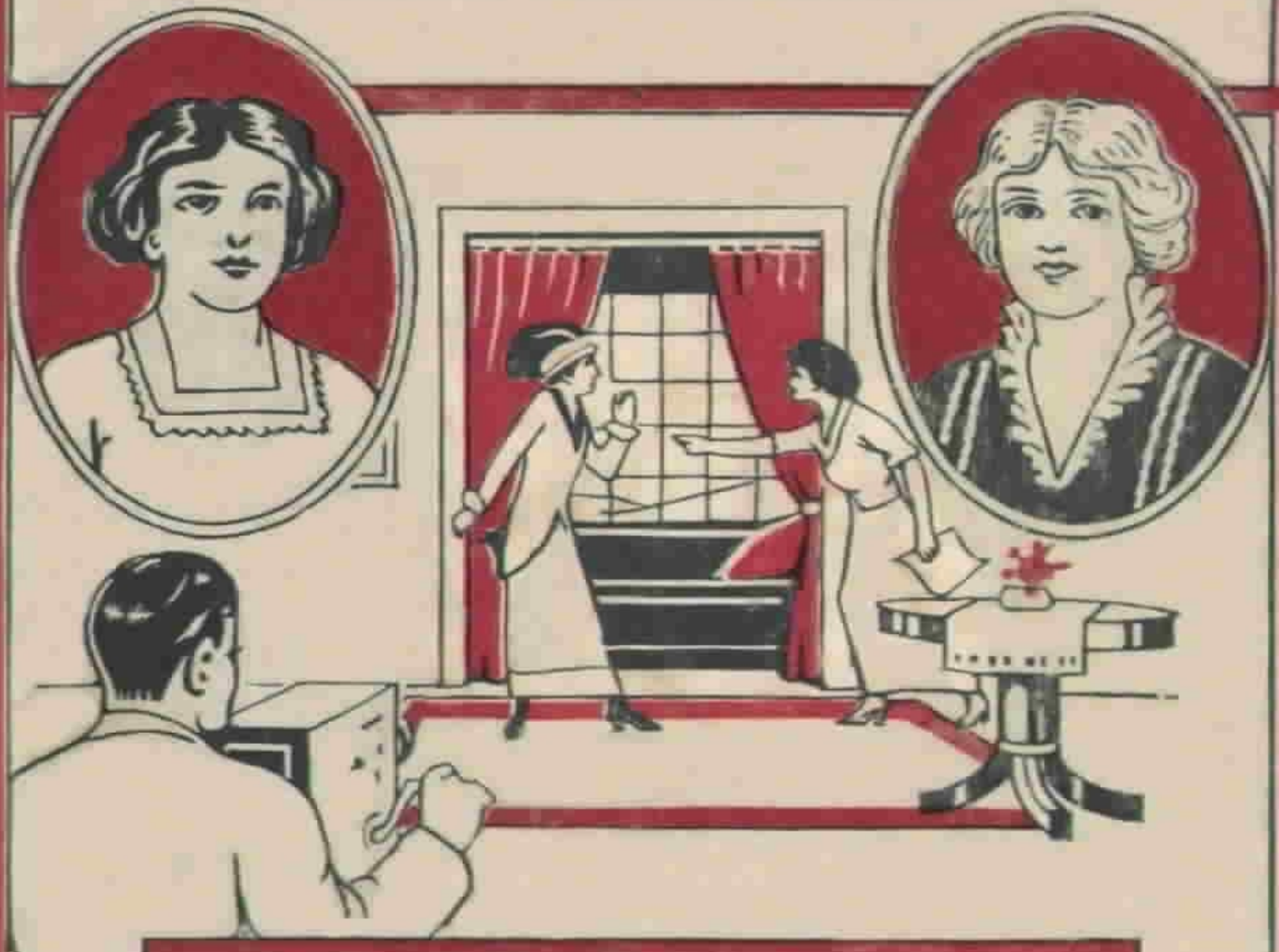
The MOVING PICTURE GIRLS SNOWBOUND



By LAURA LEE HOPE

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The
Moving Picture Girls
Snowbound

OR

The Proof on the Film

BY

LAURA LEE HOPE

AUTHOR OF "THE MOVING PICTURE GIRLS," "THE MOVING PICTURE
GIRLS AT OAK FARM," "THE OUTDOOR GIRLS SERIES," "THE BOBBSEY TWINS SERIES," ETC.

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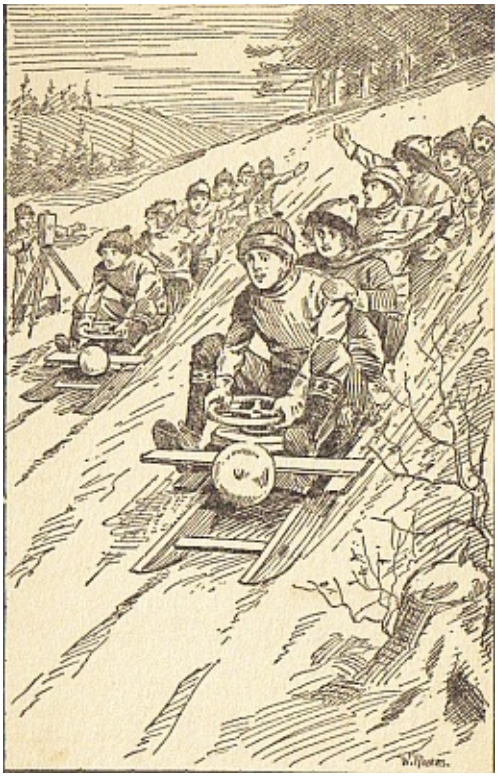

THE MOVING PICTURE RACE WAS ON.

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THE MOVING PICTURE GIRLS SNOWBOUND

CHAPTER I

TROUBLE

"Daddy is late; isn't he, Ruth?" asked Alice DeVere of her sister, as she looked up from her sewing.

"A little," answered the girl addressed, a tall, fair maid, with deep blue eyes, in the depths of which hidden meaning seemed to lie, awaiting discovery by someone.

"A little!" exclaimed Alice, who was rather plump, and whose dark brown hair and eyes were in pleasing contrast to her sister's fairness. "Why, he's more than an hour late, and he's seldom that! He promised to be back from the moving picture studio at four, and now it's after five."

"I know, dear, but you remember he said he had many things to talk over with Mr. Pertell, and perhaps it has taken him longer than he anticipated. [2]

"Besides you know there are some new plans to be considered," went on Ruth. "Mr. Pertell wants to get some different kinds of moving pictures—snow scenes, I believe—and perhaps he has kept daddy to talk about them. But why are you so impatient? Are you afraid something has happened to him?"

"Gracious, no! What put that idea into your head?"

"Well, I didn't know whether you had noticed it or not, but poor daddy hasn't been quite himself since we came back from Oak Farm. I am afraid something is bothering him—or worrying him."

"Perhaps it is his voice, though it has seemed better of late."

"I think not," said Ruth, slowly, as she bent her head in a listening attitude, for a step was coming along the hallway in the Fenmore Apartment, where the DeVere girls and their father had their rather limited quarters.

"That isn't he," said Ruth, with a little sigh of disappointment. "I thought at first it was. No, I don't mean that it was his voice, Alice. That really seems better since he so suddenly became hoarse, and had to take up moving picture work instead of the legitimate drama he loves so much. It is some other trouble, Alice." [3]

"I hadn't noticed it, I confess. But I suppose you'll say that I'm so flighty I never notice anything."

"I never called you flighty, dear. You are of a lively disposition, that's all."

"And you are a wee bit too much the other way, sister mine!" And then, to take any sting out of the words, Alice rose from her chair with a bound, crossed the room in a rush, and flung her arms about her sister, embracing her heartily and kissing her.

"Oh, Alice!" protested the other. "You are crushing me!"

"I'm a regular bear, I suppose. Hark, is that daddy?"

They both listened, but the footsteps died away as before.

"Why are you so anxious?"

"I want some money, sister mine, and daddy promised to bring my moving picture salary up with him. I wanted to do a little shopping before the stores close. But I'm afraid it's too late now," the girl added, ruefully. "Daddy said he'd be here in plenty of time, and he never disappointed me before."

"Oh, if that's all you're worrying about, I'll lend you some money."

"Will you, really? Then I'll get ready and go. There's that little French shop just around the corner. They keep open after the others. Madame Morey is so thrifty, and there was the sweetest shirt waist in the window the other day. I hope it isn't gone! I'll get ready at once. You be getting out the money, Ruth, dear. Is there anything I can get for you? It's awfully kind of you. Shall I bring back anything for supper?"

"Gracious, what a rattlebox you're getting to be, Alice," spoke Ruth, soberly, as she laid aside her sewing and went to the bureau for her pocketbook.

"That's half of life!" laughed the younger girl. "Quick, Ruth, I want to get out and get back, and be here when daddy comes. I want to hear all about the new plans for taking moving picture plays. Is that the money? Thanks! I'm off!" and the girl fairly rushed down the hall of the apartment. Ruth heard her call a greeting to Mrs. Dalwood, who lived across the corridor—a cheery greeting, in her fresh, joyous voice.

"Dear little sister!" murmured Ruth, as she sat with folded hands, looking

off into space and meditating. "She enjoys life!"

And certainly Alice DeVere did. Not that Ruth did not also; but it was in a different way. Alice was of a more lively disposition, and her father said she reminded him every day more and more of her dead mother. Ruth had an element of romanticism in her character, which perhaps accounted for her dreaminess at times. In the work of acting and posing for moving pictures, which was what the two girls, and their father, a veteran actor, were engaged in, Ruth always played the romantic parts, while nothing so rejoiced Alice as to have a hoydenish part to enact.

Alice hastened along the streets, now covered with a film of newly fallen snow. It was sifting down from a leaden sky, and the clouds had added to the darkness which was already coming that November evening.

"Oh, it's good to be alive, such weather as this!" Alice exulted as she hastened along, the crisp air and the exercise bringing to her cheeks a deeper bloom. Her eyes shone, and there was so much of life and youth and vitality in her that, as she hastened along through the falling snow, which dusted itself on her furs, more than one passerby turned to look at her in admiration. She was a "moving picture" in herself.

She lingered long in the quaint little French shop, there were so many bargains in the way of lingerie. Alice looked at many longingly, and turned some over more longingly, but she thought of her purse, and knew it would not stand the strain to which she contemplated putting it.

"I'll just have to wait about the others, Madame," she said, with a sigh. "I've really bought more now than I intended."

"I hope zat Mademoiselle will come often!" laughed the French woman.

Back through the streets, now covered with snow, hastened Alice, tripping lightly, and now and then, when she thought no one was watching her, she took a little run and slide, as in the days of her childhood. Not that she was much more than a child still, being only a little over fifteen. Ruth was two years her senior, but Ruth considered herself quite "grown up."

"I wonder if daddy has come back yet?" Alice mused, as she hastened on to the apartment. "That looks like Russ Dalwood ahead of me," she went on, referring to the son of the neighbor across the hall. Russ "filmed," or made the moving pictures for the company by whom Mr. DeVere and his daughters were engaged. "Yes, it is Russ!" the girl exclaimed. "He has probably come

right from the studio, and he'll know about daddy. Russ! Russ!" she called, as she came nearer to the young man.

He turned, and a welcoming smile lighted his face.

"Oh, hello, Alice!" he greeted, genially. "Where's Ruth?"

"Just for that I shan't tell you! Don't you want to walk with *me?*" she asked, archly. "Why must you always ask for Ruth when I meet you alone?"

"I didn't! I mean—I—er——"

"Oh, don't try to make it any worse!" she laughed at his discomfiture. "Let it go at that! Did you just come from the studio?"

"Yes, and we had a hard day of it. I forget how many thousand feet of film I reeled off."

"Was my father there?"

"Yes, he was with Mr. Pertell when I came out."

"I wonder what makes him so late?"

"Oh, there's a rush of work on. But I think he'll be along soon, for I heard Mr. Pertell say he wouldn't keep him five minutes."

"That's good. Oh, dear! Isn't it slippery!" she cried, as she barely saved herself from falling.

"Take my arm," invited Russ.

"Thanks, I will. I came out in a hurry to do a little shopping. Ruth is at home. There, I told you after all. I'm of a forgiving spirit, you see."

"I see," he laughed.

They stepped along lightly together, laughing and talking, for Russ was almost like a brother to the DeVere girls, though the two families had only known each other since both had come to the Fenmore Apartment, about a year before.

"Did they film any big plays to-day?" asked Alice. "I know Mr. Pertell said he wouldn't need Ruth and myself, so of course they didn't do anything really good. Not at all conceited; am I?" she asked, with a rippling laugh.

"Well, you're right this time—there wasn't much of importance doing," Russ replied. "Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon had some pretty good parts, but the stuff was mostly comic to-day."

