

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

*Lost in the Wilds of Florida*

By

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Chapter 18: Animated Logs



For a moment Alice and Ruth were almost paralyzed with fear. They stood spellbound, and could only gaze horrifiedly at the tawny beast stretched out on the limb of the tree.

“What—what shall we do?” asked Alice.

“What can we do?” Ruth returned. “If we move toward them, or call out, the beast may spring on them. What is it—a tiger?”

“I don’t know. Of course it’s not a tiger, for there are none in this country except in circuses. Maybe it’s a wildcat.”

“Oh, they are terrible. But this doesn’t look like the wildcat Flaming Arrow shot in the backwoods.”

“No, it doesn’t,” agreed Alice. “But we must do something to save those children!”

Tommy and Nellie, all unconscious of their peril, were still sorting their blossoms beneath the tree.

“If we could only get them out of the way—somehow,” urged Alice.  
“Then we might hurry off before the beast could spring.”

“But it might chase after us—and them.”

“That’s so. One of us had better go for help. You—you go, Alice. I—I’ll stay here,” faltered Ruth.

“What! Leave you alone with that beast? I will not!”

“But what can we do?”

Alice thought for a moment. The animal in the tree had apparently not seen them—its attention was fixed on the two children. Then, as the girls watched, they saw it move slightly, while its tail twitched faster.

“It’s getting ready to spring!” whispered Alice.

“Oh, don’t say that!” begged Ruth, clasping her hands.

They really did not know what to do. They were some distance from the others of the moving picture company, and to go to them, and summon help, might mean the death or injury of the children.

On the other hand, to call out suddenly, or to rush toward the little ones, might precipitate the attack of the beast.

And then fate, or luck, stepped in and changed the situation of affairs. Tommy spied another blossom—a brighter one than any he had yet gathered and he cried out:

“Oh, look at that pretty flower! I’m going to get it!”

“No, let me!” exclaimed his sister, and the two got up with that suddenness which seems so natural to children, and sped across a little glade, out from under the tree, with its dangerous beast toward a clump of ferns and flowers.

It was the best, and perhaps the only thing, they could have done.

“Oh—oh!” gasped Ruth. It was all she could say.

“Now they are safe,” Alice ventured.

But not yet.

The beast had been about to spring and now, with a snarl of disappointed rage, it bounded lightly from the limb of the tree to the ground, and began a slinking advance upon the children.

“Oh!” screamed Ruth, and her cry of alarm was echoed by her sister. Both girls instinctively started forward, but an instant later they were halted by a voice.

“Stand where ye are, young ladies. I’ll attend to that critter!”

Before they had a chance to look and see who it was that had called, a shot rang out and the beast, which had been running along, crouched low like a cat after a bird, seemed to crumple up. Then it turned a complete somersault, and a moment later lay motionless.

Tommy and Nellie, hearing the report of the gun, paused in their rush after the bright flowers, and then, as they saw the big animal not far from them, they uttered cries of fear, and clung to each other.

“It’s all right, dears! There’s no danger now!” called Ruth, as she sped toward them.

Alice paused but a moment to look at the individual who had in such timely and effective fashion come to the rescue. She saw a tall, gaunt man, attired in ragged clothes, bending forward with ready rifle, to be prepared to take a second shot if necessary.

“I don’t reckon he’ll bother any one no more,” said this man, with a satisfied chuckle, as he leaned on his gun, the butt of which he dropped to the ground. “I got him right in the head.”

“Oh—we—we can’t thank you enough!” gasped Alice. “The—the children—” but her voice choked, and she could not speak.

“Wa’al, I reckon he might have clawed ‘em a bit,” admitted the man with the gun. “And perhaps it’s jest as well I come along when I did. You folks live around here? Don’t seem like I’ve met you befo’.”

“We’re a company of moving picture actresses and actors,” explained Alice, while Ruth, making a detour to avoid the dead body of the animal, went to Tommy and Nellie, who were still holding on to each other.

“Picture-players; eh?” mused the hunter, for such he evidently was. “I seen a movin’ picture once, and it looked as real as anything. Be you folks on that steamer?”

“The Magnolia—yes,” answered Alice, as her sister led the children up to her.

“You’re all right now, dearies,” said Ruth. “The nice man killed the bad bear.”

“Excuse me, Miss; but that ain’t a bear,” said the hunter, with a pull at his ragged cap that was meant for a bow. “It’s a bobcat—mountain lion some folks calls ‘em—and I don’t know as I ever saw one around this neighborhood before. Mostly they’re farther to the no’th. This must be a stray one.”

“Oh, but it might have killed us all if you had not been here,” Ruth went on.

“Oh, no, Miss, beggin’ your pardon. It wouldn’t have been as bad as that. Most-ways these bobcats would rather run than fight. I reckon if it had seen you young ladies it would have run.”

