

The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms
or

Lost in the Wilds of Florida

By

Laura Lee Hope

Chapter 7: In Port



“Stand back!” cried Captain Falcon, and again his hand went to his pocket as though to draw a weapon. “Stand back! The same rule applies to you men passengers as to the sailors. Women and children first! Do you hear? Stand back!”

The rush was halted almost before it started. Then Mr. Switzer, who had taken no part in it, said slowly:

“Dot is right. Gentlemen, we are forgetting ourselves!”

“And it took him—above everyone else—to remind them of it,” said Mr. DeVere in a low voice. He had remained by the side of his daughters.

“Mr. Switzer is a bigger man than any of us thought,” murmured Ruth. “Oh, Daddy, is the boat going to sink?”

“We are going to be blown up!” exclaimed a big man, who, with others, had made a half start for the boat, and then had hung back shamefacedly.

“If you say that again!” cried Paul, in a fierce whisper, “I’ll throw you overboard! This is no time to start a panic!”

The man slunk away. There came another explosion, not so loud as the first, but enough to cause the men to start involuntarily, and to bring frantic screams from the women passengers.

“What is that, Captain?” asked Mr. Pertell.

“Nothing to be alarmed about,” was the calm answer.

“They sound alarming enough,” declared a woman.

“But they are not,” the commander insisted. “They are only slight explosions of coal gas in some of the bunkers. The fire is slowly eating into them but the explosions are not heavy enough to cause any serious damage to the ship.

“The Bell will soon be up to us. In fact, we could see her now, were it not for the slight haze. And, as it is evident that you will have to be taken off in her, I am going to lower the boats, and let you row away from this ship.

“You will be picked up by the Bell as soon as she gets here, and, in any event, you would have to take to the small boats. So you might as well start. I will have all your baggage brought on deck ready for transfer,” he added to the moving picture manager.

“Very good,” assented Mr. Pertell. “I am sorry this has occurred, but perhaps it is best that we leave the ship.”

“It will be better for your peace of mind, though really I think we can conquer the fire,” the captain went on. “But we are disabled, and may not be able to proceed for some time.”

“What are you going to do when we are gone?” asked Alice, who, with Ruth, had recovered some of her equanimity by this time. “Are you coming with us, Captain Falcon—you and your sailors?”

“I am going to stick by the ship!” he answered, and there was a proud ring in his voice. “I believe I can save her, and then we’ll make repairs, and get to port under our own steam. I want to save the owners salvage, if I can.”

“There speaks a brave man,” murmured Mr. DeVere. “And there are many such unknown, who are going down the sea in ships every day. A brave man!”

“Man the falls!” ordered Captain Falcon to those sailors who were not engaged in fighting the fire. “Man the falls, and stand by to lower the boats!”

“Oh, must we really go in those little things?” cried Miss Pennington, as she heard this.

“Certainly,” answered Russ, who was near her. “You wouldn’t expect to swim; would you?”

“Horrid thing!” snapped the actress. “Come, Laura. Don’t leave me. I’m so frightened!”

“So am I,” declared her companion. “It’s awful!”

“Their fright hasn’t made them pale, at any rate,” whispered Alice. “They’ve taken on color, lately.”

“Oh, my dear, you mustn’t say such things,” chided Ruth.

The work of getting the passengers and their baggage into the boats was soon under way. There was some confusion, not a little evidence of fright on the part of many, and some tears. But among the bravest were little Tommie and Nellie. They thought it all a lark, and probably, in their case, it was the bliss of ignorance.

Russ, who had been standing near Ruth and Alice, suddenly started for his stateroom.

“Where are you going?” asked Ruth, as the call came for them to take their places in a boat.

“For my moving picture camera! I’m going to get views of this. It’s too good to miss!”

“It seems so—so—” began Ruth, but Alice interrupted with:

“Why shouldn’t he get the film? There is really no danger of death, and it is a chance that he may never have again. A film like this could be worked into a great play!”

“Spoken like a real artist of the movies!” cried Mr. Pertell. “Go ahead, Russ. Get all you can; but don’t take any chances.”

Then the young operator busied himself with making a film that was afterward said to be one of the best in the world showing a rescue from a burning ship. And the beauty of it was that it was real. There was no posing, and the ship was not an old hulk chartered for the occasion, and set fire to, as has been done more than once.

