

The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms

or

Lost in the Wilds of Florida

By

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Chapter 23: The Palm Hut



Breakfast, on the shore of the sluggish and swamp-like stream where the big rowboat was moored, was a meagre meal, indeed. For after a moment of consideration it was decided not to use up all the food that remained.

“We may need some for luncheon,” explained Russ, who seemed to have taken command of the little party. “We may not be able to reach the steamer by noon.”

“Do you think we’ll ever be able to reach it, old man?” asked Paul, in a low voice.

“Oh, sure. We’ve just got to find it!” whispered the young operator, with a quick glance at the girls.

“That’s so,” agreed Paul. But he knew, as well as did Russ, that it would be no easy matter.

And so the “rations” were divided into two parts, though with all there would not have been enough for one substantial meal. Fortunately, however, the coffee was plentiful. The cook, when told to put up a lunch for the picnic party that was to figure in the moving pictures, had been very liberal, otherwise there would have been no food left now. And in

the matter of coffee enough had been put in to make several large pots full.

As for water, some had been brought along, but, luckily, after this was exhausted Russ managed to find a spring on shore, not far from where the boat was moored.

“We’ll have to take a chance on it,” he said. “Anyhow, boiling the water for coffee will kill all the germs in it.”

“And we can’t be too particular,” agreed Mrs. Maguire.

The embers of the camp fire kindled in the night were blown into flame, and soon a genial blaze was leaping upward under the big trees. The refugees gathered about it and ate the scanty meal, drinking several cups of coffee.

“That will keep us up, and help to ward off fevers which may lurk in these swamps,” said Paul.

The girls had freshened themselves by washing at the side of the brook which flowed from the spring, and then having arranged their hair, with the aid of their side combs, and a pocket mirror Alice carried, they looked, as Paul said, “as sweet as magnolia blossoms.”

“Oh, magnolias!” cried Ruth. “If we could only find our Magnolia—the steamer!”

“Oh, we’ll find her,” said Russ, easily—more easily than he felt.

“We look like wrecks beside the girls,” declared Paul, as he ran his hand over his unshaven chin.

“Don’t you dare desert us to look for a barber!” commanded Ruth. “To be left alone in these woods—ugh!” and she shuddered as she looked about. Certainly it was very lonely.

“It isn’t as bad as last night, though,” said Alice. “I feel quite at home, now. I wonder what became of that animal you shot, Russ? I’d like to see what it was.”

“I wouldn’t,” declared Ruth, decidedly.

Breakfast over, the blankets and cushions of the boat were spread out in the sun to dry, for they were damp from the rain and dew.

“And now the question is—what are we to do?” asked Mrs. Maguire. “We don’t want to spend another night in the woods if we can help it.”

“I should say not!” cried Russ. “We’ll start off in a little while and make our way back to the steamer.”

“Can you find it?” asked Ruth.

“Well, it can’t be so very far off,” spoke Russ, evasively. “The trouble is there are so many twists and turns to these creeks and rivers that we lost our way. I wish I had thought to bring a compass but, since we didn’t, we’ll have to go by the sun. I think the steamer lies in that general neighborhood,” and he pointed in a south-easterly direction.

“I think so, too,” agreed Paul. “And if we row that way I think we’ll get back.”

Alice, who had gone over to the sunny spot where the blankets and cushions had been put to dry, uttered an exclamation.

“Look!” she cried, and when Paul reached her side she pointed to some bright red spots on the leaves.

“That’s blood!” cried the young actor. “Russ, you winged that beast last night, all right.”

“Is that so? Let’s have a look for him! Maybe I killed him. I’d like to see what sort of a creature it was.”

The two young men went a little way into the wood, and then came a call:

“Here he is—dead as a door nail.”

“Oh, what is it? I want to see it!” cried Alice, who had a good deal of the curious boy in her make-up.

“Don’t go!” begged Ruth.

“I shall, too. It can’t hurt me—if it’s dead.”

“I know, dear, but—”

Alice went, however.

“It’s a lynx,” said Russ, as he looked at the dead beast. “I can tell by those queer little tufts of hair on the ears.”

“Are they dangerous?” asked Alice.

“Oh, I guess so, if you had one cornered. They can keep a fellow awake, anyhow, that’s one sure thing. I must have fired better than I knew. But then the shot scattered so.”