"That suited Mr. Switzer, then. I think he is the nicest German comedian I ever knew, and I met quite a number when father was appearing in real plays."

"Yes, Switzer is a good sort. But you should have seen Mr. Sneed to-day!"

"Found fault with everything; eh?"

"I should say so, and then some, as the boys say. He said something was sure to happen before the day was over, and it did—a stone wall fell on him."

"Really?"

"Really, but not real stone. It was one of Pop Snooks's scenic creations. One of the pieces of wood hit Mr. Sneed on the head, so something happened. And what a fuss he made! He's the real grouch of the company, all right. Well, here we are!" and the young man guided his companion into the hallway of the Fenmore.

"See you again!" called Alice, as she went into her door and Russ into his.

"Is that you, Alice?" called Ruth, from an inner room.

"Yes, dear. Has daddy come home?"

"Not yet. I wonder if we'd better telephone?"

"No, I just met Russ, and he said daddy would be right along. He's planning something with Mr. Pertell."

The table was nearly prepared when a step was heard in the hall.

"There he is now!" cried Alice, as she flew to open the door before her father could get out his key. But as he entered, and Alice reached up to kiss him, she cried out in amazement at the look on his face.

"Why, Daddy! Has anything happened?" she asked.

"Yes," he said in his hoarse voice—a hoarseness caused by a throat affection. "Yes, something has happened, or is going to. I'm in serious trouble!"

CHAPTER II

AN UNPLEASANT VISITOR

Ruth overheard the question asked by Alice, and her father's answer. She came in swiftly, and put her arms about him, as her sister had done.

"Oh, Daddy dear, what is it?" she asked, anxiously.

"I—I'll tell you—presently," he replied, chokingly. "I am a little out of breath. I am getting too—too stout. And my throat has bothered me a good deal of late. Would you mind getting me that throat spray and medicine Dr. Rathby left? That always helps me."

"I'll get it," offered Alice, quickly, as her father sank into a chair, and while she searched in the medicine closet for it, there was a dull ache in her heart. More trouble! And there had been so much of it of late. The sun had seemed to break through the clouds, and now it had gone behind again. [11]

And while the girls are thus preparing to minister to their father, I will tell my new readers something of the previous books of this series, and a little about the main characters.

In the initial volume, entitled "The Moving Picture Girls; Or, First Appearances in Photo Dramas," I related how Mr. Hosmer DeVere, a talented actor, suddenly lost his voice, by the return of an old throat affection. He had just been "cast" for an important part in a new play, but had to give it up, as he could not speak distinctly enough to be heard across the footlights.

The DeVere family fortunes were at low ebb, and money was much needed. By accident Russ Dalwood, a moving picture operator, suggested to one of the girls that their father might act for a moving picture film company, as he would not have to use his voice in such employment.

How Mr. DeVere took the engagement, and how Ruth and Alice followed him, as well as their part in helping Russ to save a valuable camera patent—all this you will find set down in the first book.

In the second volume, entitled "The Moving Picture Girls at Oak Farm; Or, Queer Happenings While Taking Rural Plays," the scene was shifted to the country. There you may read of many strange occurrences, as well as funny [12] ones—how Alice fell into the water—but there! I must save my space in this

book for the happenings of it. I might add that, incidentally, the girls helped to solve a strange mystery concerning Oak Farm, and solved it in a way that made glad the hearts of Mr. and Mrs. Felix Apgar, the parents of Sandy, and of the heart of Sandy himself.

Mr. Frank Pertell was the manager of the Comet Film Company, with whom Mr. DeVere and his daughters had an engagement, and the entire company, including the DeVeres, spent a whole summer at Oak Farm, in New Jersey, making rural plays.

The company had just returned to New York City, to finish some dramas there, and Mr. Pertell was working on new plans, which were not, as yet, fully developed.

The Comet Film Company included a number of people, and you will meet some of them from time to time as this story advances. You have already heard of a few members. In addition there was Wellington Bunn, a former Shakespearean actor, who could never seem to get away from an ambition to do Hamlet. Pepper Sneed was the "grouch" of the company, always finding fault, or worrying lest something happen. Paul Ardite was the "leading juvenile," the father of the moving picture girls being the leading man. The girls themselves, though comparatively new to the business, had made wonderful strides, for they had the advantage of private "coaching" at home from Mr. DeVere.

Miss Pearl Pennington and Miss Laura Dixon were former vaudeville actresses, who had gone into the "movies," and between them and the DeVeres there was not the best of feeling; caused by the jealousy of the former.

Carl Switzer, a German with a marked accent, generally did "comics." Then there was Mrs. Maguire, who did "old woman" parts. She had two grandchildren, Tommy and Nellie, who frequently played minor rôles.

"Do you feel any better, Daddy?" asked Ruth, as she took from her father's hand the atomizer he had been using on his throat.

"Yes, the pain is much less. Dr. Rathby's medicine is a wonderful help."

"Do you feel like—talking?" inquired Alice gently, for she saw that the worried look had not left her father's face.

"Yes," he answered, with a smile, "but I do not want to burden you girls

with all of my troubles."

"Why shouldn't you?" asked Ruth, quickly. "Who would you share your troubles with, if not with us? We must help each other!"

"Yes, I suppose so," returned Mr. DeVere, in a low voice. "And yet, after all, I suppose this is not such a terrible trouble. It will not kill any of us. But it will make a hard pull for me if I cannot prove my contention."

"What is that?" asked Alice. "Is there some trouble with the film company? You haven't lost your engagement; have you, Daddy?"

"Oh, no, it isn't that," he answered. "I'll tell you. Just a little more of that spray, please, Alice. I will then be better able to talk."

In a few moments he resumed:

"Did you ever hear me speak of a Dan Merley?"

"You mean that man who came to see you when we lived in the other apartment—the nicer one?" asked Ruth, for the Fenmore was not one of the high-class residences of New York. The DeVeres had not been able to afford a better home in the time of their poverty. And when better days came they had still remained, as they liked their neighbors, the Dalwoods. Then, too, they had been away all summer at Oak Farm.

"Yes, that was the man," replied Mr. DeVere. "Well, in my hard luck days I borrowed five hundred dollars from him to meet some pressing needs. I gave him my note for it. By hard work, later, I was able to scrape the five hundred dollars together, and I paid him back.

"Unfortunately Dan Merley was a bit under the influence of drink when I gave him the cash, and he could not find my promissory note to return to me.

"He promised to send it around to me the next day, and, very foolishly, as I see it now, I let him keep the money, not even getting a receipt for it. I am not a business man—never was one. I trusted Dan Merley, and I should not have done so."

"Why?" asked Ruth.

"Because he came to me to-day, for the first time in several months, and demanded his five hundred dollars. I told him I had paid it, and tried to recall to him the circumstances. But, as I said, he was slightly intoxicated when I

gave him the bills, and his mind was not clear. He declares positively that I never paid him, and he says he will make trouble for me if I do not hand him over the money in a short time."

"But you did give it to him, Daddy!" exclaimed Alice.

"Of course I did; but I have no proof."

"Did you pay him by check?" asked Ruth, who was quite a business woman, and keeper of the house.

"Unfortunately I was not prosperous enough in those days to have a bank account," answered Mr. DeVere. "A check would be a receipt; but I haven't that. In fact, I haven't a particle of evidence to show that I paid the money. And Dan Merley has my note. He could sue me on it, and any court would give him a judgment against me, so he could collect."

"But that would be paying him twice!" exclaimed Alice.

"I know it, and that is the injustice of it. It would be out of the question for me to raise five hundred dollars now. My throat treatment has been expensive, and though we are making good money at the moving picture business, I have not enough to pay this debt twice."

"He is a wicked man!" burst out Alice.

"My dear!" Ruth gently reproved.

"I don't care! He is, to make daddy pay twice!"

"Yes, it is hard lines," sighed the veteran actor. "I have begged and pleaded with Merley, imploring him to try and remember that I paid him, but he is positive that I did not do so."

"Do you suppose he really thinks so—that he is honest in his belief that you never paid him?" asked Ruth.

"Well, it is a hard thing to say against a man, when I have no proof," replied Mr. DeVere, "but I believe, in his heart, Dan Merley knows I paid him. I think he is just trying to make me pay him over again to cheat me."

"Oh, how can he be so cruel?" cried Alice.

"He is a hard man to deal with," went on her father. "A very hard man. This has been bothering me all day. I simply cannot pay that five hundred

dollars; and yet, if I don't——"

"Can they lock you up, Daddy?" Alice questioned, fearfully.

"Oh, no, dear, not that. But he can make it very unpleasant for me. He can force me to go to court, and that would take me away from the film studio. I might even lose my engagement there if I had to spend too much time over a lawsuit.

"But, worst of all, my reputation will suffer. I have always been honest, and I have paid every debt I owed, though sometimes it took a little while to do it. Now if this comes to smirch my character, I don't know what I shall do."

"Poor Daddy!" said Ruth, softly, as she smoothed his rumpled hair.

"There, girls, don't let me bother you," he said, as gaily as he could. "Perhaps there may come a way out."

"Why don't you ask the advice of Mr. Pertell?" suggested Ruth.

"I believe I will," agreed her father. "He is a good business man. I wish I was. If I had been I would have insisted on getting either a receipt from Merley, or my note back. But I trusted him. I thought he was a friend of mine."

"Well, let's have supper," suggested Alice. "Matters may look brighter then."

"And I'll go see Mr. Pertell this evening," promised Mr. DeVere. "He may be able to advise and help me."

The meal was not a very jolly one at first, but gradually the feeling of gloom passed as the supper progressed. Mr. DeVere told of what had happened that day at the film studio where the moving pictures were made.

"Now I think I'll go see Mr. Pertell," the actor announced, as he rose from the table. "He said he would be in his office late to-night, as he is working on some new plans."

"What are they, Daddy?" asked Alice. "Are we to go off to some farm again?"

"Not this time. I believe there are to be some winter scenes taken, though just where we will go for them has not been announced. Well, I'm off," and, kissing the girls good-bye, Mr. DeVere went out.

Ruth and Alice, in his absence, discussed the new source of trouble that had come to them. They had been so happy all summer, that the blow fell doubly heavy.

"Isn't it just horrid!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Too mean for anything!" agreed Alice. "I wish I had that Dan Merley here. I—I'd——"

But Alice did not finish. Ruth had looked at her, to stop her rather impulsive sister from the use of too violent an expression. But there was no need of this. An interruption came in the form of a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" asked Ruth, and there came a little note of fear into her voice, for she was timid, and she realized at once that it was not one of their kind neighbors from across the hall. Russ, his mother, and his brother Billy always rapped in a characteristic manner.

"It's me—Dan Merley, and I want to see the old man!" was the answer. The girls drew together in fright, for they recognized by the thickness of the voice that the owner was not altogether himself.

"Oh!" gasped Alice, and then the door was pushed open, for the catch had been left off, and a man came unsteadily into the room.

CHAPTER III

RUSS TO THE RESCUE

"Where's the boss?" asked the man, as he leaned heavily against the table. "I want to see the boss."

"Do you—do you mean my—my father?" faltered Ruth, as she stepped protectingly in front of Alice.

"That's jest who I mean, young lady," and the new-comer leered at her. "Is he in? If he isn't I won't mind an awful lot. I'll wait for him. This is a nice place," and, without being invited he slouched into a chair.

"My—my father is——"

"He'll be back in just a little while!" interrupted Alice, briskly. "Did he tell you to come here?"

"Nope! I told myself!" replied the man. "I'm glad I did, too. This is nice place and you're nice girls, too. Sisters, I take it?" [21]

"You need not discuss us!" exclaimed Ruth with dignity. "If you will leave word what your business with my father is I will have him call on you."

"What, leave? Me leave? Nothin' doin', sister. I'm too comfortable here," and he leaned back in the chair and laughed foolishly.

"What—what did you want to see Mr. DeVere about?" inquired Ruth, though she could well guess.

"I'll tell you what it's about," said Dan Merley, confidentially. "It's about money. I want five hundred dollars from your father, and I want it quick—with interest, too. Don't forget that."

"My father paid you that money!" Ruth declared, with boldness.

"He did not!" denied the unpleasant visitor. "He owes it to me yet, and I want it. And, what's more I'm going to have it!"

"That is unfair—unjust!" said Ruth, and there was a trace of tears in her voice. "My father paid you the money, and you promised to give him back the note—the paper that showed you had loaned it to him. But you never did."

"How do you know all this?" he asked.

"Because my father was just telling us about it—a little while ago. He said you had—forgotten."

"Yes, I know! He said I'd been drinking too much; didn't he?"

Ruth and Alice drew further back, offended by his coarse language.

"He—he said you were not—quite yourself," spoke Alice gently.

"Oh ho! Another one! So there's two of you here!" laughed the man. "Well, this certainly is a nice place. I guess I'll stay until the boss comes back. That is, unless you have the five hundred dollars here, and want to pay me," he added, with a sickly grin.

