

*The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms*

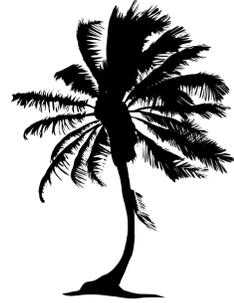
*or*

*Lost in the Wilds of Florida*

By

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Chapter 9: In the Dungeon



“Oh, if we could only stay here forever!”

“It would be Paradise!”

Thus Ruth and Alice exclaimed as they entered the orange grove, a short distance from the city gates. And indeed the scene that greeted them, and the sweet odors, might well call for this praise and desire from even the most blasé tourist.

Even Russ, grown accustomed by his calling to odd scenes, was impressed by the wonderful sight, and as for Paul, who had something of the romantic nature of Ruth, it was a pure delight to him.

“I wonder if they will take any pictures here?” said Ruth, softly—at first it seemed as if one must talk in whispers so as not to disturb the beauty of the place.

“Oh, I’m going to film you here,” announced Russ. “Stand still a moment and I’ll snap you now. There’s a pretty place.”

Ruth and Alice assumed graceful poses, and soon their likenesses were registered on the film. Russ never tired of taking pictures, and when he was not making moving ones he was using his small hand camera. How many times he had taken the likeness of Ruth it would be hard to estimate.

They wandered about the orange grove, and the young men bought some of the delicious fruit, right from the trees, and fully ripe. It had a flavor all its own.

“Let me show you how to eat an orange,” suggested one of the men of the grove, as he saw the young people going about, “in the way it is usually done when no orange spoons are to be had.”

“Somebody has said,” went on the man, “that you need to lean over a bathtub to eat an orange this way, but it’s worth while. You get a little smeared up doing it; but you can wash in the spring over there,” and he pointed to one amid a pile of stones.

Then with his keen knife he cut the orange in a peculiar spiral manner, with the skin left on so that eventually he had a long yellow strip, with the sections of orange clinging to the yellow rind.

“Now, all you’ve got to do is to run your mouth along that strip,” he directed, “and you get all the juice—that is, all you don’t miss. It takes a little practice; but I’ve got some black boys that can get every drop. Watch!”

Rapidly he ate along the extended strip of skin, to which clung the cut sections of orange. In a moment it was clean.

“It’s an awfully crude way of doing it—but, as long as we’re in an orange grove, let’s do as the orange ‘grovers’ do,” laughed Alice.

“I’m game!” cried Paul.

“Same here!” put in Russ, and they cut their oranges as the man had done. The latter then prepared one each for Ruth and Alice, and amid much laughter—the girls and the young men leaning far over so as not to drip the juice on their clothes—they finished the delicious fruit.

“Now bring on your bathtub!” cried Russ.

“There’s the spring,” the man said. “There’s a basin near it, and it’s clean.”

Laughing over the new way of eating oranges, but voting that it was worth while, even if it was a bit “smeary,” the young folks washed their hands and faces, and kept on through the grove, growing more and more glad at every step that they had come to Florida.

“And now for the Fountain of Youth!” cried Paul.

“I don’t feel that I need it, after that delicious orange,” laughed Ruth.

“Indeed, if you get any younger, you’ll go back to kindergarten days,” remarked Paul.

“Thank you. I don’t want to be quite as young as that.”

The Fountain of Youth, one of the curiosities of St. Augustine, is on Myrtle avenue, two blocks north of the orange grove, and the four laughing young people were soon there.

“Is this really the fountain Ponce de Leon thought would give eternal youth?” asked Ruth, half-seriously, as they stood near the little roofed-over spring.

“That is the legend,” declared Paul. “Of course that’s not saying it’s so. But the spring has one peculiar quality.”

“What’s that?” asked Russ.

“The waters rise and fall without any particular cause. Sometimes they are higher than at others, and none of the other wells, or springs, in this vicinity do that. So you see it may be miraculous after all.”

“Let’s try it,” suggested Alice, who was always ready for anything new.

“Oh, but perhaps it isn’t good water,” objected Ruth, more cautious. “We may get typhoid, or something like that.”

“Nonsense!” laughed Alice, but she looked questioningly at Paul.

“Lots of people drink the water,” he said. “Allow me,” and he lowered a small bucket attached to a rope made fast to the roof of the well.

He drew it up, brimming over, and with a low bow handed some of the water to Alice, pouring it into a small collapsible cup he happened to have with him.

“Drink! And may you never grow old!” he said, and there was more of meaning in his eyes than in his words.

“We’ll all sample it!” cried Russ, and as Ruth was induced, just for the fun of the thing, to try some, they heard the murmur of voices behind them.

“Save some for us!” was the call, and Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon came up.

“We’ll all be young together,” said Alice. Though she and her sister were not very chummy with the two former vaudeville actresses, they were not exactly unfriendly. And who could be unfriendly in that beautiful spot, and on the reputed site of the Fountain of Youth?

