

The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms

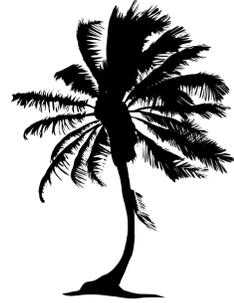
or

Lost in the Wilds of Florida

By

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Chapter 12: A Warning



Beg pardon,” said Claude Towne, during a pause in which Mr. Pertell was consulting some notes he had jotted down, in order to make matters more clear to his players. “Beg pardon, my dear sir, but are we going to a very wild part of this country?”

“Why, yes—rather so,” was the not very reassuring answer. “You probably won’t be able to get a room and bath at the hotel where we stop.”

“Oh, another one of those backwoods places,” murmured Miss Pennington. “How horrid!”

“Is there any—er—any society there?” asked Mr. Towne.

“Hardly,” answered the manager, “unless you call the natives society.”

“Wretched!” exclaimed the dude, with a wry face.

“Hold on, though!” cried Mr. Pertell, “I believe that there are some of our first families there.”

“Ah, that is better,” replied Mr. Towne, adjusting his lavender tie. “I shall include my evening clothes in my wardrobe, then.”

“I’d advise you to,” remarked Mr. Pertell, with an assumption of gravity. “The Seminole Indians, to which I refer, are a very ancient and proud race, I understand, and doubtless a dress suit would appeal to them. They are the first families of Florida!”

“Wretched joke!” muttered the actor. “I think I shall not go into the interior.”

“Oh, I think you will,” retorted Mr. Pertell, easily. “Your contract calls for it.”

“What about alligators?” asked Mr. Sneed.

“You know my offer—a thousand dollars a big bite,” laughed the manager. “But I don’t fancy we shall see half as many as you saw out at the alligator farm. They are being hunted too fiercely for their skins to allow many to be around loose. Don’t worry about them.

“And now, friends, if you please, get ready for the trip to Lake Kissimmee. Russ, see to it that you have plenty of film, for we won’t be able to get any out there. Now I leave you to make your arrangements.”

There was a buzz and a hum of excitement as the players talked over what lay before them. Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon rather shared the disappointment of Mr. Towne that there was no “society” at the place where they were going. But Ruth and Alice, aside from a little feeling of apprehension, and of regret at the fate of the two girls of whom they had read, rather welcomed the coming change.

“It will be a new experience for us,” exulted Alice.

“And I hope it will be a pleasant one,” rejoined Ruth.

Final visits were paid to points of interest in St. Augustine. It would be some time before they would see it again, as Mr. Pertell intended remaining in the interior for several weeks, and then going back to New York by a different route.

“We must have another drink from the Fountain of Youth,” laughed Alice, the day before their departure. “Who knows but what it may preserve us, out in those dismal swamps?”

“Good idea!” commented Paul. “Come on, I’ll go with you.”

So they went and made merry at the historic well.

Mr. Pertell and Russ had much to do to get ready for the trip. A motor boat had been arranged for to meet the party at Sycamore, where the headquarters would be for most of the work in the wilds of Florida. On this it was planned to take trips on Lake Kissimmee, and the river of that name.

“And we may go as far as Lake Okeechobee,” said Russ in speaking of the matter to Ruth.

“That’s down among the Everglades; isn’t it?” she asked.

“Close to them. I’ve always wanted to go there, and see what they are like. Now I may get the chance.”

“I think I should like to see them, too,” she agreed.

“Ruth, you are getting very brave,” observed Alice a little later, when the two sisters were packing up in their room.

“Why, dear?”

“To offer to go with Russ to the Everglades.”

“I didn’t offer!”

“It was the same thing, sister mine. It makes a big difference; doesn’t it?”

“Silly!”

Alice laughed.

“I wonder if we ought to take all these light waists?” she asked a little later, holding up a beautiful flimsy one. “It’s sure to be hot there, I suppose.”

“I imagine so. And yet there may be cool and damp evenings. I’d take everything, if I were you.”

“I was thinking of sending some of my things back to Mrs. Dalwood. She promised to look after them, if I did.”

“Oh, I’d take everything. Where did you get that?” Ruth asked curiously, as she held up one of her sister’s garments, ornamented with a peculiar lace.

“At that little Spanish shop we pass every day. Oh, she has some of the most gorgeous things there, and some of the most beautiful! I wish my purse were as long as my desires. But I got this very reasonably.”

“Are there any more like it?” asked Ruth, for she, too, liked pretty things.

“There were only two, and I took one.”

“Then I’m going to get the other. I can go without ice cream for a week to make up for it. I never saw anything so pretty.”

“I’ll go with you. She might charge you more than she did me. I had to bargain with her.”

“I never knew you could do it,” laughed Ruth.

The two girls desisted from their packing long enough to slip out to the lingerie shop, where they spent more time and money than they intended.

The result was they had to hurry at the last minute, and their trunks were hardly strapped before the porter came to take them to the station.

The trip to Sycamore from St. Augustine was rather tedious and tiresome. The railways in the interior of Florida were not like some of the fast lines, and there was not always the luxury of a parlor car.

Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon were rather inclined to murmur about this, but most of the others of the company took the inconveniences in good spirit, even Mr. Towne making the best of it.

He soon found that it was of little use to attire himself in the “height of fashion,” and gradually became more sensible in his adornment.

On the trip Russ managed to get a series of films showing different scenes, and at one lonely railroad station, where they had to wait several hours for a connecting train, a little scene was improvised that later was worked into a play.

The few “natives” around the place were much excited at some of the things the players did, and when Paul “saved” Mr. Towne from being run down by a freight train that came along, one grizzled old man was so worked up, thinking it all real, that he wanted to run for a doctor, when Mr. Towne pretended to be hurt.

“An’ they do that fer money?” this native inquired, when the matter had been explained to him.

“That’s what they do,” said Russ, who was putting away his camera.

“Wa’al, all I’ve got to say is if that’s what they call work—I’d rather do nothin’,” was the caustic comment.

“And that’s what he jinerally does,” spoke another native, in a low voice. “He’s never worked, an’ I guess he never will.”

“It would be pretty hard to get a moving picture of him, then,” laughed Russ.

Finally the train, which had been delayed by a slight accident, came along, and the weary players got aboard. In due season they reached Sycamore, a little village near the shores of Lake Kissimmee.

Accommodations had been arranged for in advance, and soon the company was getting settled in the new quarters.

“This is some different from St Augustine,” complained Miss Pennington, who roomed with her friend Miss Dixon.

“I should say so. I’d go back to New York, if I could.”

“So would I. But I guess we’ll have to stay, my dear. Hand me the powder; will you? My face is a wreck from the cinders and dust.”

“So’s mine.” And together they “beautified.”

Ruth and Alice were among the first to go down to the parlor to await the ringing of the dinner gong. They strolled up to the desk, to ask the clerk if there was any mail for them, since word had been left at the hotel in St. Augustine to forward any letters.

“Oh, you are with the moving picture company; aren’t you?” the clerk asked, as he gave them each a letter. They were from acquaintances they had made at the hotel.

“Yes, we’re with the ‘movies,’” admitted Alice.

“Going to make all your pictures around here?”

“Not all. We are booked to go into the interior, I believe. Pleasant prospect; isn’t it?” she asked with a frank laugh.

“Well, no, I wouldn’t say it was,” answered the clerk, and he spoke as though Alice had meant to be serious. “In fact, if I were you I wouldn’t try to go into the interior around here.”

“Why not?” asked Ruth.

“Because it was from here the two girls started out into the wilds to gather rare flowers, and they have not since been heard from!”