

The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms

or

Lost in the Wilds of Florida

By

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Chapter 16: A Strange Attack



It was true, then. The frantic appeals of Mr. Bunn were not in the interests of acting for moving pictures, but because he felt himself in actual danger. None of his friends had thought of that, until the man from the steamer offered confirmation. They had all thought the actor was doing a realistic bit of work.

“Quicksand! Do you mean it?” gasped Mr. Pertell.

“I certainly do,” answered the steamer hand. “There are a lot of those bogs around here, and he’s stumbled into one. He’s going down every minute, too, and if you don’t get him out soon you never will.”

“Oh, mercy!” screamed Miss Pennington. “How horrible!”

“To be buried alive!” gasped Miss Dixon.

“Quiet!” commanded Mr. Pertell, sternly. “Come on, gentlemen!” he called to the male members of the company. “We must save him!”

“Oh, do get me out!” cried the unfortunate Mr. Bunn.

“We’ll save you!” shouted the manager, as he made a dash toward the bog hole. He was followed by Mr. DeVere, Paul and some of the others.

“Keep back!” yelled the man from the steamer. “If you get in you won’t get out either.”

“But they must save him!” cried Alice, who had gone forward with her father.

“They can’t save him by getting into the quicksand themselves!” pointed out the man who seemed to know the deadly nature of the bog. “The only way is to fling him a rope.”

“A rope! There isn’t one nearer than the steamer!” cried Mr. Pertell.

“I’ll go get it!” offered Mr. Switzer. “I am a goot runner!”

“It will be too late, I’m afraid,” objected the steamer hand. “He is sinking faster now.”

This was indeed but too true. Whereas at first the clinging mud and sand of the bog hole had only been up to Mr. Bunn’s knees, he was now engulfed to his waist.

“We’ll have to make a rope!” cried Mr. Towne. “Tear up our coats, or something like that.”

“I know a way, Ruth,” declared Alice. “We have on two skirts. The under one is of heavy cloth. Couldn’t we tear those into strips—?”

“Of course! How wise of you to think of it!” replied the other girl. “Daddy, we can provide a rope!” she cried, and she quickly whispered to him what Alice had suggested.

“The very thing!” he agreed. “Quick, slip behind the bushes there and remove your underskirts. I’ll have my knife ready to slit it into strips.”

While the two moving picture girls retired for a moment their father quickly explained their plan.

“And you may have our skirts, too,” said Miss Pennington. “Only mine is of such thin material—”

“So is mine, unfortunately,” added Miss Dixon.

“Fortunately I think the two skirts of my daughters will be sufficient,” said Mr. DeVere, as he opened his keen-bladed knife.

“Oh, I am going down!” cried Mr. Bunn, in anguished tones.

“Here are the skirts!” cried Alice, as she came out with her own and Ruth’s over her arm.

Ready hands aided Mr. DeVere in cutting the stout material into strips that were quickly knotted together, making a strong rope.

“It’s a shame to spoil your suit,” said Paul to Alice.

“It doesn’t matter. The skirts were only cheap ones, of khaki cloth, but they are very strong. I am glad we wore them.”

“And I guess Mr. Bunn will be, too,” added the young actor.

“Now we’ll have you out!” cried Mr. DeVere, as he flung one end of the novel rope to the actor in the bog. Mr. Bunn caught it, and, at the direction of Mr. Pertell, looped it about his chest, just under his arms.

“Now, all pull together!” cried the manager. “But take it gradually, until we see what strain this rope will stand.”

Indeed a slow, gradual pull was the only feasible method of releasing Mr. Bunn. But with the rope around him, he felt that he was going to be saved, and did not struggle so violently.

Often when one gets into a quicksand bog the more one struggles the faster and deeper one sinks. Only it is almost impossible not to struggle against the impending fate.

With the skirt-rope about him, and his friends pulling on it, Mr. Bunn's hands were free. Seeing this, and realizing that the more force that was applied, up to a certain point, the sooner would the actor be freed, Ruth cried:

"If we had another rope we girls could help, and Mr. Bunn could hold on to it with his hands," for she and her sister, as well as Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon, were doing nothing.

"Let's go to the steamer and get one," proposed Miss Dixon.

"It would be too late," declared Alice. Then, as she looked about the little clearing where the accident had taken place she saw, dangling from a tree, a long vine of some creeping plant. There were several stems twined together.

"There's our rope!" she cried. "That vine!"

"Oh, Alice! How splendid!" exclaimed her sister. "You think of everything!"

"Well, let's stop thinking, and work!" suggested the younger girl. "They need all the help they can get to pull Mr. Bunn out of that bog."

Together the girls managed to get off a long piece of the stout vine, which made a most excellent substitute for a rope.

“I suppose if I had thought of this first we needn’t have cut our skirts,” said Alice.