“The more you drink the younger you get!” bantered Paul, as Miss Dixon asked him for a second cup.

“Gracious, then I’ll turn into a baby,” exclaimed Miss Pennington. “I’ve been here once before this morning, and I took several glasses.”

“Back to juvenile rôles for yours!” cried Russ. “Mr. Pertell will have to look for another leading lady.”

“I haven’t noticed any effect yet,” she said, as she took out a vanity box, and surreptitiously used her chamois, leaving a more brilliant tint on her face.

“It takes time,” went on Russ, half-seriously. “You will awaken in the morning, crying for a rattle.”

Thus they made merry near the well, with its queer square stones built into pillars to hold up the roof.

“Poor Ponce de Leon,” sighed Ruth. “How disappointed he must have been when he found out that his life was slipping away in spite of the Fountain of Youth. I wonder if he really believed he had found it?”

“He couldn’t have — when he came to die,” remarked Russ, practically.

“But it is a pretty story,” Ruth said, softly. “Poor Ponce de Leon!”

“The Indians told him this was the fountain,” said Paul, who had been reading history. “Near this fountain was found a large coquina cross. The cross was located by the discovery of a silver casque, which contained documents telling of the matter, and one seems to fix the date of the first visit of Ponce de Leon to Florida. That was in 1513, according to the documents found in the casque.

“Am I boring you?” he asked quickly, for he thought the two former vaudeville actresses looked as though they wanted to talk of something else besides dry historical facts.

“No, indeed!” cried Alice. “I just love to hear about this.”

“Do go on,” urged Ruth, and even Miss Pennington condescended to say:

“It sounds interesting.”

“I’ll read you what one of the old documents said,” went on Paul. ”As we bore down upon him we found him to be an Indian, in a skin boat with a skin sail, running to a point twenty feet in the air, with a bow at the top. In the boat, which I describe in my descriptive image, I went ashore with the Indian. We landed near a spring that they call the Fountain of Youth; there they had a temple built where they worshipped the sun, and there I built a cross out of coquina, which is a natural formation of the sea, and I laid it with the rising and setting sun. In the heart of the cross I placed a descriptive image of myself, and took possession in the name of our beloved Catholic King.’

“That’s in the document,” went on Paul, “and the paper was given to the United States, through courtesy of the Governor of Sevilla, in 1908.”

“How interesting,” murmured Alice. “And to think that we are standing on such historic ground! Think of the ancient Indians worshipping the sun here,” and she looked up at the flaming orb.

“The sun is paying altogether too much attention to me!” complained Miss Pennington, with a laugh. “It will spoil my complexion, in spite of the Fountain of Youth. I must be going.”

“Oh, by the way, Russ,” she called back over her shoulder, “Mr. Pertell was looking for you.”

“Was he?” asked the young operator. “Then I’d better be getting back.”

“I fancy we all had,” spoke Ruth. “It must be near lunch time. Come along, Alice.”

Russ, back at the hotel, found that the manager had decided to make as the first film one showing some of his players at Fort Marion, and he wanted Russ to go out there with him and plan the scenario, which would be undertaken in a day or two.

The time quickly passed, for it was so lovely in St. Augustine, and there were so many things to see, that night seemed to follow quickly on the heels of morning.

Arrangements having been made, the company one morning went to the old fort and there Russ filmed many scenes. The play was to be called “The Spanish Prisoner,” the background of the old fort being most effective.

The players were filmed, going through their various parts on what was once the drawbridge in front of the portcullis, near the old watchtower on the stairway that was originally an inclined way, by which artillery was hauled up to the terre plein.

Ruth and Alice were in many of the scenes, but there came a rest for Alice who, always interested in matters of antiquity, wandered about the old fort by herself, Ruth and Mr. DeVere being engaged.

The girl finally made her way to what had been the old guard room and dungeon. In the guard room was a table and some chairs, for the fort is in charge of a detachment from the United States Army, and accommodations are provided for visitors.

Alice sat down in one of the chairs, and looked at the big open fire-place at one end of the guard rooms. She recalled some of its history that Paul had read to her that morning.

The dungeon was accidentally discovered in 1835 and two iron cages, containing the skeletons of a man and woman, were found fastened to the wall.

“Poor creatures! What a horror it must have been!” thought Alice, as she looked toward the narrow opening to the black dungeon.

“Ugh! It’s getting on my nerves, staying here!” she exclaimed, for she was all alone. “I’m going!”

As she rose she heard a noise near the doorway by which she had entered. Turning quickly, expecting to see one of the company, she was horrified to see by the light which entered through a barred window, an aged colored man facing her. He did not approach, but bowing before her exclaimed in quavering tones:

“Den I find yo’, my Missie! Old Jake look eberywhere fo’ you,’ but he find yo’! I knowed I’d find yo’ some day, an’ now I has, but it’s been a pow’ful long time, honey! A long time!” and with outstretched hands, as he took a battered hat from his head, he approached her. Alice screamed and got behind the table.