

The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms

or

Lost in the Wilds of Florida

By

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Chapter 15: Under Peril



Russ instantly stopped grinding away at the camera handle as he saw Mr. Towne go into the ditch, but the manager, without the loss of a moment, cried:

“Film that, Russ! It’ll be better than the way we were to play it first. Catch him as he comes up!”

“All right!” chuckled the young operator.

“Oh, what a place to fall!” cried Miss Pennington, who was off one side, out of the camera’s range.

“His suit will surely need washing,” remarked Alice.

“Oh, how can you be so heartless?” asked her sister.

“Heartless! Isn’t that the truth?”

Mr. Towne had struggled to his feet. The muddy stream was not very deep.

“Help! Help! Save me!” he cried, as he wiped the water from his face, thereby making many muddy streaks on his countenance.

“You’re in no danger—come on out!” cried Mr. Pertell, trying not to laugh. “Come right toward the camera, Mr. Towne, and register anger and disgust!”

“Register—register!” spluttered the actor. “Do you mean to say you are filming me in this state?”

“I certainly am—it’s a state that will make a hit in the movies!” cried Mr. Pertell. “You might fall down once more, if you don’t mind, Mr. Towne. It will add realism to the film.”

“Fall down again! Never! I will resign first.”

“Very well, I won’t insist on it,” replied the manager, for he felt that it was rather hard on the actor.

But moving picture work is not at all easy, and actors and actresses have to do more disagreeable and dangerous “stunts” than merely falling into a muddy stream. The demand of the public for realism often goes to extremes, and more than once performers have risked their lives at the behest of some enthusiastic manager.

Mr. Pertell was not that sort, however, though he did insist on his players doing a reasonable amount of hard work—and often disagreeable work, as in this case.

But aside from getting wet and muddy, which conditions could be remedied by a bath and dry clothes, the actor suffered no great hardship, except to his pride, and perhaps he had too much of that, anyhow.

“Come on!” cried the manager. “Crawl out of that, and keep on with the chase.”

“Keep on—in this condition! Do you mean it?” Mr. Towne asked.

“Certainly I do. The play must go on. Just because you fell in the ditch is no excuse for stopping it. Keep on! Right along the path. Crawl out and run on.”

“But—but look at my clothes!” complained Mr. Towne. “They are—they’re muddy!”

“There is a little mud on them, to be sure,” agreed Mr. Pertell. “But don’t worry. It will wash off.”

“A little mud!” spluttered the actor. “I—I—”

“Keep on!” cried the manager. “You are delaying the play!”

The young actor groaned, but there was nothing for it but to obey. He climbed out of the ditch, his once immaculate suit dripping mud from every point, and then he began the pretended chase again, seeking to find the escaping lovers.

Of course this was the farcical element, but managers have found that this is much needed in plays, and though many of them would prefer to eliminate the “horse-play” the audiences seem to demand it, and managers are prone to cater to the tastes of their audiences when they find it pays.

“I’m glad I wasn’t cast for that part,” remarked the dignified Mr. Bunn, as he saw what Mr. Towne had to go through.

“I’d never consent to it,” declared Mr. Sneed. “This business is bad enough as it is,” he complained, “without deliberately making it worse. I presume he’ll want me to try and catch an alligator next, or drive a sea cow to pasture.”

“What’s a sea cow?” asked Alice, who had overheard the talk, while Mr. Towne was being filmed in his muddy state.

“The manatee,” explained Mr. Sneed. “They are curious animals. They browse around on the bottom of Florida rivers, and sea inlets, as cows do on shore, eating grass. We’ll probably see some down here.”

“Are they dangerous?” asked Miss Dixon.

“Not as a rule,” answered the grouchy actor, who seemed to have taken a sudden interest in this matter. “They might upset a small boat if they accidentally bumped into it, for often they grow to be fourteen feet long, and are like a whale in shape.”

“I hope we won’t meet with any,” observed Ruth. “I can’t bear wild animals.”

“Manatees are not especially wild,” laughed Mr. Sneed, it being one of the few occasions when he did indulge in mirth. “In fact, the earlier forms of manatee were called Sirenia, and were considered to be the origin of the belief in mermaids. For they carried their little ones in their fore-flippers, almost as a human mother might do in her arms, and when swimming along would raise their heads out of water, so that they had a faint resemblance to a swimming woman.”

“How very odd!” cried Alice. “And are there manatees down here?”

“Many in Florida? Yes,” was the answer. “I suppose we’ll see some if we stay long enough. But I’m going to serve notice on Mr. Pertell now that I refuse to drive any of the sea cows to pasture.”

“I don’t blame you!” laughed Ruth. “Oh, look at Mr. Towne! He’s fallen again!”

And so the unfortunate actor had, but this time into a clump of rough bushes that tore his now nearly ruined white flannels.

“That’s good!” cried Mr. Pertell, approvingly. “You did that very well, Mr. Towne!”

“Well, I didn’t do it on purpose,” the actor protested, as he managed, not without some difficulty, to extricate himself from the briars.

Then he ran on, Russ making picture after picture, while the manager rapidly changed some of the other scenes on the typewritten sheets to conform to the accident of which he had so cleverly made use.

