

*The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms*  
*or*

*Lost in the Wilds of Florida*

By

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Chapter 17: Out of a Tree



Paul sprang to his feet with such suddenness that he nearly upset the boat, and the girls shrieked in even greater fright.

“Sit down! Oh, sit down!” Alice begged him.

“Russ! Russ!” cried Ruth. “It’s an alligator!”

“It can’t be!” declared the young moving picture operator. He had stopped working his camera, and was urging the two men from the steamer, who were rowing his boat, to make better progress.

“Deed an’ dere am ‘gators in dish yeah ribber!” declared one of the colored men.

“Don’t let the girls hear you say that!” cautioned Russ.

Paul had obeyed the request of the girls to sit down, but he crawled toward the bow of the boat, which was now moving through the water, up stream, at a fair rate of speed.

“What is it? Oh, what is it?” implored Alice.

“Can you see anything?” Ruth wanted to know.

“Some sort of animal has got hold of our anchor, or the rope,” declared Paul, “and it’s towing us. I don’t think it can be an alligator, though.”

“Oh, what will become of us?” gasped Ruth.

“Don’t be in the least alarmed!” exclaimed Paul. “All I’ll have to do will be to cut the rope, and we’ll be free. But I don’t want to lose the anchor.”

“Don’t cut loose! Don’t!” cried Russ, whose boat was now up to that containing the two girls and the young actor. “I want to get a film of that. You’re not in any real danger; are you?”

“Oh, yes indeed we are!” said Ruth.

“Nonsense! We aren’t at all!” protested her sister. “Only I’d like to see what sort of a fish is towing us.”

“It isn’t a fish at all!” Paul suddenly exclaimed. “It’s a manatee—a sea cow!”

“Oh, a sea cow! I want to look at it!” Alice cried.

“You must keep quiet in the boat!” insisted Ruth, who seemed greatly afraid.

“Silly! I won’t upset you,” was the answer. “But I want to get a glimpse of that creature. There is no danger; is there, Paul?”

“Sea cows are considered gentle, and seldom attack,” he replied. “You can see it quite plainly now. It is swimming near the top of the water.”

Alice made her way forward, and even Ruth was induced to come and look at the strange creature, while Russ, from his boat, took views of the occurrence.

“The anchor seems to be caught under one of its flippers,” said Paul. “That’s why it’s towing us. Probably the manatee wants to get rid of us as much as you girls want to get rid of it.”

“I hope it doesn’t get away for a few minutes!” called out Russ. “This will make a dandy film!”

Much reassured now by the gentle movements of the manatee, Ruth lost nearly all of her fear. Alice really had felt very little.

“I thought it surely was an alligator,” the latter said, as the boat continued to be towed by the manatee.

“Nebber knowed one ob dem t’ings t’ come so far up de ribber,” declared one of the colored men. “He’s a big one, too!” he added, as his eyes bulged.

“How large is it, Russ?” asked Paul. “You can see better than we can.”

“Oh, about twelve feet long, I guess. There, I got a good view of him then!” he cried, as the manatee, probably in an effort to get rid of the rope, rose partly from the water.

“Oh, what a horrid looking thing!” cried Ruth.

“I don’t think so at all,” Alice said. “I wish I could see it from in front.”

She had her wish a moment later, and it was rather more than she bargained for since the sea cow, in an effort to get rid of the rope that was twisted about its flipper, turned about with a swirl in the water, not unlike that made by the propeller of a motor boat, and came head-on for the craft it was unwittingly towing.

“Oh, it will upset us!” cried Ruth.

“Never mind! They don’t bite, and we’ll rescue you!” Russ reassured her.

“Oh, I—I’d die, sure, if I were to be thrown into the water with that terrible creature!” gasped Ruth, clinging to Alice for protection.

And there did seem some likelihood of the manatee upsetting the boat, not so much through a vindictive spirit, as by accident, and because of its huge bulk.