"You have been paid once," Ruth insisted.

"I have not—I never was paid!" Dan Merley cried. "I want my money and I'm going to have it! Do you hear? I'm going to have it, and have it soon! You tell your father that from me!" and he banged his fist on the table.

Ruth and Alice looked at each other. The same thought was in both their minds, and it shone from their eyes. They must leave at once—the door was slightly open.

"No more monkey business!" cried the unwelcome caller. "I lent your father that money and he never paid me back. He may say he did; but he can't prove it. I hold his note, and if he doesn't pay me I'll——"

"What will you do?" interrupted a new voice, and with relief Ruth and Alice looked up, to see Russ Dalwood entering the room.

"Excuse me," he said to the girls, "I knocked, but you did not seem to hear. Possibly there was too much noise," and he looked at the man significantly. "Is there any trouble here?" the young moving picture operator asked.

"Oh, Russ, make him—make him go!" begged Alice, half sobbing. "He wants to see my father—it's some sort of unjust money claim—and he wants to enforce it. Father has gone out——"

"And that's just where this person is going!" announced Russ, advancing toward the man.

"What's that?" demanded Merley in an ugly tone.

"I said you were going out. It's your cue to move!"

"I don't move until I get my five hundred dollars," answered the visitor. "I've waited for it long enough."

"My father paid you!" protested Ruth.

"I say he did not!" and again the man banged the table with his fist.

"Well, whether he did or not is a question for you and Mr. DeVere to settle," said Russ, in firm tones. "You will kindly leave these young ladies alone."

"I will; eh? Who says so?"

"I do!"

"And who are you?"

"A friend. I must ask you to leave."

"Not until I get my five hundred dollars!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Russ, and, though he spoke in low tones, there was that in his voice which made it very determined. "You may have a valid claim against Mr. DeVere, or you may not. I will not go into that. But he is not at home, and you will have to come again. You have no right in here. I must ask you to leave."

"Huh! You haven't any right here either. You can't give *me* orders."

"They are not my orders. This is a request from the young ladies themselves, and I am merely seeing that it is carried out. You don't want him here; do you?" he asked, of the two girls.

"Oh, no! Please go!" begged Ruth.

"I want my money!" cried the man.

"Look here!" exclaimed Russ, taking hold of Merley's shoulder. "You will either leave quietly, or I'll summon a policeman and have you arrested. Even if you have a claim against Mr. DeVere, and I don't believe you have, that gives you no right to trespass here. Take your claim to court!"

"I tell you I want my money now!"

"Well, you'll not get it. You have your remedy at law. Now leave at once, do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear all right, and you'll hear from me later. I will go to law, and I'll have my five hundred dollars. I'll bring suit against Mr. DeVere, and then he'll wish he'd paid me, for he'll have to settle my claim and costs besides. Oh, I'll sue all right!"

"I don't care what you do, as long as you get out of here!" cried Russ, sharply, for he saw that the strain was telling on Ruth and Alice. "Leave at once!"

"Suppose I don't go?"

"Then I'll put you out!"

Russ looked very brave as he said this. Ruth glanced at him, and thought he had never appeared to better advantage. And between Russ and Ruth there was—but there, I am getting ahead of my story.

"Are you going?" asked the young moving picture operator, again.

"Well, rather than have a row, I will. But I warn you I'll sue DeVere and I'll get my money, too. It's all nonsense for him to say he paid me. Where's his proof? I ask you that. Where's his proof?"

"Never mind about that," returned Russ, calmly. "It's your move, as I said before. And you can give a good imitation of a moving picture film showing a man getting out of a room."

With no good grace the man arose clumsily from his chair, and with leers at Ruth and Alice, who were clinging to each other on the far side of the room, the visitor started for the door.

"I'll see you again!" he called, coarsely. "Then maybe the laugh will be on my side. I'm going to have my money, I tell you!"

Russ kept after the man, and walked behind him to the door. There Dan Merley paused to exclaim, in loud tones:

"You wait—I'll get my money out of DeVere—you'll see!"

Then he stumbled on down the hallway, and Russ quickly closed and locked the door.

"Oh, Russ!" exclaimed Ruth. Then she sank into a chair, and bent forward with her head pillowed in her arms on the table.

"There, there," said the young man gently, as he put his hand on her head. "It's all right—he's gone. Don't be afraid."

"Oh, but what a dreadful man!" cried Alice. "I could——"

"Don't, dear," begged her sister gently, as she raised her head. There were tears in her eyes. Russ gently slipped his hand over her little rosy palm.

CHAPTER IV

A FUNNY FILM

For a moment Ruth remained thus, while, Alice, with flashing eyes, stood looking at the door leading into the hall, as if anticipating the return of that unpleasant visitor. Then Ruth lifted her head, and with a rosy blush, and a shy look at Russ, disengaged her hand.

"I—I feel better now," she said.

"That's good," and he smiled. "I don't believe that fellow will come back. I'll stay here. Is your father out?"

"Yes, and all on account of that horrid man," answered Alice. "Oh, it was so good of you to come in Russ!"

"I happened to be coming here anyhow," he answered. "When I saw the door open, and heard what was said, which I could not help doing, I did not stand on ceremony."

"It was awfully good of you," murmured Ruth, who now seemed quite herself again. "I suppose you heard what that man said?" [28]

"Not all," he made reply. "It was something about money though, I gathered. He was demanding it."

"Yes, and after father has already paid it," put in Alice. "That's where daddy has gone now—to consult Mr. Pertell as to the best course of action."

Between them, Ruth and Alice told about Dan Merley's claim, and the injustice of it. Russ was duly sympathetic.

"If I were your father I would pay no attention to his demand," the young moving picture operator said.

"But suppose he sues, as he threatened?" asked Ruth.

"Let him, and fight the case in court when it comes up. Merley may be only 'bluffing', to use a common expression."

"But it annoys daddy almost as much as if the case were real, you see," said Ruth. "Won't you sit down, Russ? Excuse our impoliteness, but really

we've been quite upset."

"Thanks," he laughed as he took a chair. "You need cheering up. You come to the studio to-morrow and forget your troubles in a good laugh."

"Why?" asked Alice. "Ruth and I are not down for any parts to-morrow."

"No, but Mr. Switzer is going to do some comic stunts, and Mr. Bunn and Mr. Sneed are in them with him. There are to be some trick films, I believe."

"Then we'll go," decided Alice. "I think a laugh would do me good."

Gradually the little fright wore off, and when Mr. DeVere returned shortly afterward the girls were themselves again, under the happy influence of Russ.

"What luck, Daddy?" asked Alice, as her father came in. He shook his head, as she added: "Russ knows all about it," for she gathered that he might not like to speak before the young man. "What did Mr. Pertell say?"

"He advised me to wait until Merley made the next move, and then come and see him again. He said he would then send me to the attorney for the film company, who would handle my case without charge."

"How good of him!" cried Ruth, impulsively.

"Mr. Pertell gave daddy the same advice Russ gave us," added Alice. "Oh, it was so good to have him here when that dreadful man came in," she went on.

"What man?" asked Mr. DeVere, in surprise. "Was someone in here while I was gone—those camera scoundrels, Russ?"

"No, it was Dan Merley himself!" exclaimed Ruth, "and he was so horrid, Daddy!" There was a hint of tears in her voice.

"The impertinent scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. DeVere, in the manner that had won him such success on the stage. "I shall go to the police and——"

"No, don't Daddy dear," begged Ruth laying a detaining hand on his arm, as he turned to the door. "That would only make it more unpleasant for us. We would have to go to court and testify, if you had him arrested. And, besides, I don't know on what charge you could cause his arrest. He really did nothing to us, except to hurt our feelings and scare us. But I fancy Russ scared him in turn. Don't go to the police, Daddy."

"All right," he agreed. "But tell me all about it."

They did so, by turns, and Mr. DeVere's anger waxed hot against Merley as he listened. But he realized that it was best to take no rash step, much as he desired to. So he finally calmed down.

"If I could only prove that I had paid that money," he murmured, "all would be well. I must make it a point, after this, to be more business-like. It is like locking the stable door after the automobile is gone, though, in this case," he added, with a whimsical smile.

Russ remained a little longer, and then took his leave. Ruth saw to it, even getting up out of bed to do it, that the chain was on the hall door. For she was in nervous doubt as to whether or not she had taken that precaution. But she found the portal secure.

"That man might come back in the night," she thought. But she did not confide her fear to Alice.

Morning revealed a new and wonderful scene. For in the night there had been a heavy storm, and the ground of Central Park was white with snow. A little rain had fallen, and then had frozen, and the trees were encased in ice. Then as the sun shone brightly, it flashed as on millions of diamonds, dazzling and glittering. Winter had come early, and with more severity than usual in the vicinity of New York.

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Alice, as she looked out. "I must have a slide, if I can find a place! Ruth, I'm going to wash your face!"

"Don't you dare!"

But Alice raised the window, and from the sill took a handful of snow. She rushed over to her sister with it.

"Stop it! Stop it! Don't you dare!" screamed Ruth. Then she squealed as she felt the cold snow on her cheeks.

"What's the matter with you girls in there?" called Mr. DeVere from his apartment. "You seem merry enough."

"We are," answered Alice. "I've washed Ruth's face, and I'm going to wash yours in a minute."

"Just as you like," he laughed. And then he sighed, for he recalled a time

when his girlish wife had once challenged him the same way, when they were on their honeymoon. For Mrs. DeVere had been vivacious like Alice, and the younger daughter was a constant reminder to her father of his dead wife—a happy and yet a sad reminder.

Alice came rushing in with more snow, and there was a merry little scene before breakfast. Then Mr. DeVere hurried to the film studio, for he was to take part in several dramas that day.

"I know I'll be late," he said, "for the travel will be slow this morning, on account of the snow. And I have to go part way by surface car, as I have an errand on the way down town."

"We're coming down, also," Ruth informed him.

"Why, you're not in anything to-day," he remarked, pausing in the act of putting on his overcoat. "You're not cast for anything until 'The Price of Honor,' to-morrow."

"But we're going down, just the same," Alice laughed. "We want to see some of the funny films."

"Come ahead then," invited Mr. DeVere. "Better use the subway all you can. Even the elevated will have trouble with all this sleet. Good-bye," and he kissed them as he hurried out.

The girls made short shrift of the housework, and then left for the place where the moving pictures were made.

As I have described in the first book of this series how moving pictures are taken, I will not repeat it here, except to say that in a special camera, made for the purpose, there is a long narrow strip of celluloid film, of the same nature as in the ordinary camera. The pictures are taken on this strip, at the rate of sixteen a second. Later this film is developed, and from that "negative" a "positive" is made. This "positive" is then run through a specially made projecting lantern which magnifies the pictures for the screen.

As Alice and Ruth got out at the floor where most of the scenes were made they heard laughter.

"Something's going on," remarked the younger girl.

"And it doesn't sound like Mr. Sneed, our cheerful 'grouch,' either," answered Ruth.

As they went in they saw Carl Switzer, the German comedian, climbing a high step-ladder with a pail of paste in one hand, and a roll of wall paper in the other. He was in a scene representing a room, which he was to decorate.

"Is diss der right vay to do it?" Mr. Switzer asked, as he paused half way up the ladder, and looked at Mr. Pertell.

"That's it. Now you've got the idea," replied the manager. "Begin over again, and Russ, I guess you can begin to run the film now," for the young moving picture operator was in readiness with his camera.

"You must tremble, and shake the ladder," advised the manager, who was also, in this case, the stage director. "You want to register fear, you see, because you are an amateur paper hanger."

"Yah. Dot's right. I know so leedle about der papering business alretty yet dot I could write a big book on vot I don't know," confessed Mr. Switzer.

"All ready now—tremble and shake!" ordered the manager.

The comic film that was being made was a reproduction of a scene often played in vaudeville theaters, where an amateur paper hanger gets into all sorts of ludicrous mishaps with a bucket of paste, rolls of paper and the step ladder. It was not very new, but had not been done for moving pictures before.

"Here I goes!" called Mr. Switzer. "I am shaking!"

"Good!" encouraged Mr. Pertell. "Now, Mr. Bunn, you come in, as the owner of the house, to see if the paper hanger is doing his work properly. You find he is not, for he is going to put the wrong sort of paper on the ceiling. Then you try to show him yourself."

"Do I wear my tall hat?"

"Oh, yes, of course, and I think Mr. Switzer, you had better let——"

But the directions were never completed, for at that moment, in the excess of his zeal, Mr. Switzer shook the step ladder to such good effect that it toppled over and with him on it.

Down he came on top of Wellington Bunn, in all his dignity and the glory of the tall hat, and paste flew all over, liberally spattering both actors.

CHAPTER V

A QUEER ACCIDENT

"Get that Russ! Every motion of it!" cried the manager. "That will make it better than when we rehearsed it. Spatter that paste all over Mr. Bunn while you're at it, Mr. Switzer."