“Mr. Bunn, I have a new part for you, in this same play,” the manager said, when Mr. Towne was finally allowed to rest.

“What is it?” asked the older actor. “I hope you can put in something about Shakespeare. I have not had a Shakespearean part in so long that I have almost forgotten how to do it properly.”

“I can’t promise you that this time,” said the manager. “But it just occurred to me that you could also try to trace the escaping lovers, and get stuck in a bog-hole.”

“Who, the lovers get stuck in a bog?”

“No, you!”

“Me? Never! I refuse—”

“Now hold on, Mr. Bunn!” said Mr. Pertell, quickly. “I am not asking you to do much. You need not get in the bog deeper than up to your knees. That will answer very well. You can pretend it is a sort of quicksand bog and that you are sinking deeper and deeper. You call for help, and Mr. Switzer comes to get you out.”

“I refuse to do it!” cried the actor.

“And I insist!” declared Mr. Pertell, sharply. “Your contract calls for any reasonable amount of work, and to wade into a bog knee-deep is not unreasonable.”

“But I will spoil my shoes and trousers.”

“No matter, I will provide you with new ones. You need not sacrifice your tall hat this time.”

“That is one comfort,” sighed the old actor. “Well, I suppose there is no help for it. Where is the bog hole?”

“I think this one will do,” said the manager, pointing to one where Mr. Towne had fallen into the mud. “You will come along, pretending to look for the fleeing lovers, and you will unwittingly wade out into the bog. There you will struggle to release yourself, but you will be unable to, and will call for help. Mr. Switzer, who is also on the trail, will respond and he will wade out and save you.”

“Excuse me,” remarked the German actor, softly, “but vy iss it necessary dot I rescue him?”

“Why he can’t rescue himself,” declared Mr. Pertell. “You’ve got to do it.”

“No, dot I did not mean. I meant dot as Herr Towne iss alretty wet and muddy, dot he could as vell do der rescue act.”

“That’s so. It will be better!” said the manager. “I didn’t think of that. I’ll have Towne do it. He can come along on the film right after he’s pulled himself out of the ditch. Fix it up that way, Russ.”

“All right, Mr. Pertell.”

“Have I got to go in more mud and water?” demanded the fastidious actor.

“Yes,” replied the manager. “But it won’t be much. Just a few feet or so of film.”

Mr. Towne groaned, but there was no help for it. And really he could not get much muddier.

Accordingly, after some intervening scenes had been filmed to make the action of the story, as revised, more plausible, Russ moved his camera near the bog hole, ready to get views of Mr. Bunn, when he should stumble into it, and also Mr. Towne, when the latter came to the rescue.

“All ready now—let her go!” called the manager. “Come along, Mr. Bunn.”

The old actor advanced, but evidently with very little liking for his part.

“Oh, be more natural!” cried Mr. Pertell. “You are supposed to be the father of the young man who is eloping, and you want to prevent him. Put some spirit into your work!”

Thereupon Mr. Bunn tried, and with better success. But when he came to the edge of the bog hole he hesitated.

“Hold on! Stop the camera!” cried the manager, sharply. “That won’t do at all. This must be spontaneous. Run right along, and don’t stop when you see the bog hole. Plunge right into it. Why, it isn’t up to your knees, Mr. Bunn, and the weather is hot.”

“All right, here I go!” he said, resignedly.

“Wait! Go back and do that last bit over again,” ordered the manager. “Russ, cut out the last few pictures and substitute these that are to come. Now, Mr. Bunn!”

The Shakespearean actor started over again, and he was “game” enough to pretend that he did not in the least mind floundering into the bog hole. As he came to the edge of it, in he plunged.

He went down much deeper than to his knees, and as he felt himself sinking he called out:

“Help! Help! Save me! Save me!”

“That’s it! That’s the way to do it! That’s being what I call realistic!” shouted Mr. Pertell, who always waxed enthusiastic over a new idea.

Mr. Bunn continued to sink in the bog. He pulled and struggled to get out, apparently without success. Then his tall hat fell off from the violence of his exertions, and he barely saved it from a muddy bath.

“Help! Help! I’m sinking!” he cried.

“Good! That’s the way to act it!” encouraged Mr. Pertell. “Now, Mr. Towne, you come up to the rescue in a few seconds. Don’t mind the mud, either. Go right out to him. You can’t be much worse off.”

“Indeed I cannot,” agreed the other, as he glanced at his soiled suit.

“Wait just a minute more,” said Mr. Pertell to the prospective rescuer.
“Give him a chance to struggle more. It will look better.”

“No, let him come at once and save me! Save me at once!”

“Why?” the manager wanted to know.

“Because I really am sinking! This isn’t play! The quicksand has me in its grip!”

And, as Mr. Pertell looked about, unable to tell whether the actor was saying that as part of the “business,” or because he was in earnest, the unfortunate man cried out in real anguish:

“Save me! Save me! I am in the quicksand and it’s sucking me down!”

“That’s right! He is in a quicksand bog!” cried one of the steamer hands who had helped hew a path through the swamp. “He’ll never get out if you don’t help him quick!”