On it surged toward the craft, and Paul, seizing an oar, prepared to attack. Russ called to his rowers to be ready to rescue the girls and the young actor if necessary, and then, with the desire for a good film ever uppermost in his mind, he continued to grind away at the camera crank.

“This will be a peach of a film!” he exulted.

“Oh, Paul! Is it going to attack us?” asked Ruth.

Paul did not answer, but jabbed with his oar at the manatee and struck it on the head. The sea cow dived, and this produced the desired result, for the rope slipped off its flipper, and it was free. It went under the boat, rubbed along on the keel with its back a short distance, causing Ruth and Alice to scream as their craft careened, and then vanished for good.

“Oh, thank goodness! It’s gone!” gasped Ruth.

Their boat began to drop down stream, until the dragging anchor caught and held it. Russ now ceased to work the camera.

“I don’t know just how we can incorporate that scene in this drama,” he admitted; “but I suppose Mr. Pertell can find a way. He generally does. Now, if you girls are up to it, we’ll finish with the regular play. I’ll have to slip in some new film, though.”

“Oh, I guess we can go on, after we quiet down a bit,” Ruth said, and a little later she and her sister, with Paul, went through with the business of the play as originally laid down in the scenario.

“What a strange experience!” observed Ruth, as they were returning to the steamer.

“Wasn’t it?” agreed Alice.

Mr. Pertell, after properly sympathizing with the girls, declared himself delighted with the unexpected film of the manatee.

“I tell you we didn’t make any mistake coming to Florida,” he said. “We’ll get pictures here that no other company can touch.”

And later this was found to be so, for the films made under the palms created quite a sensation when shown in New York.

Mr. DeVere, as usual, was somewhat perturbed when he learned what his daughters had gone through, and again expressed his doubts as to the advisability of keeping them in moving picture work.

“Oh, but that might have happened to anyone—if we were out after orchids, instead of being filmed,” protested Alice. “I don’t ever want to think of giving up this work.”

“Nor do I!” added Ruth, with more energy than she usually exhibited.

The players were out in the palm forest. It was several days after the episode of the manatee, and the steamer, with a plentiful supply of wood fuel, had gone up another sluggish stream, some miles farther on.

Quite an elaborate drama was to be filmed and the “full strength of the company,” as Paul laughingly said, was required. Even little Tommy and Nellie were to be used in some of the scenes.

“Isn’t it wild and desolate in here?” remarked Ruth, with a little shudder as they penetrated deeper and deeper into the forest, for Mr. Pertell wanted a certain background.

“It is lonesome,” agreed Alice. “Whenever I get to a place like this I think of those two missing girls.”

“So do I! Isn’t it too bad about them? I wonder if they can have been found by this time?”

“Let us hope so,” said Alice, in a low voice.

It took some little time to arrange for making this new film, and in the first scenes neither Ruth nor Alice were required. They wandered off to one side, remaining within call, however.

“There’s an orchid!” exclaimed Alice, as she pointed to a beautiful bloom, clinging to a tree. Seemingly it drew its nourishment from the air alone.

“How beautiful!” remarked Ruth. “I wonder if we could get it?”

“I can climb the tree,” declared her sister. “I have on an old skirt. I’ll get it.”

She did, after some little difficulty, and as she was bringing it to Ruth, Alice looked through an opening between the trees, and exclaimed:

“Oh, there are Tommy and Nellie. They are after flowers too, for they each have a handful. But I must call to them. They should not wander too far away.”

Together she and Alice, admiring the orchid, advanced toward the two children, who had come to a halt under a big sycamore.

Then, as Alice was about to call, she uttered an exclamation of terror.

“See!” she whispered hoarsely to Ruth. “That creature in the tree—right over their heads, and it is crouching for a leap!”

Ruth looked and saw a tawny beast with laid-back ears and twitching tail, stretched on a big limb a short distance above the ground, and right over the two children, who were innocently prattling away, and looking at the flowers they had gathered.