"Stop! Stop, I say! I protest. I will not have it!"

"Vell, you goin' to git it, all right!" cried the German, and with the brush he liberally daubed the Shakespearean actor with the white and sticky stuff. All the other players were laughing at the ridiculous scene.

"More paste!" ordered Mr. Pertell. "More paste there, Mr. Switzer. Don't be afraid of it, Mr. Bunn! It's clean!"

"Oh, this is awful—this is terrible!" groaned the tragic actor. "My hat is ruined."

And such did seem to be the case, for the shining silk tile was filled with paste, the outside also being well covered. [37]

Mr. Bunn tried to get away from the slapping brush of Mr. Switzer, but the German was not to be outwitted. The two had fallen to the floor under the impact of the comic player, and were now tangled up in the ladder.

"That's good! That's good!" laughed Mr. Pertell. "Get all of that, Russ! Every bit!"

"I'm getting it!" cried the operator, as he continued to grind away at the crank of the moving picture camera.

Again Mr. Bunn tried to get up and away, but the ladder, through which his legs had slipped, hampered him. Then a roll of the paper got under the feet of both players. It unreeled, and some paste got on it. The next instant part of it was plastered over Mr. Switzer's face, and, being unable to see, he pawed about wildly, spattering more paste all over, much of it getting on Mr. Bunn.

"Better than ever. Use some more of that paper!" ordered the manager. "Paste some on Mr. Switzer, if you can, Mr. Bunn."

"Oh, I can all right!" cried the older actor. "Here is where I have my

revenge!"

He scooped up a hand full of paste, spread it on a piece of paper, and clapped it over the face of the German, for that player had removed the first piece that was stuck on. And thus they capered about in the scenic room, making a chaos of it.

Russ took all the pictures for the future amusement of thousands who attended the darkened theaters.

Of course it was horseplay, pure and simple, and yet audiences go into paroxysms of mirth over much the same things. The love of slap-stick comedy has not all died out, and the managers realize this.

"I don't know when I've laughed so much," confessed Alice, holding her aching sides as she sat down near Ruth, when the little comedy was over.

"Nor I, my dear. I think the old saying is true, after all, that 'a little nonsense, now and then, is relished by the best of men.'"

"This was certainly nonsense," admitted Alice. "Oh, come over and let's see Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon in that new play—'Parlor Magic.' It's very interesting, and rather funny."

The two older actresses were to play in a little scene where a young man—in this case Paul Ardite—attempted to do some tricks he had been studying. He was supposed to come to grief in making an omelet in a silk hat, and have other troubles when he tried to take rabbits out of parlor vases, and such like nonsense.

This was one of the trick films—that is, it was not a straight piece of work. It depended for its success on the manipulation of the camera, on substituting dummies for real persons or animals at certain points, the interposition of films and many other things too technical to put into a book that is only intended to amuse you.

"How are you?" asked Miss Pennington, as Ruth and Alice came over to their side of the studio. "You are looking quite well."

"And we are well," answered Alice. "We want to see you act," for the filming had not yet begun.

"For instruction or amusement?" asked Miss Dixon, and her voice had something of a sneer in it. She and her chum were not on the most friendly

terms with Ruth and Alice.

"Both amusement and instruction," responded Alice, sweetly—in a doubly sweet voice under the circumstances. "One can learn from anyone, you know," and she pretended to be interested in one of the tricks Paul was practicing while getting ready for the camera.

Alice could say things with a double meaning at times, and probably this was one of them.

"Oh!" was all Miss Dixon said, and then she called: "Paul, come here; won't you? I want you to fasten my glove."

"Certainly," he agreed, with a look at Alice which was meant to say: "I don't want to do this, but I can't very well get out of it."

Paul, I might add, had been quite interested in Miss Dixon before the advent of Alice, and the vaudeville actress rather resented the change. She took advantage of every opportunity to make Paul fetch and carry for her as he had been wont to do.

The parlor magic play was successfully filmed and then, as Alice and Ruth had some shopping to do, to get their costumes ready for their appearance before the camera next day, they prepared to leave. They stopped for a moment, however, to watch their father in his play—"A Heart's Cavalier." This was rather a pretentious drama, and called for really good acting, the nature of which appealed to the veteran player.

It was really a delight to watch him, for he gave a finished performance, and the loss of his voice was no handicap here. He could whisper the words, or utter them in a low tone, so that the motion of his lips might be seen by the audience.

If you have ever seen motion pictures, and I am sure you all have, you know that often you can tell exactly what the characters are saying by watching the form of their lips.

Deaf persons, who have learned to know what other persons are saying, merely by watching their lips, are able to "hear" much more than can the ordinary individual what goes on in moving pictures. In this they have a distinct advantage.

But of course the story the celluloid film tells is mostly conveyed by the action of the characters, and Mr. DeVere was an expert in this.

"Good-bye, Daddy," called Alice, when he was out of the scene for a moment. "We'll be back, and you can take us out to lunch."

"All right," he laughed. "Make your poor old daddy spend his hard-earned money, will you?"

"You know you're just crazy to do it," said Ruth. "Come on Alice."

The next day called for hard work for both the moving picture girls, and there were a number of outdoor scenes to do. They were glad of this change, however.

Some of the scenes Ruth and Alice had parts in, as well as Paul Ardite, were filmed out in Bronx Park, with the still natural wildness of that beauty spot as background. One scene was down near the beaver pond, and with the snow on the ground, and the sleet still on the trees, the pictures afterward turned out to be most effective. Special permission had to be obtained to use the camera in the park, there being a rule against it.

Alice had one part which called for feeding the birds with crumbs scattered over the snow. And, just when they wanted this not a bird—even a sparrow—was in sight. In vain they went to different parts of the park, looking for some, and scattered many crumbs.

"I guess we'll have to give it up, and come back some other time," Russ said finally. "I don't want to make another trip, either," he went on. "It wastes so much time, and we're going to be be very busy soon."

"What about those new plans?" asked Ruth.

"They are to be announced to-morrow, I believe," was the answer. "A lot of snow dramas are to be filmed."

"Good!" cried Alice. "I love the snow."

"Oh, quick! There are some birds!" called Ruth. "See, over there, Alice. Scatter the crumbs!"

Russ had them in his pocket in readiness, and soon the snow was covered. The birds did their part well, and as Alice stood near them, throwing crumbs to the hungry sparrows and starlings, they fluttered about her, and flocked at her feet.

"Good!" cried Russ, who was busy with the camera. "It couldn't be better.

This will make a fine film."

Alice presented a pretty picture as she stood there in her furs, scattering crumbs to the birds, and the little feathered creatures proved the best sort of actors, for they were not self-conscious, and did not stop to peer at the camera, the clicking of which they did not mind in the least.

"Well, that's done; now I think we'll go back," Russ said, when he had ascertained, by looking at the register on the side of the camera, that enough feet of the film had been used on that scene. For, in order to have each scene get its proper amount of space, both as regards time and length of film a strict watch is kept on how much celluloid is used.

A manager, or director, will decide on the importance of the various scenes, and then divide up the film, giving so many feet to each act.

The standard length of film is a thousand feet. It comes in thousand foot reels, but some plays are so elaborate that two, three or even seven reels have been given up to them. Great scenic productions, such as "Quo Vadis?" use up many thousand feet of film.

Russ and the two girls, with Paul, started back from the Bronx. They were to stop in at the studio, but on reaching there the girls found that their father had gone home, leaving a note saying he was going to see the doctor about his throat.

"Poor daddy!" murmured Ruth. "He does have such trouble!"

"Has Merley bothered him again?" asked Russ.

"No, he has heard nothing from him," answered Alice. "But daddy worries about it. Five hundred dollars means more to him now than five thousand may later. For I hope daddy will get rich some day," she finished, with a laugh.

The three walked on together to the subway, and got out at the station nearest their house. On the way they had to cross one of the surface car lines, and, just as they reached the corner, they heard a shout of alarm or warning, evidently directed at someone in danger from an approaching electric car.

"What is it?" cried Ruth, clinging to Alice.

"I don't know," answered the younger girl. "Oh, yes, there it is!" she cried, pointing.

Three men were on the car tracks, and two of them seemed to be trying to pull one away, out of the path of an approaching car. The shouts came from a number of pedestrians who had seen the danger of the man.

The latter seemed to be caught by the foot on the rail, though how this was possible was difficult to understand, as the rail was flat.

The motorman was doing his best to stop the car, but the rails were slippery and it was easily seen that he could not do it. Then he added his shouts to those of the others.

"Oh, he'll be killed!" cried Alice, covering her face with her hands. Ruth had also turned aside.

"No, he won't!" cried Russ, with conviction. "They'll get him off, I think. There! He's free! I guess they took off his shoe."

As he spoke the girls looked, and they saw the man fall in a peculiar way, to one side, so as to be out of the path of the car, which swept past him. The vehicle, however, seemed to hit him, but of this neither Russ nor the girls could be sure.

"That's a queer accident," murmured Russ, as he started toward the scene of it. "Come on, girls."

Ruth and Alice went with him. There was a little crowd about the fallen man, and at the sight of the fellow's face Alice suddenly cried:

"Look! That is Dan Merley!"

CHAPTER VI

NEW PLANS

Alice's announcement caused her sister to start in surprise. Ruth looked as if she could not understand, and Alice repeated:

"See, the man who fell is Dan Merley—the one who says daddy owes him five hundred dollars."

"I believe you're right!" agreed Russ, who had had a good look at the impudent fellow the night he invaded the DeVere rooms. "And I know one of those other men—at least by sight. His name is Jagle. Let's see what is going on here."

Fortunately no very large crowd gathered, so the girls felt it would be proper for them to remain, particularly as the accident was not of a distressing nature.

The motorman had stopped his car and had run back to the scene with the conductor.

"What's the matter here? What did you want to get in the way of the car for, anyhow?" demanded the motorman. He was nervously excited, and the reaction at finding, after all, he had not killed a man, made him rather angry. [47]

"Matter? Matter enough, I should say!" replied one of the men with Merley. "My friend is badly hurt. Someone get an ambulance! Fripp, you call one."

"That was Jagle who spoke," Russ whispered to the girls. "But I don't know the other one."

"He doesn't seem to be badly hurt," remarked the motorman. The conductor, with a little pad and pencil, was getting the names of witnesses to be used in case suit was brought. This is always done by street car companies, in order to protect themselves.

"Hurt? Of course he's hurt!" exclaimed the man Russ called Jagle. "See that cut on his head!"

There was a slight abrasion on Merley's forehead, but it did not seem at all

serious.

"Aren't you hurt, Dan?" asked Jagle.

"Of course I am!" was the answer. "I'm hurt bad, too. Get me home, Jim."

"If he's hurt the best place for him is a hospital," remarked the motorman. "But I can't see where he's hurt."

"I can't walk, I tell you," whined Merley, and he attempted to get up, but fell back. One of his friends caught him in his arms.

"There, you see! Of course he's hurt!" declared Jagle. "Go call an ambulance, Fripp."

"I'll get an ambulance if he really needs one," spoke a policeman, who had just come up on seeing the crowd. "Where are you hurt?"

"Something's the matter with my legs," declared Merley. "I can't use my right one, and the left one is hurt, too. My foot got caught between the rail and a piece of ice, and I couldn't get loose. My friends tried to help me, but they couldn't get me away in time. I'm hurt, and I'm hurt bad, I tell you! I think one of my legs must be run over."

"Nothing like that!" declared the motorman. "There's been no legs run over by my car!"

That was very evident.

"Get me away from here," groaned Merley.

"Well, if you're really hurt I'll call an ambulance and have you taken to the hospital," offered the policeman as he went to turn in a call.

"I sure am hurt," insisted Merley. "Why, I can hardly move now," and he seemed to stiffen all over, though there was no visible sign of injury.

"Why doesn't someone get a doctor?" a boy in the crowd asked.

"There'll be one in de hurry-up wagon!" exclaimed another urchin. "A feller in a white suit—dem's doctors. I know, cause me fadder was in de 'ospital onct."

Merley's two friends carried him to a drug store not far from the scene of the accident. Ruth and Alice shrank back as he was borne past them, for they feared he might recognize them, and cause a scene. But if he saw them, which

is doubtful, he gave no sign.

"Here comes de hurry-up wagon!" cried the lad who had thus designated the ambulance. "Let's see 'em shove him on de stretcher! Say dis is great!"

"I think we had better be going, Alice, dear," said Ruth. "Daddy wouldn't like us to be in this crowd."

"Oh, I want to stay and see what happens. Besides, it might be important," Alice objected. "This is Dan Merley, who might make trouble for papa. We ought to see what happens to him. I think that whole accident was queer. He didn't seem to be hit at all, and yet he says he can't move. We ought to stay."

"If you want to go, I'll stay and let you know what happens," offered Russ. "I don't mind."

