

*The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms*

*or*

*Lost in the Wilds of Florida*

By

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Chapter 25: Out of the Wilds



For perhaps several seconds the two parties strangely met in that Florida wild stood staring at one another. Then the two girls hurried forward, and one of them exclaimed:

“Oh, have you come for us?”

“Not exactly, Miss Madison.”

“Oh—you—you know us?” gasped the other.

“Certainly, Mabel,” laughed Alice. “Don’t you remember us—the moving picture girls?”

“Ruth—Alice DeVere!” came the simultaneous cry from the lost girls—now the found girls. “Oh, how did you ever get here?” asked Helen Madison, for it was really she and her sister. Alice had recognized them first, and Ruth knew them a moment later.

“We are lost, like yourselves,” said Ruth. “Oh, but can you tell us where our steamer is?”

“Your steamer—no!” half-sobbed Mabel. “Oh, it is awful! We have been lost a long time—it seems a month, but of course it isn’t. We can’t find our way out of this wilderness. It is a labyrinth, and we dare not go far from this hut for fear we shall never find it again. It has been terrible. But if you are lost you cannot help us. What shall we do?”

“Let us eat first,” suggested Russ, practically. “You have some birds there. I fancy you are as hungry as we are. We have some crackers and coffee. We’ll get up a meal and then decide what to do. Come, Paul, we’re the commissary department.”

“Oh, but we must hear your story!” cried Ruth to the lost girls, after she had presented Mrs. Maguire and the boys. “We read about you in the paper, and we heard of you from the hotel clerk in Sycamore.”

“There isn’t much to tell,” said Mabel. “We started off after wild orchids. Well, we became lost, and in trying to find our way back we wandered farther and farther into the swamp. We had our motor boat, as you see, and quite a quantity of provisions, which was lucky for us. We tried our best to get out, but could not.

“Finally we found this spot—the hut was already here, built by alligator hunters, very likely. We appropriated it, and the small quantity of food it contained. Since then we have lived on that and what we could shoot. Fortunately game was plentiful, but we have so longed for some bread and coffee. I am dying for a cup.”

“Dinner will soon be served,” laughed Russ, who, with Paul, was preparing a rude meal, broiling the birds over a camp fire.

“And now tell us about yourselves,” suggested Mabel to Alice. “Oh! to think of meeting you again this way,” and she recalled the first meeting in the train going to the New England backwoods.

By degrees, and with each one telling a part, the story of the moving picture players was related. They told how they had looked in vain for their steamer. Mabel and Helen Madison also went more into details, giving some of their trying experiences in the swamps and bayous.

“But for days we have not tried to find our way from here,” said Mabel. “Our motor boat broke down, and we can’t get it to go.”

“I fancy I can fix it,” said Russ, “but the question is: Which way to go? We may only get to a worse place.”

“Let us eat, anyhow,” suggested Paul.

It was not a very elaborate meal, but it put new heart and courage into the lost ones.

“We’ll get back somehow—some time,” declared Alice, who was now almost her old self. “And then won’t everybody be glad!”

Night was coming on, but before the advent of darkness Russ had remedied the defect in the motor boat. There was trouble with the ignition system, and also with the carbureter.

“Now we could go, if we knew which way to go,” he said, as he tested the craft.

“Hark!” exclaimed Alice, suddenly.

The sound of a cheerful whistle came through the screen of trees.

“Oh!” gasped Ruth. “Who can it be?”

She had her answer a moment later.

Around a bend in the stream, rowing a battered boat, came an old colored man. It was he who was making the melody. Cheerfully he whistled, and more happily was he listened to.

“Ahoy there, Uncle!” called Russ. “Can you tell us where we are, and where the Magnolia is tied up?”

The old colored man was so startled by the sudden hail, breaking in on his whistling, that he nearly went overboard. He recovered himself, however, and called out:

“Whut—whut yo’ all doin’ at mah cabin?”

“Is this your place, Uncle?” asked Russ.

“It shore am. An’—an’—I bids yo’ all welcome—I shore does, honey!” he added quickly, remembering his hospitality.

“We’ve made ourselves at home,” said Mabel. “Oh, whoever you are, can you show us the way out of this wilderness?”

“Kin I show yo’ all a way outen dish yeah woods? I shore kin, honey lamb! I knows dish yeah place laik a book, even if I cain’t read. Where all does yo’ all want t’ go? Oh, wait a minute, though. Hole on! I done got t’ ax yo’ all some questions. Hab yo’ all seen any photographers round ‘bout yeah?”

“Photographers?” repeated Paul.

“Yais, sah! I done passed a steamer yist’day, an’ dey all on board was monstrous peevd ‘cause dey done lost der photographer. Yo’ all know—he takes dese pictures dat twinkle laik stars—yo’ know, slidin’ pictures, I guess dey calls ‘em.”

“Do you mean moving pictures?” asked Russ, eagerly.

“Uh, huh! Dat’s what I means, honey. All on board dish yeah steamer was pow’ful worried case de moving picture man an’ some oders got lost. Yo’ all didn’t see ‘em; did yo’ all?”

“We’re them!” cried Alice, with a justifiable disregard of grammar.