“I’m not sorry we didn’t,” was her sister’s reply.

“Nor am I!”

“Catch this, Mr. Bunn!” called Alice, as with the vine rope she went as near the bog hole as was safe.

“Good idea! Great!” cried Mr. Pertell. “You moving picture girls are as good as men!”

“Better!” declared Mr. Bunn, who was over his fright now. He caught the end of the vine Alice flung to him, and held on grimly as the four girls prepared to tug on their portion.

With this added strength the plight of the actor was soon relieved. Slowly but surely he was pulled from the sticky mud, and, a little later, he was safely hauled out on the firm bank.

“Thank the Lord for that!” exclaimed Mr. Pertell, reverently, as he saw that his employe was safe. “I should never have forgiven myself if—if anything had happened to you. For it was my suggestion that you go in the bog. My dear man, can you forgive me?” and he held out his hand to Mr. Bunn, while his voice grew husky, and there was a suspicious moisture in his eye.

“That’s all right,” responded Mr. Bunn, generously, and he seemed to have added something to his nature through his nerve-racking experience. He had been near death, or at least the possibility of it, and it had meant much to him.

“Don’t blame yourself, Mr. Pertell,” he went on. “I went into the hole with my eyes open. Neither of us knew the quicksand was there. And I suppose we must accept with this business the risks that go with it.”

“Yes, it is part of the game,” admitted the manager; “but I want none of my players to take unnecessary risks. I shall be more careful in the future.”

Mr. Bunn was quite exhausted from his experience, and, as the affair had tried the nerves of all, it was decided to give up picture work for the rest of the day.

“I can’t help regretting, though,” said Mr. Pertell, as they were on their way back to the steamer, “that we didn’t get a moving picture of that. It would have made a great film—better even than the one I had planned.”

“Oh, but I did get views of it!” cried Russ, with a laugh, that did much to relieve the strain they were all under.

“You did!” exclaimed the manager, in surprise.

“Yes,” went on the young operator, “when I saw that there were enough of you hauling Mr. Bunn out, I thought I might as well take advantage of the situation and get pictures. So I have the whole rescue scene here,” and he tapped his moving picture camera.

“I am glad you have!” exclaimed the Shakespearean actor, heartily. “As long as I had to go through with it we might as well have the Comet Company get the benefit of it.”

Back through the tropical forest and swamp they went, until they reached the steamer. There Mr. Bunn and Mr. Towne enjoyed the luxury of a good bath, and their clothes were cleaned.

Alice came in for much praise, for it was her quick wit, in a way, that had enabled Mr. Bunn to be so promptly saved.

“And to replace your daughters’ spoiled skirts, Mr. DeVere,” said the manager, in speaking of the matter later, “I beg that I may be allowed to get them whole new suits.”

“Oh, that is too much,” protested the actor.

“Indeed it is not!” declared Mr. Pertell. “I am also going to give each player a bonus on his or her salary, and to Mr. Bunn, for what he suffered, a special bonus.”

A day or so later the film, in which Mr. Bunn had figured in the quicksand, was finished, and then came the announcement that they would proceed on down the river to a new location, so as to get a different scenic background for the filming of a new drama.

Some of the scenes of this took place on the steamer, and then, when the captain announced that he would have to tie up for half a day to enable the “roustabouts” to go ashore and cut wood for the boiler, Mr. Pertell said:

“Then we’ll go ashore, too. I want to get some pictures in which a small boat will figure. So we’ll take the camera along, Russ, and get some of those views I spoke of.”

Some scenes ashore were filmed, and then, carrying out the idea of the drama, Ruth and Alice, with Paul Ardite, got into a small boat.

They were to go down stream a little way, and there go through certain “business” called for in the play. Paul was to row.

The boat floated under the arching moss and vines that trailed from the trees on the bank. Now and then a snag would be struck, and on such occasions Ruth would start nervously, and cry out:

“Alligators!”

“Oh, please stop!” begged Alice, after two or three of these scares. “I don’t believe there’s an alligator within ten miles of us.”

“Of course not,” agreed Paul.

All this while Russ was getting films of the boat containing the two moving picture girls. He was following in another boat.

“Steady there!” he called, at a certain point. “Better toss over your anchor, and stay there a while. I want a long film of this scene.”

“All right,” agreed Paul, and with a splash the little anchor went over the side. The boat swung around and then became stationary. Russ was grinding away at the camera when, suddenly, the boat he was filming, with its occupants, began moving up stream.

“Hold on!” he warned. “I don’t want you to move yet!”

“I’m not moving!” retorted Paul.

“But the boat is going—and up stream!” cried Alice.

“Oh, Paul!” exclaimed Ruth. “What has happened?”

At the same moment the craft careened violently, and a bulky object rose partly from the water in front of it.

“An alligator has attacked us!” screamed Alice.