"Perhaps that would be best," said Ruth.

"All right," agreed Alice, and she and her sister, with a last look at the crowd around the ambulance, started for their apartment.

Russ came along a little later.

"What happened?" asked Ruth, when he had knocked on the door of their hall and had been admitted.

"Not much," he replied. "They took Merley home, instead of to a hospital. He wouldn't go to an institution, he said."

"Did those other two men go with him?" asked Alice.

"Who, Fripp and Jagle? No, they wouldn't be allowed to ride on the ambulance. But they got a taxicab and went off in that. I heard Jagle say to the ambulance surgeon, that he was a doctor, and that he'd attend his friend when he got him home."

"Is Jagle a doctor?" asked Alice. "He didn't look like one."

"He's a *sort* of doctor," Russ replied. "I think he's a quack, myself. I wouldn't have him for a sick cat. But he calls himself a doctor and surgeon. So that's all that happened."

"It was enough, anyhow," remarked Ruth. "I don't like to see anybody hurt."

"I'm not so sure that fellow *was* hurt," said Russ, slowly.

"What do you mean?" Alice asked, curiously.

"Well, he might have *imagined* he was. I guess he was pretty well scared at seeing that car come down on him. But I watched when he was put in the ambulance and he seemed as well as either of his friends. Only he kept insisting that he could not walk."

"It was certainly a queer accident," said Alice. "But, in spite of the fact that he is a bad man, and wants to make trouble for daddy, I hope he isn't seriously hurt."

"I don't believe it is serious," said Russ. "But it might easily have been, though, if he had fallen in front of the car instead of away from it."

"Well, there is nothing that hasn't its good side," remarked Ruth. "Emerson's idea of the law of compensation works out very nicely in this case."

"Kindly translate, sister mine," invited Alice, laughingly.

"Why, you know Emerson holds that one advantage makes up for each defect. In this case Merley has had an accident—a defect. That may cause him to stop annoying daddy—a distinct advantage to us."

"Oh, Ruth, how queer you are!" exclaimed Alice with a laugh. "I never heard of such an idea."

"Who was this Emerson—a moving picture fellow?" asked Russ.

"No, he was a great writer," explained Ruth. "I'll let you take one of his books."

"I wish you would," said Russ, seriously. "I never had much of a chance to get an education, but I like to know things."

"So do I," agreed Ruth. "I never tire of Emerson."

Mr. DeVere was surprised when he heard about the accident to Merley.

"I can't understand it," said the girls' father. "He must have been hurt, and yet—er—was he in a sensible condition, Russ?"

"Oh, yes, he seemed to be himself, all right," the young moving picture operator replied, thoughtfully. "I haven't gotten to the bottom of it myself."

And indeed it developed that there was a strange plot back of the accident

—a plot which involved the moving picture girls in an amazing way, as will soon appear.

But puzzle over the odd accident as they might, neither Mr. DeVere, his daughters, nor Russ could understand what it involved.

"At any rate, as you say, Ruth," the actor remarked with a smile, "there is some compensation. He may not annoy me for some time; and, meanwhile, I may think of a plan to prove I really paid that money."

"I hope so, Daddy!" she exclaimed. "Is your throat any better?"

"Yes, much," he replied with a smile. "Dr. Rathby is going to try a new kind of spray treatment, and I had the first one this afternoon. It helped me wonderfully."

"That's good!" exclaimed Alice.

The next day's papers contained a slight reference to the accident. It was not important enough to warrant much space, and about all that was said was that Merley claimed to have received an injury that made him helpless, though its nature was a puzzle to the physician sent around by the street car company.

"Well, if he's helpless, and the Lord knows I wish that to no man," said Mr. DeVere, reverently, "he will not come here bothering you girls again. If he confines his attacks to me I do not so much mind, but he must leave you alone."

"That's what I say!" cried Russ.

When Mr. DeVere and his daughters arrived at the moving picture studio that afternoon, for they were not to report until then, they found notices posted, requesting all members of the company to remain after rehearsal to hear an "important announcement."

"I wonder what it can be?" said Ruth.

"Probably it's about the new plans Mr. Pertell has been working on," suggested Alice.

"I think so," Russ said. He knew something of them, but had not permission to reveal them.

And this proved to be the case. After the day's work was ended, and it

included the filming of several scenes for important dramas, Mr. Pertell called his players together, and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen—also Tommy and Nellie, for you will be in on this, I hope—we are going to leave New York City again, and be together in a new place to make a series of plays."

"Leave New York!" gasped Miss Pennington.

"I hope we don't go to Oak Farm again!" cried Miss Dixon. "I want to be in some place where I can get a lobster now and then."

"There will be no lobsters at Deerfield!" said Mr. Pertell, with a smile, "unless there are some of the canned variety."

"How horrid!" complained Miss Pennington.

"Will there be deers there?" asked Tommy, with big eyes.

"I think there will, sonny," answered the manager.

"Reindeers—like Santa Claus has?" little Nellie wanted to know.

"Well, I guess so!" laughed Mr. Pertell. "At any rate, I plan to take you all there."

"Where is Deerfield, if one may ask?" inquired Miss Dixon, pertly.

"Deerfield is a sort of backwoods settlement, in one of our New England States," explained the manager. "It is rather isolated, but I want to go there to get some scenes for moving pictures with good snow, and ice effects as backgrounds."

"Are there good hotels there?" Miss Pennington demanded.

"We are going to stop in a big hunting lodge, that I have hired for the occasion," Mr. Pertell replied. "I think you will like it very much."

"Hold on! One moment!" exclaimed Mr. Sneed, the grouchy actor. "You may count me out of this! I shall go to no backwoods, in the middle of winter, and freeze. I cannot stand the cold. I shall resign at once!"

"One moment. Before you decide that, I have something else to say to you," said Mr. Pertell, and there was a smile on his face.

CHAPTER VII

OFF TO THE WOODS

The moving picture players looked curiously at the manager, and then at Mr. Sneed. They were used to this action on his part, and also on the part of Mr. Bunn—that of resigning when anything did not suit them. But matters with either of them seldom went farther than the mere threat.

"I know it will not be as pleasant, as regards weather conditions, at Elk Lodge, Deerfield, as it was at Oak Farm," said Mr. Pertell. "But the lodge is a big building, very quaint and picturesque, I have been told, and it has all the comforts, and many of the conveniences, of life. There are big, open fireplaces, and plenty of logs to burn. So you will not freeze."

"Open fires are always cold," complained Mr. Sneed. "You roast on one side, and freeze on the other."

"Oh, I think it won't be quite as bad as that," laughed the manager. "But that is not all I have to say. In consideration of the fact that there will be some inconveniences, in spite of all I can do, I am willing to make an increase of ten per cent. in the salaries of all of you, including Tommy and Nellie," and he smiled at the two children.

"Oh, goodie! I'm going!" cried the small lad.

"So'm I," voiced his sister.

There was a moment of silence, while all the members of the company looked at Mr. Sneed, who had raised the first contention. He seemed to think that it was necessary for him to say something.

"Ah—ahem!" he began.

"Yes?" spoke Mr. Pertell, questioningly.

"In view of all the facts, and er—that I would have to give two weeks' notice, and under all the circumstances, I think—er—I will withdraw my resignation, if you will allow me," the grouchy actor went on, in a lofty manner.

"Ah!" laughed Mr. Pertell. "Then we will consider it settled, and you may

all begin to pack up for Elk Lodge as soon as you please."

"When are we to leave?" asked Mr. DeVere.

"In a few days now. I have one more play I want to stage in New York, and then we will leave for the country where we can study snow and ice effects to better advantage than here. We want to get out into the open. Russ, I must have a talk with you about films. I think, in view of the fact that the lights out in the open, reflected by the snow, will be very intense and high, a little change in the film and the stop of the camera will be necessary."

"I think so myself," agreed the young moving picture operator. "In fact, I have been working on a little device that I can attach to our cameras to cut down the amount of light automatically. It consists of a selenium plate with a battery attachment——"

"Oh, spare us the dreadful details!" interrupted Miss Pennington, who was of a rather frivolous nature.

"Well, there is no longer need of detaining you," spoke Mr. Pertell. "Work for the day is over. We will meet again to-morrow and film 'A Mother's Sorrow,' and that will be the last New York play for some time. I presume it will take a week to get ready to go to Deerfield, as there are many details to look after."

"Oh, I just can't wait until it's time to go to the backwoods!" cried Alice, as she and Ruth were on their way home that evening. "Aren't you crazy about it, sister mine?"

"Well, not exactly *crazy*, Alice. You do use such—er—such strong expressions!"

"Well, I have strong feelings, I suppose."

"I know, but you must be more—more conservative."

"I know you were going to say 'lady-like,' but you didn't dare," laughed Alice.

"Well, consider it said, my dear," went on Ruth, in all seriousness, for she felt that she must, in a measure, play the part of a mother to her younger sister.

"I don't want to consider anything!" laughed Alice, "except the glorious

fun we are going to have. Oh, Ruth, even the prospect of that dreadful Dan Merley making daddy pay the debt over again can't dampen my spirits now. I'm so happy!"

She threw her arms about Ruth and attempted a few turns of the one-step glide.

"Oh, stop! I'm slipping!" cried Ruth, for the sidewalk was icy. "Alice, let me go!"

"Not until you take a few more steps! Now dip!"

"But, Alice! I'm going to fall! I know I am! There! I told you——"

But Ruth did not get a chance to use the favorite expression of Mr. Sneed, if such was her intention. For she really was about to fall when a young man, who was passing, caught her, and saved her from a tumble.

"Oh!" she gasped, in confusion, as she recovered her balance.

"I beg your pardon," laughed the young fellow, with sparkling eyes.

"I should beg yours!" faltered Ruth, with a blush.

"It was all my fault—I wanted her to dance!" cried Alice, willing to accept her share of the blame.

"Yes, this weather makes one feel like dancing," the young fellow agreed, and then with a bow he passed on.

"Alice how could you?" cried Ruth.

"How could I what?"

"Make me do that."

"I didn't mean to. Really, he was nice; wasn't he? And say, did you notice his eyes?"

"Oh, Alice, you are hopeless!" and Ruth had to laugh.

The two moving picture girls reached home without further mishap, if mishap that could be called, though all the way Alice insisted on waltzing about happily, and trying in vain to get Ruth to join in, and try the new steps. Passersby more than once turned to look at the two pretty girls, who made a most attractive picture.

The drama next day was successfully filmed and then followed a sort of week's vacation, while the picture players prepared for the trip to the woods.

They were to go by train to Hampton Junction, the nearest station to Deerfield. This last was only a small settlement once the center of an important lumber industry, but now turned into a hunting preserve, owned by a number of rich men. As the Lodge was not in use this season, Mr. Pertell had engaged it for his company.

In due time the baggage was all packed, the various "properties" had been shipped by Pop Snooks and everything was ready for the trip. The journey from the railroad station at Hampton Junction to Elk Lodge, in Deerfield, was to be made in big four-horse sleds, several of them having been engaged, for it was reported that the snow was deep in the woods. Winter had set in with all its severity there.

Finally all the members of the company were gathered at the Grand Central Terminal, New York. The players attracted considerable attention, for there was that air of the theater about them which always seems so fascinating to the outsider, who knows so little of the really hard work that goes on behind the footlights. Most of the glitter is in front, in spite of appearances.

"Why, it's like setting off for Oak Farm!" remarked Alice, as she stood beside her sister, Paul and Russ.

"Only there isn't any mystery in prospect," spoke Paul. "I wonder how the Apgars are getting on, now that their farm is safe?"

"They're probably sitting about a warm fire, talking about it," Russ said.

"There may be just as much of a mystery in the backwoods as there was at Oak Farm, if we can only come across it," suggested Alice. "I wish we could discover something queer."

"Oh, Alice!" protested Ruth.

Mr. Sneed was observed to be walking about, peering at the various sign boards on which the destination of trains was given.

"What are you looking for?" asked Russ.

"I want to see that we don't start out on track thirteen as we did when we went to Oak Farm, and had the wreck," the actor answered. "I've had enough of hoodoos."

"You're all right this time—we leave from track twenty-seven," called Mr. Pertell. "All aboard for Deerfield and Elk Lodge!"

CHAPTER VIII

A BREAKDOWN

There was snow everywhere. Never could Ruth, Alice, and the other members of the Comet Film Company remember so much at one time. They seemed to have entered the Polar regions.

Along the tracks of the railroad the white flakes were piled in deep drifts, and when they swept out from a patch of woodland, and had a view across the fields, or down into some valley, they could see a long, unbroken stretch of white.

"It sure is some snow," observed Russ, who sat in the seat with Ruth, while Paul had pre-empted a place beside Alice. This last in spite of the fact that Miss Dixon invitingly had a seat ready for the young actor beside herself. But she was forced to be content with a novel for companionship.