“And can you take us to that steamer?” asked Ruth, eagerly.

“I shore can, honey lamb; but it’s quite a far way t’ row t’ night.”

“We can go in the motor boat!” cried Mabel. “Oh, how glad I am that we have it. There’s gasoline enough, I think, and there is a powerful searchlight. Oh, Helen, we’re found—we’re found!” and she fell to sobbing on her sister’s shoulder.

Ruth and Alice, too, clasped their arms about each other. All their troubles seemed over now.

“Do you think you can pilot us to that steamer?” asked Russ.

“I shore can, honey lamb!” chuckled the old negro. “I’s libbed in dese waters boy an’ man all mah life. Yo’ can’t lose me!”

“And is this your place?” asked Mrs. Maguire, pointing to the palm hut.

“Dat’s what it am, honey lamb. Uh, huh! I comes heah t’ hunt alligators an’ sea cows. Sometimes I stays fer a week at a time. I jest come up now t’ see if dere any traces of ‘gators. I’s gwine t’ start in huntin’ next week.”

“Oh, isn’t he a dear!” laughed Alice, with tears of joy in her eyes.

“Well, I guess you can postpone your investigation for a while,” suggested Russ. “It’s getting dark, Uncle, and we’d like to get back to the steamer. Now, if you’ll pilot us we’ll pay you well, and see that you get back in the morning. You can stay on the Magnolia to-night—if we find her.”

“Oh, I’ll find her, all right—don’t yo’ all let dat fret yo’!” chuckled the negro. “I knows jest where’s she tied. It’s a few miles from heah, but in dat choo-choo boat yo’ all kin soon be dere.”

Leaving his own boat on shore the colored man got into the motor boat with the others. The rowboat from the steamer was towed, and in it were left the rugs, blankets, moving picture camera and other things.

The two Madison sisters brought away with them a box of rare orchid specimens, the results of their search.

“I wish I could get a moving picture of this; but I can’t,” sighed Russ, as the motor boat started off in the twilight. Soon it became so dark that the searchlight was set aglow, and this gave a fine illumination.

But Uncle Joshua, which the negro said was his only name, seemed to need no light. In and out among the creeks, rivers, and bayous he directed Russ to steer, until finally, making a turn in a stream, there burst out on the eager eyes of the refugees the lights of the steamer.

“Magnolia ahoy!”

“Here we are!”

“Oh, Daddy, Daddy!”

“On board the Magnolia!”

Such joyful shouts as there were, and such joyful answers!

And then—but I leave you to imagine the scene aboard the steamer when the lost ones stepped out of the motor launch. Mr. DeVere, who was in a state of collapse through fear for his daughters, nearly fainted from joy, but he soon was himself again. And as for Tommy and Nellie, it is a wonder their grandmother was able to stand all the hugging and kissing they gave her.

As for the other members of the picture company, they rejoiced to the extent of tears, and even Mr. Sneed whistled cheerfully.

Mabel and Helen Madison were really in need of food and rest, for they had fared worse than our friends, having been lost so long, and suffering so from exposure. They were put to bed, and ordered to rest, the assurance being given that early in the morning the start would be made for their home in Sycamore.

And then such a talking time as there was! It was almost morning before anyone thought of bed.

“And all the while we were only a comparatively short distance from here,” said Russ, when everything had been explained. But the dense woods and the winding waterways were as effective a barrier as many miles would have been.

“It’s lucky Uncle Joshua came along,” commented Alice, and there was no dissent from this.

“I declare, we seem to be getting into more and more strenuous adventures, the more moving picture business we do,” said Ruth. “But I think this is about the end.”

“Indeed it isn’t!” declared Mr. Pertell. “I don’t want to crowd you too much, but I have an idea for some new moving pictures, and I’d like to keep this whole company together.”

“Where this time?” Alice asked.

“Out West,” was the answer. “I am planning a big drama, to be called ‘East and West,’ and I think it will be our best effort.”

“Out West,” said Ruth, softly. “I wonder what will happen to us out there?”

And the answer may be found by reading the next book of this series, to be entitled “The Moving Picture Girls at Rocky Ranch; Or, Great Days Among the Cowboys.”

The day following the finding of the lost girls the Magnolia started back for Sycamore. It was reached without accident, or incident of moment, and how the whole town rejoiced when it was known that the two Madison girls were aboard the boat! There was a veritable holiday.

The moving picture girls, too, came in for their share of attention, and had Uncle Joshua been there he probably would have been one of the centres of attraction. But, after being suitably rewarded, he went back to his palm hut, which had served the lost girls so well.

Russ made a few more films, to complete the set wanted, and then came a packing-up for the return to New York. Before that, however, Mr. Madison insisted on being the host to the entire company at a garden fete in honor of his daughters’ safe return.

“Oh, but it was lovely under the palms, even if we did get lost,” said Alice, as they started on their northward journey.



“Indeed it was,” agreed Ruth. “I wonder if we will like the West as well.”

“Better!” predicted Russ.

“I’m going to be a cowboy!” declared Paul.

And now we will take leave of the Moving Picture Girls and their friends.

THE END