

The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms

or

Lost in the Wilds of Florida

By

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Chapter 14: Under the Palms



“Attention, everyone!”

Mr. Pertell stood on the deck of the Magnolia, facing his company of players. At his side was Russ, with the moving picture camera ready for action.

“The first part of this play takes place aboard here,” went on the manager. “The action is simple, as you can see from the scenarios I have distributed. Some acts will take place on shore, and when the time comes for that the boat will be sent over to the bank and be tied up. Now then, Russ, get ready to film them. Mr. DeVere, you are in this first act; also Miss Ruth and Miss Dixon. Are you up in your parts?”

“Oh, yes,” answered the veteran actor. Indeed it did not take him long to become letter perfect, for with him to act was not only second, but first nature.

“I don’t just understand how I am to do this part,” said Miss Dixon, as she walked over to Mr. Pertell to point out a certain direction. Thereupon he explained it carefully to her.

The company of players was out on the steamer, moving slowly up a quiet stream, one of the tributaries of the Kissimmee River. On either side of the swamp-like stream were tall trees, from which hung, in graceful festoons, streamers of the peculiar growth known as Spanish moss. In the background were palms and other semi-tropical plants. But the growth along the stream itself was so luxuriant that little could be seen except along the banks.

Now and then the quietude, which was unmarred, save by the gentle puffing of the engine, would be disturbed by some big bird, as it forsook its station on a fallen log, startled by the invasion of its domain. Again there would be a splash in the water.

“An alligator!” exclaimed Miss Pennington, as one rather loud splash sounded just beneath where she was leaning on the rail, looking down into the water.

“Where?” cried Russ, eagerly, as he made ready to get some views of it with his camera.

“There!” she said, pointing a trembling finger.

“Oh, don’t look at it!” begged Miss Dixon, covering her face with her hands. “Don’t look at the horrid thing!”

“No harm in looking at that,” laughed Russ. “It’s only a log of wood.”

And so it proved.

“Well, it looked just like an alligator,” protested Miss Pennington, as the others smiled.

“And it sounded like one!” declared Miss Dixon.

“How does an alligator sound?” asked Mr. Towne, who was walking about attired in immaculate white.

“It made a splash.”

“So does a bullfrog,” observed Paul.

“It does look rather alligatory in there,” admitted Alice, as she stood beside the young actor, and gazed into the sluggish stream.

”Alligatory’ is a new one,” he remarked. “I wonder if alligators eat alligator pears?”

“Probably,” she laughingly agreed. “There, I guess they’re ready for you, Paul,” for he was to take part in the first scene.

Miss Dixon, having had her difficulty straightened out, was prepared to go on, and soon Russ was again at his usual occupation of turning the handle of the moving picture camera.

For a description of how moving pictures are taken, developed, printed and thrown on the screen in the theater by means of a projecting machine, the reader is referred to the previous books of this series.

“That will do for this part of the drama,” announced Mr. Pertell, when an hour or more had been spent in taking various films. “We will now go ashore. Put her over there,” he called to the man in the pilot house on deck, pointing to a place where, back of the moss-fringed row of trees, could be seen some stately palms.

The rather clumsy boat turned slowly toward shore, and a little later had “poked her nose,” as Russ expressed it, against a luxuriant growth of tropical vegetation, in the midst of some low palms and gigantic ferns.

The moist smell of earth and plants, and the odor of flowers was borne on a gentle breeze.

It was a lonely spot, and just what Mr. Pertell wanted for this particular play. On the way up the stream they had passed several small settlements, and the population, consisting mostly of colored folk, had rushed down to the crude landings to stare with big eyes at the passing steamer.

“Everybody ashore!” called the manager, when the boat had been made fast.

“Oh, but we can’t go through there!” complained Mr. Bunn, who, in attempting to make his way into the deeper part of the woods, had suffered the loss of his tall hat several times, low branches having knocked it off.

“Wait, I’ll send some of the hands ahead with axes to clear the way,” offered the steamer captain. “It’ll be easier going, then.”

This was done, and the moving picture players found it no trouble at all to make their way along the hewn path to where a little grove of palms, in a pretty glade, offered the proper scenic background for the pictures.

“This is just the place!” cried the manager. “Russ, set your camera up here, and you’ll get the sun just right. Now, everybody attention!” and he carefully explained what he wanted done.

The play concerned the elopement of a pretty Southern girl, the pursuit by her father, her subsequent marriage, and the forgiveness of her parents. One of the scenes showed the young couple fleeing through the wilderness, and coming to rest beneath the palms, while the pursuers searched in vain for them.

“You’re one of the lovers who has been disappointed by the elopement, Mr. Towne,” said Mr. Pertell, in giving his directions. “When I give the word you must come running along there, so the camera will show you alone.”

“But I may fall in there,” objected the actor, as he pointed you to a small, muddy stream along the path he was to take.

“You must look out for that,” the manager replied. “In fact, I don’t know but what it would be good business to have you fall in. It would seem more realistic.”

“I absolutely refuse to fall in with this new suit on!” cried Mr. Towne, as he glanced at his white flannels.

“Oh, very well, then,” conceded the manager.

Russ had his camera in readiness, and, after making views of the two lovers beneath the palms, he called:

“All ready for you, Mr. Towne,” and he focused his camera in another direction.

The well-dressed actor came on.

“Oh, run faster!” commanded Mr. Pertell, impatiently. “Act as though you meant it. Put some spirit in it. You are supposed to be desperate because your sweetheart has gone off with another man. You look as though you didn’t care!”

Thereupon Mr. Towne tried to “register” anger, and succeeded fairly well. But in doing so he forgot to “mind his steps,” and a moment later, in running along the edge of the muddy stream he slipped, and the next moment, in all the glory of his white suit, he splashed into the mud.