"Yes, and we're going to get more snow," remarked Mr. Sneed, who sat behind Russ. "We'll get so much that the train will be delayed, and we'll have to stay on it all night; that's what will happen."

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"Und ve vill starf den; ain't dot so?" inquired Mr. Switzer, with a jolly laugh from across the aisle. "Ve vill starf alretty; vill ve not, mine gloomy friendt?"

"We sure will," predicted the grouch of the company. "They took the dining car off at the last station, and I understand there isn't another one to be had until we get to Hampton Junction. We sure will starve!"

"Ha! Dot is vot ve vill *not* do!" laughed Mr. Switzer, with conviction. "See, I haf alretty t'ought of dot, und I haf provided. Here are pretzels!" and he produced a large bag of them from his grip. "Ve vill not starf!"

"Ha! Pretzels!" scoffed Mr. Sneed. "I never eat them!"

"Maybe you vill before you starf!" chuckled Mr. Switzer, as he replaced them. "I like dem much!"

The other members of the company laughed—all but Mr. Sneed and Wellington Bunn. The former went forward to consult a brakeman as to the prospects of the train becoming snowbound, while Mr. Bunn, who wore his

tall hat, and was bundled up in a fur coat, huddled close to the window, and doubtless dreamed of the days when he had played Shakespearean rôles; and wondered if he would play them again.

The train went on, not that any great speed was attained, for the grade was up hill, and there had been heavy storms. There was also the prospect of more snow, and this, amid the rugged hills of New England, was not reassuring.

"But we expect hard weather up here," said Mr. Pertell to his company. "The more snow and ice we have, the better pictures we can get."

"That's right!" agreed Russ.

"Humph! I'm beginning to wish I hadn't come," growled Mr. Sneed, who had received information from a brakeman to the effect that trains were often snowbound in that part of the State.

A few feathery flakes began falling now, and there was the promise of more in the clouds overhead, and in the sighing of the North wind.

"Does your throat hurt you much, Daddy?" asked Ruth, as she noticed her father wrapping a silk handkerchief closer about his neck.

"Just a little; I think it is the unusual cold," he replied. "But I do not mind it. The air is sharper here than in New York; but it is drier. Perhaps it may do me good. I think I will use my spray," and he got out his atomizer.

There were not many passengers beside the members of the film theatrical company in the car in which Ruth and her sister rode. Among them, however, were two young ladies, about the age of Alice, and as Ruth went down the aisle once, to get a drink of water, she noted that one of the strangers appeared to be ill.

"Pardon me," spoke Ruth, with ready sympathy, "but can I do anything to help you?"

"She has a bad headache," replied the other. "My sister always gets one when she travels. Fortunately we have not much farther to go."

"Oh, Helen, I shall be so glad when we get there," said the suffering one.

"Never mind, Mabel, we will soon be there," soothed the other.

"If you don't mind—I'd like to give you my smelling salts," offered Ruth. "They always help me when I have a headache, which is seldom, I'm glad to

say."

"I wish I could say that," murmured the afflicted one.

"Suppose you let me give the bottle to you," suggested Ruth. "I'll have my sister bring some spirits of cologne, too. Then you can bathe your head."

"You are very kind," responded the other.

Soon the four girls were in the ladies' compartment of the parlor car in which the picture company was traveling. There was a lounge there, and on this the girl called Mabel was soon receiving the ministrations of the others.

Her head was bathed in the fragrant cologne, and the use of the smelling salts relieved the slight feeling of indisposition that accompanied the headache.

"I feel so much better now," she declared, after a little. "I—I think I could sleep."

"That would be the best thing for you, my dear," said Ruth, as she smoothed her hair. "Come," she whispered to the others, "we will sit back here and let her rest," and she motioned them to come into the curtained-off recess of the compartment.

There the other girl said that she and her sister were on their way to visit relatives over the holidays. They were Mabel and Helen Madison, of New York.

"And right after Christmas we're going to Florida," Helen confided to Ruth and Alice.

"Oh, it must be lovely there, under the palms!" exclaimed the latter. "I do so want to go."

"It is quite a contrast to this, I should imagine," remarked Ruth, as she gazed out of the window on the snowy scene.

"Does your company ever get as far as Florida?" asked Helen, for Ruth and Alice had told her their profession.

"We haven't yet," replied Ruth, "though once, when we were small, daddy played in St. Augustine, and we were there. But I don't remember anything about it."

"We are going to a little resort on Lake Kissimmee," said Helen Madison. "Perhaps we may see you there, if you ever make pictures in Florida."

"I hardly think we are going that far," observed Ruth. "But if we do we shall look for you."

Ruth little realized then how prophetic her words were, nor how she and Alice would actually "look" for the two girls.

A little later Mabel awakened from a doze, and announced that her head felt much better. Then, as it would soon be time for her and her sister to get off, for they were nearing their destination, they went back to their seats to get their luggage in readiness.

"I like them; don't you?" asked Alice, as she and Ruth rejoined their friends.

"Indeed I do! They seem very sweet girls. I would like to meet them again."

"So would I. Perhaps we shall. It would be lovely if we could go to Florida, after our winter work is over. I'm going to ask Mr. Pertell if there's any likelihood of our doing so."

But Alice did not get the opportunity just then, as she and Ruth went to the door to bid their new girl acquaintances good-bye. Then came the announcement that in a short time Hampton Junction would be reached.

"Better be getting your possessions together," advised Mr. Pertell to his company. "It is getting late and I don't want to have you travel too much after dark."

The train came to a stop at Hampton Junction, and from the car emerged the picture players. Ranged alongside the small building that served as the depot were several large sleighs, known in that country as "pungs," the bodies being filled with clean straw. There were four horses to each, and the jingle of their bells made music on the wintry air.

"Oh, we're going to have a regular straw ride!" cried Alice, clapping her hands at the sight of the comfortable-looking sleighs. "Isn't this jolly, Ruth?"

"I'm sure it will be, yes. Come now, have you everything?"

"Everything, and more too!"

"Daddy, are you all right?" went on Ruth, for she had gotten into the habit, of late, of looking after her father, who seemed to lean on her more and more as she grew older.

"Everything, daughter," he replied. "And my throat feels much better. I think the cold air is doing it good."

"That's fine!" she laughed, happily. "Now I wonder which of these sleighs is ours?"

"I'll tell you in a minute," said Mr. Pertell. "I want to see the lodge-keeper. Oh, there he is! Hello, Jake Macksey!" he called to the sturdy man, in big boots, who was stalking about among the sleds, "is everything all right for us?"

"Everything, Mr. Pertell," was the hearty answer. "We'll have you out to Elk Lodge in a jiffy. My wife has got a lot of stuff cooked up, for she thought you'd be hungry."

"Indeed we are!" grumbled Mr. Sneed.

"But if dere iss stuff cooked I can safe mine pretzels!" chuckled Mr. Switzer.

The baggage was stowed in one sled, and in the others the members of the picture company distributed themselves.

"All right?" asked Jake Macksey, who was a veteran guide and hunter, and in charge of Elk Lodge.

"All ready!" answered Mr. Pertell.

"Drive lively now, boys!" called the hunter. "It's getting late, and will soon be dark, and the roads aren't any too good."

"Oh my!" groaned Mr. Sneed. "I'm sure something will happen!"

With cracks of the whips, and a jingling of sleighbells, the little cavalcade started off. The gloom settled slowly down, but Ruth and Alice helped dispel it by singing lively songs. Over the snow-covered road they went, now on a comparatively level place, and again down into some hollow where the drifts were deep. The horses pulled nobly.

They came to a narrow place in the road, where the snow was piled high on either side. There was room for but one sled at a time.

"I hope we don't meet anyone here," said Mr. Macksey. "If they do we'll have a hard job passing. G'lang there!" he called to his horses.

They were half-way through the snow defile, when the leading sleigh, in which rode Ruth and Alice, swerved to one side. There was a crashing sound, a splintering of wood, and the two forward horses went down in a heap.

"Whoa! Whoa!" called Mr. Macksey, as he reined in the others.

"What's happened?" asked Mr. DeVere.

"Some sort of a breakdown," answered the hunter.

"Serious?" the actor wanted to know, trying to peer ahead in the gloom.

"I can't tell yet," was the answer. "Here, can someone hold the reins while I get out?" he asked.

"I will," offered Russ, and he held the rear team. The horses who had fallen had struggled to their feet and were quiet now. But the front part of the sled seemed to have sagged into the snow.

"I thought so!" exclaimed Mr. Macksey, as he got up after peering under the vehicle. "No going on like this."

"What happened?" asked Alice.

"One of the forward runners has broken. There must have been a defect in it I didn't notice."

"Can't we go on?" asked Mr. Sneed.

"Not very well," was the answer. "We've broken down, and unfortunately we're the leading sleigh. I don't know how to get the others past it."

"Well, I knew something would happen," sighed the human grouch. And he seemed quite gratified that his prediction had been verified.

CHAPTER IX

THE BLIZZARD

The two other sleds had, as a matter of necessity, come to a halt behind the first one. The defile in the snow was so narrow that there could be no passing. Those who had broken the road through the drifts had not been wise enough to make a wide path, and now the consequences must be taken.

In fact it would have been a little difficult to make at this point a path wide enough for two sleighs. The road went between two rocky walls, and though in the summer, when there was no snow, two vehicles could squeeze past, in the winter the piling up of the snow on either side made an almost impassable barrier.

To turn out to right or left was out of the question, for the snow was so deep that the horses would have floundered helplessly in it.

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Mr. DeVere, as he buttoned his coat collar up around his neck, and looked at his two daughters.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you all to get out," said Mr. Macksey. "I want to get a better look at that broken runner, and see if it's possible to mend it. Bring up a lantern," he called to one of the drivers of the other sleds. "We'll soon need it."

The moving picture players in the broken-down sled piled out into the snow. Fortunately they had come prepared for rough weather, and wore stout shoes. Ruth and Alice, as well as Russ and Paul, laughed at the plight, and Mr. Switzer, with a chuckle, exclaimed:

"Ha! Maybe mine pretzels vill come in useful after all!"

"That's no joke—maybe they will," observed Mr. Sneed, gloomily. "We may have to stay here all night."

"Oh, we could walk to Elk Lodge if we had to," put in Mr. Macksey, as he took the lantern which the other driver brought up.

"It wouldn't be very pleasant," replied Mr. Sneed, "with darkness soon to be here, and a storm coming up."

"You're right about the storm, I'm afraid," answered the veteran hunter. "I don't like the looks of the weather a bit. And it sure will be dark soon. But we'll have a look at this sled," he went on. "Give me a hand here, Tom and Dick," he called to the other drivers, who had left their teams.

They managed to prop up the sled, so a better view could be had of the forward runner. Then the extent of the damage was made plain. One whole side had given way, and was useless. It could not even be patched up.

"Too bad!" declared the hunter. "Now, if it had only been the rear sled it wouldn't worry me so.

"For then we could pile the stuff from the back sled into the others, and go on, even if we were a bit crowded. But with the front sled blocking this narrow road, I don't see how we are to go on."

"If we could only jump the two rear sleds over this broken one, it would be all right," said Alice. "It's like one of those moving block puzzles, where you try to get the squares in a certain order without lifting any of them out."

"That's it," agreed Mr. Macksey. "But it's no easy matter to jump two big sleds, and eight horses, over another sled and four horses. I've played checkers, but never like that," he added.

"But we must do something," insisted Mr. Pertell. "I can't have my company out like this all night. We must get on to Elk Lodge, somehow."

"Well, I don't see how you're going to do it," responded the hunter. "You could walk, of course; but you couldn't take your baggage, and you wouldn't like that."

"Walk? Never! I protest against that!" exclaimed Mr. Bunn.

"'He doth protest too much!'" quoted Paul, in a low voice. "Come on, Ruth—Alice—shall we walk?"

"I'd like to do it—I'm getting cold standing here," cried Alice, stamping her feet on the edge of the road. "Will you, Ruth?"

"I'm afraid we'd better not—at least until we talk to daddy, my dear," was the low-voiced answer. "Perhaps they can get the sled fixed."

But it did not seem so, for Mr. Macksey, with a puzzled look on his face, was talking earnestly to the two drivers. The accident had happened at a most

unfortunate time and place.

"We can't even turn around and go back a different road, the way it is," said the hunter. "There isn't room to turn, and everybody knows you can't back a pung very far before getting stuck."

"Then what are we to do?" asked Mr. Pertell.

The hunter did not answer for a minute. Then he said:

"Well, we've got twelve horses here, and I can manage to squeeze the two rear teams past the stalled sled. Then if you'd like to take chances riding them to Elk Lodge——"

"Never!" cried Mr. Bunn, with lively recollections of a time he had ridden a mule at Oak Farm. "I shall stay here forever, first!"