“He must have been pretty close to us,” remarked Paul.

“Ugh! I don’t like to think of it,” murmured Alice, with a little shiver.
“Suppose he had jumped into the boat?”

“Don’t suppose,” laughed Russ.

“Come!” called Mrs. Maguire from where she had remained near the boat with Ruth. “If we’re going, we’d better start.”

“That’s right,” agreed Russ. “The sooner we start the quicker we’ll get there.”

The blankets and cushions were arranged in the craft to make comfortable places for the girls and Mrs. Maguire, and then the remains of the food, and the coffee outfit, having been stowed away, Paul and Russ took the oars, and once more the refugees were under way.

As nearly as possible, allowing for the twists and turns of the stream, the course was in the direction Russ and Paul had agreed upon as being the best. From time to time, as they rowed on, they paused to listen for any hails which would probably be given by the searching party from the steamer.

“For of course daddy will start out after us,” said Ruth. “Poor daddy!”

“I guess there’s no doubt of that,” agreed Russ. “The only trouble is they won’t know where to look for us.”

“Wouldn’t they go first to the place where we took the picnic films?” asked Alice.

“I suppose so, yes; but when we came away from there we left no trail they could follow. So it will be sort of hit or miss with them, as it will be with us.”

“We ought to fire the gun once in a while,” suggested Mrs. Maguire. “That’s what all lost persons do.”

“Good idea!” commented Russ. “I should have done it before. And they will probably fire to attract our attention, for there are several guns aboard the steamer.”

They now made up a definite program, to the effect that they would stop every half-hour to listen for possible shouts and shots and would also shout and fire in their turn.

This was done, but the sun was nearly noon high, and they had heard no sounds save the natural ones of the swamp and forest.

Now and then they would see alligators in the waters up or down which they rowed, but the saurians showed no disposition to molest the boat. And Russ had too few cartridges to wish to waste any on the creatures.

“We may have to spend another night in the open,” he confided to Paul.

“It doesn’t look very hopeful,” agreed the young actor.

Noon came, and as far as could be told from listening, and from looking about, they were as far off as ever from the steamer.

“And yet it may be within a comparatively short distance of us,” said Russ, as cheerfully as he could. “Only the woods are so dense that we can’t see it, and if our voices and the sounds of the gun carry to the Magnolia those aboard can’t tell from which direction they come.”

They had been keeping on in the course first decided on—southeast—and there were many twists and turns to the trail.

“Would it be any better to get out and walk?” asked Ruth.

“I think not,” said Russ. “The boat is really easiest and best for us.” He did not say so, but he thought that if they had to spend another night in the open the boat would be absolutely necessary. So they remained aboard.

At noon they tied up, and went ashore to eat the last of the food. Only a little coffee remained, and as the final meagre crumbs were disposed of each one feared to look the others in the face.

What would be next—where would the next meal come from?

No one could answer.

“Well, we’d better move on, I suppose,” suggested Russ, after a pause. “No good staying here.”

“That’s the idea,” agreed Paul, trying to speak cheerfully.

He glanced at the two girls. Ruth’s lips were quivering, and she seemed on the verge of tears. Alice was bearing up better, but she, too, showed the effects of the strain.

Mrs. Maguire was a pillar of strength and courage.

“Whist! And it’s laughin’ we’ll be at ourselves in a little while—to think we were scared!” she cried, with a forced Irish brogue. “We’ll be soon aboard the steamer tellin’ what good times we had, an’ the others will be wishin’ they’d been along.”

“I—I wish I could believe so,” faltered Ruth.

The boys rowed on, and they were glad of the exertion, for it kept them from brooding over the troubles of their situation, and a troublesome situation it was—they admitted that.

The afternoon was half gone, and in spite of having traveled several miles, twisting this way and that, there were no signs of the steamer.

The boat made a turn in a stream that seemed more sluggish and lonely than any of the others. But it was broader and this gave the boys hope.

“We may get somewhere on this creek,” observed Russ, pulling hard at the oars.

Alice gave a startled cry, pointed toward the shore and said:

“Look!”

They all gazed to where she indicated, and there, on the bank of the stream, was a small hut, made of palm leaves, while in front of it, tied to an overhanging tree, was a large motor boat!