“Are we as scary as all that?” asked Alice, with a nervous little laugh.

“Oh, no, Miss. I didn’t mean it that way at all,” said the man. “I beg your pardon, I’m sure. But a bobcat won’t hardly ever attack a grown person, unless it’s cornered. I reckon this one must have been riled about suthin’ and thought to claw up the tots a bit. I happened to be around, so I jest natcherally plunked him—beggin’ your pardon for mentionin’ the matter.”

“It was awfully good of you,” murmured Ruth, who had Tommy’s and Nellie’s hands now.

“Won’t you tell us who you are?” asked Alice, as she introduced herself and her sister.

“Who—me? Oh, I’m Jed Moulton,” replied the hunter. “I’m an alligator hunter by callin’. But they’re gittin’ a bit scarce now, so I’m on the move.”

“I wish you’d come back and meet our friends,” suggested Ruth. “Mrs. Maguire, the children’s grandmother, will want to thank you for what you have done.”

“Wa’al, I’m in no special rush, and I reckon I can spare a little time,” agreed Jed. “But I ain’t much used to havin’ a fuss made over me.”

“You can see how moving pictures are made,” suggested Alice.

“Can I, Miss? Then I’ll come,” and shouldering his gun he set off with them.

“Are you going to leave the bobcat there?” asked Ruth.

“Yes, Miss. Its skin ain’t really no good this time of year, and I don’t want to bother with it. The buzzards’ll make short work of it. Leave it lie.”

There was considerable excitement among the other players when the girls and children came back, accompanied by Jed, and told of their adventure.

Much was made over the alligator hunter, and Mrs. Maguire was profuse in her thanks. Then, in the next breath, she scolded the tots for wandering so far away.

“I think they won’t do it again,” said Ruth, with a smile, as she recalled their fright.

“No, sir! Never no more!” declared Tommy, earnestly.

Bad as the scare had been, its effects were not lasting, and Ruth and Alice were able to take their part in the drama that was being filmed. Jed Moulton looked on, his eyes big with wonder.

“That beats shootin’ bobcats!” he declared at the conclusion of the performance.

Jed at once became a favorite with all, and when Mr. Pertell learned that he was quite a successful hunter he made him an offer.

“You come along with us,” the manager urged. “I want to get a film of alligator hunting, and I’ll make it worth your while to do some of your stunts before the camera. I’ll pay you well, and you can have all the alligators you shoot.”

“Say, that suits me—right down to the ground!” cried Jed, heartily. “I’ll take you up on that.”

So Jed became attached to the moving picture outfit, and a cheerful and valuable addition he proved. For he knew the country like a book, and offered valuable suggestions as to where new and striking scenic backgrounds could be obtained.

An uneventful week followed the episode of the bobcat. The Magnolia went up and down sluggish streams and bayous, while the company of players acted their parts, or rested beneath the palms and under the graceful Spanish moss.

“But it is getting lonesome and tiresome—being away from civilization so long,” complained Miss Pennington one day. “We can’t get any mail, or anything.”

“Who wants mail, when you can sit out on deck and look at such a scene as that?” asked Alice, pointing to a view down a beautiful river.

“Don’t you want to come for a row?” asked Paul of Alice, after luncheon.

“I think so,” she answered. “Where is Ruth?”

“We’ll all go together,” he proposed. “Russ wants to get a few pictures, and Jed Moulton is going along to show us where there are some likely spots for novel scenes.”

“Of course I’ll come!” cried Alice, enthusiastically, as she went to her stateroom to make ready.

A little later the four young people, with the alligator hunter, set out in a big rowboat. Russ took with him a small moving picture camera, as he generally did, even when he had no special object in view.

They rowed up the stream in which the Magnolia was resting, her bow against a fern bank, and presently the party was in a solitude that was almost oppressive. There was neither sign nor sound of human being, and the steamer was lost to sight around a bend in the stream.

“Isn’t it wonderful here?” murmured Ruth.

“It certainly is,” agreed Russ who, with Paul, was rowing.

“It sure is soothin’,” said Jed. “Many a time when I ain’t had no luck, and feel all tuckered out, I sneak off to a place like this and I feel jest glad to be alive.”

He put it crudely enough, but the others understood his homely philosophy.

They rowed slowly, pausing now and then to gather some odd flower, or to look at some big tree almost hidden under the mass of Spanish moss.



Alice, who had gone to the bow, was looking ahead, when suddenly she called out:

“Oh, look at the funny logs! They’re bobbing up and down all over. See!”

Jed and the others looked to where she pointed, toward a sand bar in the stream. Then the old hunter called out:

“Logs! Them ain’t logs! Them’s alligators! We’ve run into a regular nest of ‘em! I’m glad I brought my gun along!”

“Oh! Alligators!” gasped Ruth, as one thrust his long and repulsive head from the water, just ahead of the boat.