"Well, if you don't want to do that," said Mr. Macksey, and to tell the truth few members of the company seemed in favor of the idea, "if you don't want to do that I might ride on ahead and get a spare sleigh I have at the Lodge. I could get back here before very late, and we'd get home sooner or later."

"And we would have to stay here?" asked Mr. DeVere.

"I see no help for it. There are plenty of blankets in the sleds, and you can huddle down in the straw and keep warm. I'll get back as soon as I can."

There really seemed nothing else to do, and, after talking it over, this plan was practically decided on. But something happened to change it. The wind had been rising constantly, and the snow was ever falling thicker and faster. The players could see only a little way ahead now from the place where they were stalled.

"This would make a good film, if you could get it," remarked Paul to Russ.

"Too dark," replied the camera operator. "Do you know, I don't like this," he went on in a low voice to the young actor.

"You don't like what?" Paul wanted to know.

"The way this weather is acting. I think there's going to be a big storm, and here we are, stalled out in the open. It will be hard for the girls and the women, to say nothing of Tommy and Nellie."

"That's what it will, Russ; but what can be done?"

As he spoke there came a sudden fierce rush of wind and a flurry of snow. It took the breaths of all, and instinctively they turned from it, for the snow stung their faces. The horses, too, disliked to face the stinging blast, and shifted their places.

"Get behind such shelter as you can!" cried Mr. Macksey, above the roar of the storm. "This is a genuine blizzard and it's death to be unprotected. Get into the sleds, and cover up with the blankets. I'll have to go for help!"

CHAPTER X

AT ELK LODGE

The warning by Mr. Macksey, no less than the sudden blast of the storm, struck terror to the hearts of not only the moving picture girls, but to all the other players. For it was something to which they were not used—that terrible sweep of wind and blinding snow.

There had been heavy storms in New York, but there the big buildings cut off the force of the wind, except perhaps in some street canyon. But in the backwoods, on this stretch of open fields, there was no protection except that furnished by nature; or, in this case, by the sleds.

For a moment after the veteran hunter had called his warning no one moved. They all seemed paralyzed by fear. Then Mr. Macksey called again:

"Into shelter, every one of you! What do you mean; standing there in this storm? Get under the blankets—crouch down at the side of the sleds. I'll go for help." [80]

"But you—you'll freeze to death—I can't permit you to go!" protested Mr. Pertell, yelling the words into the other's ear, to make himself heard above the storm.

"No, I'm used to this sort of thing!" the hunter replied. "I know a short cut to the lodge, and I can protect myself against the wind. I'll go."

"I don't like it!" repeated Mr. Pertell, while Mr. Macksey was forcing him back toward the protecting sled.

Meanwhile the others, now, if never before, feeling the need of shelter, were struggling through the blinding snow toward the broken sled, from which they had wandered a short time before while listening to the attempts made at solving the problem of getting on.

"Isn't this awful!" gasped Ruth, as she clung to Alice.

"Awful? It's just glorious!" cried the young girl. "I wouldn't have missed it for worlds."

"Oh, Alice, how can you say so? We may all die in this terrible storm!"

"I'm not going to think anything of the kind!" returned the other. "We'll get out of it, somehow, and laugh at ourselves afterward for being so silly as to be afraid. Oh, this is great!"

She was really glorying in the fierce outburst of nature. Perhaps she did not understand, or appreciate, it, for she had never seen anything like it before, and in this case ignorance might have been akin to bliss.

But the others, especially the drivers of the two sleds, with anxious looks on their cold faces, were trying to seek the shelter they so much needed, and also look to the restless horses. For the animals were now almost frantic with their desire to get away from that cutting wind and stinging snow.

"Unhitch 'em all!" roared Mr. Macksey to his men. "Take the horses from the sleds and get 'em back of as much shelter as you can find. Otherwise they may bolt and upset something. I'll take old Bald-face, and see if I can't get some kind of help."

Though what sort of aid he could bring to the picture actors in this time of storm and stress he hardly knew. But he was not going to give up without trying.

Ruth and Alice were trying to struggle back through the snow to their sled, and not making very successful work of it, when they felt arms at their sides helping them, and Russ and Paul came along.

"Fierce; isn't it!" cried Russ in Ruth's ear.

"Awful, and yet this sister of mine pretends that she likes it."

"I do!" declared Alice. "It's glorious. I can't really believe it's a blizzard."

"It's the beginning of one, though," Paul assured her. "I hear the drivers saying so. Their blizzards up here start in with a squall like this, and soon develop into a bad storm. This isn't at its worst yet."

"Well, I hope I see the worst of it!" said Alice.

"Oh, how can you so tempt fate?" asked Ruth, seriously.

"I'm not tempting fate, but I mean I do like to see a great storm—that is, if I'm protected, as I am now," and Alice laughed through the whirling snow into Paul's face, for he had wrapped a fold of his big ulster about her.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Ruth.

"What's the matter?" asked Russ, anxiously.

"I'm so worried."

"Don't be—yet," he said, reassuringly.

"But we may be snowed in here for a week!"

"Never mind—Mr. Switzer still has his pretzels, I believe."

She could not help laughing, in spite of their distress.

"Oh, poor daddy!" cried Alice, as she reached the sled, and Paul prepared to help her in, "he is trying to protect his poor throat." Mr. DeVere wore a heavy coat, the collar of which he had turned up, but even this seemed little protection, and he was now tying a silk handkerchief about his collar.

"I have the very thing for him!" cried Paul, taking off a muffler he wore.

"Oh, but you'll need that!" protested Alice, quickly.

"Not a bit of it—I'm as warm as toast," he answered. "Here you are, sir!" he called to Mr. DeVere, and when the latter, after a weak resistance, had accepted it (for he was really suffering from the cold), Alice thanked Paul with a look that more than repaid him for his knightly self-sacrifice.

The players were by now in the sled, which, in its damaged condition, had been let down as nearly level as possible. The blankets were pulled up over the side, and Mr. Macksey was preparing to unhitch one of the horses, and set off for help. Then one of the drivers gave a sudden cry, and came running up to his employer.

"Look!" he shouted. "The wind's shifted. It's blowing right across the top of this cut now. We'll be protected down here!"

This was indeed true. At the beginning of the squall, which was working up to a blizzard, the wind had swept up the canyon-like defile between the hills of earth and snow. But now the direction of the gale had shifted and was sweeping across the top of the depression. Thus those at the bottom were, in a measure, protected from the blast.

"By hickory!" exclaimed Mr. Macksey, "that's right. The wind has changed. Folks, you'll be all right for a while down here, until I can get help."

"Must you go?" asked Ruth, for now they could talk with more ease.

Indeed, so fiercely was the snow sweeping across the top of the gulch that little of it fell into the depression.

"Oh, sure, I've got to get help," the hunter said. "You folks can't stay here all night, even if the wind continues to blow across the top, which makes it much better."

"Indeed and I will not stay here all night!" protested Mr. Bunn. "I most strenuously object to it."

"And so do I!" growled Mr. Sneed. "There is no need of it. I might have known something unpleasant would happen. I had a feeling in my bones that it would."

"Well, you'll have a freezing feeling in your bones if I don't get help," observed Mr. Macksey, grimly.

"And I am hungry, too," went on Mr. Sneed. "Why was not food brought with us in anticipation of this emergency?"

"Haf a pretzel!" offered Mr. Switzer, holding one out.

"Away with the vile thing!" snapped Mr. Sneed.

Mr. Macksey was about to leap on the back of the horse and start off, when the same driver who had noticed the change in the wind called out:

"I say, Mr. Macksey, I have a plan."

"What is it?"

"Maybe you won't have to go for help, after all. Why can't we take the forward bob from under the rear sled and put it in place of the broken one on the first sled? We can easily pass the bob by the second sled even if the place is narrow."

"By hickory! Why didn't you think of that before?" demanded the hunter. "Of course we can do it! Lively now, and we'll make the change. Got to be quick, or it'll be pitch dark."

It would have been very dark long ago had it not been for the snow, which gave a sort of reflected light.

"Come on!" cried Mr. Macksey. "We'll make the change. I guess I'll have to ask you folks to get out again," he said to the players in the first sled. "But

it won't be for long. We'll have a good runner in place of the broken one, and then we can pile into two sleds and get into Elk Lodge. We'll leave the last sled until to-morrow."

"But what about our baggage?" asked Miss Pennington. "That is in the rear sled. Can we take that with us?"

"Not all of it," answered the hunter, "but you can crowd in as much as possible. The rest can wait."

"I want *all* of mine," declared the former vaudeville actress.

"So do I!" cried Miss Dixon.

"You'll be lucky if you get in out of this storm," said Mr. Pertell reprovingly, "to say nothing about baggage. Do the best you can, Mr. Macksey."

"I will. Come now, men, lively!"

It took some little time to make the change, but finally the work was done.

The broken runner was cast aside, and there were now two good sleds, one ahead of the other in the snowy defile. As much of the needed baggage as possible was transferred, and the four horses that had been on the rear sled were brought up and hitched to the remaining sleds—two to each so that each conveyance now had six animals attached to it.

"And by hickory!" exclaimed Mr. Macksey, that appearing to be his favorite expression, "By hickory, we'll need 'em all!"

They were now ready to set forth, and all rather dreaded going out into the open again, for the defile offered a good shelter from the storm. But it had to be done, for it was out of the question to stay there all night.

"Go 'long!" called the hunter, as he shook the long reins of his six horses, and cracked the whip with a report like a pistol. But the lash did not fall on the backs of the ready animals. Mr. Macksey never beat his horses—they were willing enough without that.

Lanterns had been lighted and hung on the sleds, to shed their warning rays through the storm. They now gleamed fitfully through the fast-falling snow.

"Are you feeling better now, Daddy?" asked Ruth of her father, as she

glanced anxiously at him.

"Much better, yes. I am afraid I ought to give you back your muffler, Paul," he added.

"No indeed—please keep it," begged the young actor.

Alice reached beneath the blanket and pressed his hand in appreciation.

"Thanks," he laughed.

"It is I who thank you," she returned, softly.

They were now out in the open road, and the fury of the blast struck them with all its cruel force.

"Keep covered up!" shouted Mr. Macksey, through the visor of his cap, which was pulled down over his face. "We'll be there pretty soon."

On through the drifts plunged the straining horses. It was all six of them could do, pull as they might, to make their way. How cruelly the wind cut, and how the snow flakes stung! Soft as they really were, the wind gave them the feeling of pieces of sand and stone.

On through the storm went the delayed party. And then, when each one, in spite of his or her fortitude, was almost giving up in despair at the cold and the anxiety Mr. Macksey shouted out;

"Whoa! Here we are! All out for Elk Lodge!"

CHAPTER XI

THROUGH THE ICE

Warming, comforting beams of light shone from a large, low building set back from the road in a little clearing of the woods. It was too dark to see more than this—that the structure offered shelter, warmth and light. Yes, and something else, for there was borne on the wings of the wind the most delicious odor—the odor of supper.

"Pile out, folks! Pile out!" cried the genial old hunter. "Here we are! At Elk Lodge! No more storm! No more cold! Get inside to the blaze. I reckon mother's about given us up; but we're here, and we won't do a thing to her cooking! Pile out!"

It was an invitation that needed no repetition. It was greeted with a merry shout, even Mr. Sneed, the grouch, condescending to say:

"Ah, that sounds good!"

"Ha! Den if dere iss food to eat I dinks me dot I don't need to eat my pretzels. I can safe dem for annoder time!" cried Mr. Switzer, as he got out.[90]

There was a laugh at this, and it was added to when Mr. Bunn called out in his deepest tragic voice:

"Ha! Someone has my silk hat!"

For he had persisted in wearing that in the storm, though it was most uncomfortable.

"It is gone!" he added. "Stolen, mayhap. Has anyone seen it?"

"Probably blew off," said Russ. "We'll find it—when the snow melts!"

Wellington Bunn groaned—again tragically.

"I'll get you another," offered Mr. Pertell, generously.

"Come on, folks! Pile out!" cried Mr. Macksey again.

"I'm so stiff I can hardly move!" declared Ruth.

"So am I," added Alice. "Oh, but it's good to be here!"

"I thought you liked the storm so," observed Ruth.

"I do, but I like supper too, and I think it must be ready."

Out of the sleds climbed the cold and cramped picture players, all thought of the fierce storm now forgotten.

"Go right in," invited Mr. Macksey. "Supper's waiting!"

"Welcome to Elk Lodge!" called a motherly voice, and Mrs. Macksey appeared in the open door of the main corridor. "Come right in!"

They were glad enough to do it.

"I don't know any of you, except Russ and Mr. Pertell," she said, for the manager and his helper had paid a visit to the place sometime before to make arrangements about using it.

"You'll soon know all of 'em," declared Mr. Pertell with a laugh. "I'll introduce you," which he quickly did.

"Now then, I expect you'll want to wash up," went on the hunter's wife. "I'll have the girl show you to your different rooms, and then you can come down to supper. It's been waiting. What kept you? I'll have to ask you folks because it's like pulling teeth to get any news out of my husband. What happened?"

