we going to blow up?”

“Is the ship sinking?”

“Don’t be alarmed!” Captain Falcon exhorted them, but, even as he spoke, there came a second dull rumbling, a trembling of the vessel, and another explosion, louder than the first. There were screams from frightened women and children, and a number of men passengers made a rush for the boats, as the sailors had done before.