As the women and children were first helped to the boats, and the craft then carefully lowered to the sea, Russ took picture after picture. Fortunately the sea and weather were both calm, and, after the first little fright, no one made any disturbance.

The boat containing Mr. Bunn and Mr. Sneed had returned part way to the ship, the sailors having heard the explosions, and desiring to aid in the work of saving the passengers if there was any need, for their craft could hold many more.

But there was no need. There was ample room in the other boats, and, as Captain Falcon had said, the explosions were really of little moment—at least, for the present.

Boat after boat was loaded and lowered away, and not an accident marred the work. True, Mrs. Maguire, in her anxiety to see that Nellie and Tommy were safe, nearly fell overboard, but a burly sailor caught her just in time.

“How are you coming on, Russ?” asked Mr. Pertell who, with Pop Snooks, was seeing to the bringing up of the baggage, and the other property of the moving picture company.

“Fine,” answered the young operator. “This will be a great film!”

“Glad to hear it! It will be our turn soon.”

“I’m going to stick till the last boat. I want to get all the views I can.”

Russ spoke simply, but he well knew the danger he ran in remaining until the last boat was sent away. The ship might be in no real danger; even as Captain Falcon had said; but, on the other hand, the fire might have spread more than the commander realized. But Russ, like many another picture operator, was not afraid to do his duty as he saw it, even in the face of danger.

Suddenly a great shout arose.

“Wonder what’s happened now?” remarked Mr. Pertell. He knew a moment later, for the shout took to itself words:

“The ship!”

“The rescue ship!”

“There comes the Bell!”

Sweeping up through the mist came the ship that had responded to the wireless calls for aid. On she came at full speed, and when she caught sight of the Tarsus she sent out a reassuring blast from her great whistle. It was answered in kind.

“Now you’re all right!” cried Captain Falcon over the side, to those in the small boats. “Row the passengers over to her,” he ordered the sailors, “and then come back to your ship!”

“Aye, aye, sir!” was the answer. And be it said to the credit of those sailors that not one of them shirked, or tried to desert, which might have been easily forgiven in the face of the danger.

“I’ve got to get a picture of her!” cried Russ, as he focused the camera on the oncoming ship. And a fine picture he obtained.

“Oh, now we’re all right, Daddy!” cried Ruth, as she nestled close to her father. Mr. DeVere had been allowed to go in the boat with his daughters, as there was plenty of room, and all the other women had been provided for.

“I wasn’t worrying,” declared Alice.

“Oh yes, it’s easy to say that now,” sighed Ruth. “But I’m sorry for poor Captain Falcon.”

“He is a brave man,” said Mr. De Vere, again.

The Bell came as close as was safe, and a little later the small boats rowed to her accommodation ladder, which had been lowered. Then began the risky work of getting from the small boats to this ladder, and so aboard the Bell. For there was now a little sea on, and the boats rose and fell to a considerable degree.

But the sailors were skillful, and soon all the passengers and baggage were transferred. Russ was the last to leave the Tarsus, and the last to go aboard the Bell, for he wanted every view he could get.

He was received with a cheer, given not only by his friends, but by the passengers and crew of the Bell.

For Mr. Pertell had told of the devotion to duty of the young operator, and his act was duly appreciated.

Back to the burning vessel—perhaps, for all they knew, back to their doom—rowed the sailors of the Tarsus. The chief mate of the Bell, at the request of his commander, went to consult with Captain Falcon. On returning, the mate reported that Captain Falcon felt he could get the fire under control, and also make repairs to enable him to get his ship to port.

“Then we will proceed,” said Captain Blackstone, of the Bell. He gave the signal to go ahead, and soon the ill-fated Tarsus, with the smoke pall hanging about her, was left behind.

But it is a pleasure to record that, after a hard fight, Captain Falcon and his men did subdue the flames, and, after harder work, temporary repairs enabled them to limp into port. Thus the commander saved his ship, and also avoided the payment, on the part of the owners, of heavy salvage. Later he was suitably rewarded by his superiors.

“Oh, but what an experience!” lamented Miss Pennington, as she sank into a steamer chair after the rescue. “I wonder what sort of a stateroom we’ll have here, Laura?”

“They’ll be lucky if they get even a berth,” grumbled Paul. For the Bell carried a number of passengers, and the addition of those from the Tarsus rather crowded her.

But accommodations were found for all, though the quarters were rather cramped. The Bell was bound direct for St. Augustine, and in due season, and without further mishap, the moving picture company reached that oldest city in the United States.