"A breakdown," explained Ruth, who took an instant liking to motherly Mrs. Macksey. "Oh, we had such a time!"

"Such a glorious time!" supplemented Alice.

"Here's a girl who evidently likes outdoors," laughed the hunter's wife.

"Indeed I do!" cried Alice.

There was some little confusion, getting the players to their rooms, because of the lateness of the arrival, but finally each one was in his or her appointed apartment, and trying to get settled. The rooms were small but comfortable, and the hunters who had built the lodge for themselves had provided many comforts.

"There ought to be a private bath for each one," declared Miss Pennington, as she surveyed her room.

"Indeed there ought," agreed her friend Miss Dixon. "I think this place is

horrid!"

"How thoughtless and selfish they are," said Ruth, who shared a room with Alice.

"Aren't they! I think it's lovely here. Oh, but I am so hungry!"

"So am I, dear."

"Glad to hear it for once, Ruth. Usually you have so little appetite that one would think you were in love."

"Silly! I'm going to eat to-night anyhow."

"Does that mean you are *not* in love?"

"Silly!" cried Ruth again, but that was all she answered.

What a glorious and home-like place Elk Lodge was! Yes, even better than the best home the moving picture girls had known most of their lives, for they had spent part of the time boarding, as their father traveled about with his theatrical company, and who can compare a home to a boarding house?

Down in the big living room a fire burned and crackled, and gave out spicy odors on the great hearth that took in logs six feet long. And how cheerfully and ruddily the blaze shone out! It mellowed and cheered everyone. Even Mr. Sneed smiled, and stretched out his hands to the leaping flames.

As Ruth and Alice were about to go down, having called to their father across the hall that they were ready for him, there came a knock on their door.

"Come in!" invited Ruth.

"Sorry to trouble you," spoke Miss Pennington, "but have you any cold cream and—er—powder? Our things were left in the other sled—I mean all of those things, and Laura and I can't—we simply can't get along without them."

"I have cold cream," said Alice. "But powder—that is unless it's talcum or rice——"

"That will have to do I guess," sighed the vaudeville actress. "But I did hope you had a bit of rouge, I'm so pale!"

"Never use it!" said Alice quickly. Too quickly, hospitable Ruth thought, for, though she decried the use of "paint," she would not be rude to a guest,

and, under these circumstances Miss Pennington was a guest.

"You don't need it," the caller said, with a glance at Alice's glowing cheeks, to whom the wind and snow had presented two damask spots that were most becoming.

"The weather is very chapping to my face," the former vaudeville actress went on. "I really must have something," and she departed with the cold cream and some harmless rice powder, which Ruth and Alice used judiciously and sparingly, and only when needed.

The fine supper, late as it was, necessarily, was enjoyed to the utmost. It was bountiful and good, and though at first Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon were inclined to sniff at the lack of "courses," and the absence of lobster, it was noticed that they ate heartily.

"There is only one thing more I want," sighed Paul, as he leaned back in his chair.

"What, pray? It seems to me, and I have been watching you, that you have had about all that is good for you," laughed Alice. "I have seen you get three separate and distinct helpings of fried chicken."

"Oh, I didn't mean anything more to eat," he said, quickly, "and if you are going to watch me so closely I shall have to cut down my rations, I fear. What I meant was that I would like a moving picture of this supper. It has memories that long will linger, but I fain would have a souvenir of it."

"Be careful that you don't get indigestion as a souvenir," laughed Alice, as he followed her sister from the table.

The dining room opened off the great living apartment with that wonderful fire, and following the meal all the members of the company gathered about the hearth.

Outside the storm still raged, and Mr. Macksey, who came in from having with his men, put away the horses, reported that the blizzard was growing worse.

"It's a good thing we thought of changing the bobs and coming on," he said. "Otherwise we might be there yet."

"What really happened?" asked his wife. "I was telling one of the young ladies that it was like pulling teeth to get any news out of you."

"Oh, we just had a little breakdown," he said. "Now, folks, just make yourselves at home. Go to bed when you like, get up when you please. I'll try and get the rest of your baggage here some time to-morrow, if this storm lets up."

"I hope you do get it," complained Miss Pennington.

"Selfish thing!" whispered Alice. "All she wants is her paint!"

"Hush," cautioned Ruth. "She'll hear you!"

"I don't care," voiced her sister.

They talked of many things as they sat about the fire, and then Mr. Pertell said:

"We will film no dramas while the storm continues, but as soon as we can get out on the ice I want to start one."

"Is there skating about here?" asked Alice, who was very fond of the sport.

"There's a fine lake back of the lodge," replied Mr. Macksey, "and as soon as the storm lets up I'll have the men clear a place of snow, and you can have all the fun you want."

"Oh, joy!" cried Alice.

"Save me the first skate," whispered Paul to her, and she nodded acquiescence.

Mr. Pertell briefly outlined the drama he expected to film on the ice, and then, after a little more talk, every one voted that bed was the best place in the world. For the wind had made them all sleepy, and they were tired out from the storm and their long journey.

Alice and Ruth went up to their room. Alice pulled aside the curtain from the window and looked out on a scene of swirling whiteness. The flakes dashed against the pane as though knocking for admission.

"It's a terrible night," said Ruth, with a little shiver.

"Well, much as I like weather, I wouldn't want to be out in it long," Alice confessed. "Elk Lodge is a very good place in a blizzard."

"Suppose we got snowed in?" asked Ruth, apprehensively.

"Then we'll dig our way out—simple answer. Oh dear!" and Alice yawned luxuriously, if not politely, showing her pretty teeth.

In spite of the portentous nature of the storm, it was not fully borne out, and morning saw the sun shining on the piles of snow that had fallen. There had been a considerable quantity sifted down on what was already about Elk Lodge, but there was not enough to hinder traffic for the sturdy lumbermen and hunters of that region.

The wind had died down, and it was not cold, so when Mr. Macksey announced that he was going back after the broken-down sleigh, Ruth and Alice asked permission to accompany him.

Before starting off Mr. Macksey had set a gang of men, hired for the occasion, to scraping the snow off the frozen lake, and when Ruth and Alice came back they found several of the picture players skating, while Russ was getting ready to film one of the first scenes of the drama.

"You're in this, Mr. Sneed," said the manager. "You are supposed to be skating along, when you trip and fall breaking your leg——"

"Hold on—stop—break my leg! Never!" cried the grouchy actor.

"Of course you don't really injure yourself!" exclaimed the manager, testily.

"Oh, why did I ever come to this miserable place!" sighed Mr. Sneed. "I despise cold weather!"

But there was no help for it. Soon he was on the steel runners gliding about, while Russ filmed him. Mr. Sneed was a good skater, and was not averse to "showing off."

"All ready, now!" called the manager to him. "Get that fall in right there. Russ, be ready for him!"

"Oh!" groaned the actor. "Here I go!"

And, as luck would have it, he, at that moment, tripped on a stick, and fell in earnest. It was much better done than if he had simulated it.

But something else happened. He fell so heavily, and at a spot where there was a treacherous air hole, that, the next instant Mr. Sneed broke through the ice, and was floundering in the chilly water.

CHAPTER XII

THE CURIOUS DEER

"Quick! A rope!"

"No, boards are better!"

"Fence rails will do!"

"Oh, get him out, someone!"

These were only some of the cries uttered, following the accident to Mr. Sneed. Meanwhile he was doing his best to keep himself above water by grasping the edge of the ice.

But it crumbled in his fingers, and he was so shocked by the sudden immersion, and by the cold, and his skates were so heavy on his feet, that he went down again and again. Fortunately the lake was not deep at that point, and as he went down his feet would touch bottom, and he could spring up again.

"Don't go out there!" warned Mr. Pertell, as Paul started for the spot.

"Why not?" asked the young actor.

"Because the ice is probably thin all around that place. I don't want two of you in. Hold on, Mr. Sneed!" he cried to the desperate actor. "We'll have you out in no time!"

"Shall I get this?" cried Russ, who had not deserted his camera, even as a gunner will not leave his cannon, nor a captain his ship. More than once brave moving picture operators have stood in the face of danger to get rare views.

"Yes, get every motion of it!" cried the manager.

"But it isn't in the play!"

"I don't care! We'll write it in afterward. You get the pictures and we'll rescue Mr. Sneed. Hi, there, Mr. Bunn, you must help with this. Get some fence rails! We can slide them out on the ice and they will distribute the weight so that the ice will hold us."

"But where will I get fence rails?" asked the actor.

"Oh, gnaw them out of a tree!" cried Mr. Pertell, who was much disturbed and nervous. "Don't you see that fence?" he cried, pointing to one not far off. "Get some rails from that. And then get in the picture!"

"Oh, such a life!" groaned Mr. Bunn.

"This is to save a life!" the manager reminded him.

And while Russ continued to make moving pictures of the unexpected scene, the others set about the work of rescue. Later this could be interpolated in the drama to make it appear as though it had all been arranged in advance.

"Hurry with those rails!" called Mr. Pertell to Mr. Bunn. "He can't stay in that icy water forever."

Some of the men who had been working at removing the snow now came up with ropes and trace chains. Then, when the rails were spread out on the ice, near the air hole, the rescuers were able to get near enough to throw the ends of several lines to Mr. Sneed. He managed to grasp one, and, a moment later was hauled out on the ice.

"I—I—I'm c-c-c-cold!" he stammered, as he stood with the icy water dripping from him.

"Shouldn't wonder but what you were," agreed Mr. Pertell. "Now the thing for you to do is to run to the Lodge as fast as you can. Here, Mr. Bunn, you and Paul run alongside him, with a hold on either arm. We'll call this film 'A Modern Pickwick,' instead of what we planned. In Dickens' story there's a scene somewhat like this. We'll change the whole thing about.

"Russ, you go on ahead, and when Paul and Mr. Bunn come along with Mr. Sneed, you get them as they run."

"All right," assented the young moving picture operator, as he kept on grinding away at the crank.

Exercise was the best thing to restore the circulation of the actor who had fallen into the water, and he soon had plenty of it. With Paul on one side, and Mr. Bunn on the other, he was raced back to Elk Lodge, and there he was supplied plentifully with hot lemonade to ward off a cold. Russ got interior pictures of these scenes as well, and later the film made a great success.

"In view of the accident, and the fact that you are all more or less upset," said Mr. Pertell, when some of the excitement had calmed down, "we will give up work for the rest of the day. You may do as you please until to-morrow."

"Then I'm going for a walk," cried Alice.

"I'm with you," spoke Paul, "only we ought to have snowshoes."

"Oh, could we get any?" she cried.

"I can arrange for some for you," promised Mr. Macksey, "but I haven't any now."

"Good idea!" exclaimed the manager. "An idea for a new film—'The Snowshoe Rescue!' Here, Russ, make some notes of this for future use," and he began to dictate to the young operator, who with his employer frequently thus improvised dramas out of a mere suggestion.

"If you want to walk," said Mr. Macksey to Alice, "you'd better stick to the road. The men have been out with homemade snowplows breaking a trail. That's what we do around here after a storm. You'd better stick to the road."

"We will!" cried Alice. "Will you come, Ruth?"

"Later perhaps—not now. I want to study a new part I have."

"I suppose you're waiting for Russ," whispered Alice.

"Don't be silly!" flashed Ruth. But she did not go out with her sister.

Alice and Paul had a glorious walk in the snow, and saw a beautiful country, even though it was hidden under a mantle of white. For Deerfield was a lovely place.

"Aren't you cold?" asked Ruth, when her sister returned.

"Not a bit. It's glorious. What did you do, and how is Mr. Sneed?"

"He's doing nicely, I believe. As for me, I stayed in. I had some mending to do."

"Is that why Russ has threads on his coat sleeve—was it his coat you were mending?"

"Oh, Alice—you are hopeless!" protested Ruth, but she blushed vividly.

That afternoon, as Mrs. Macksey was overseeing the getting of supper, Alice, who went to the kitchen for something, heard the veteran hunter and his wife in conversation.

"You say they are strangers about here?" he asked.

"Yes, three men. I saw them after you had gone to the station to get the moving picture folks. There were three men, and I think they were after deer."

"After deer, eh? Don't they know that this is a private preserve?"

"They didn't seem to care. They came to ask their direction. They all had guns, and I'm sure they were after deer."

"And you never saw them before?"

"No, I never did."

"And you have no idea where they came from?"

"I couldn't tell—no. I heard one of them ask the other if he thought it was safe."

"If what was safe?"

"He didn't say. Maybe he meant to hunt deer around here."

"It won't be safe if I catch them!" declared Mr. Macksey, as he went out. Alice wondered who the men could be.

It was so quiet and peaceful at Elk Lodge that Mr. DeVere soon forgot all about the annoyance caused by the demand of Dan Merley for the five hundred dollars. At first he had expected some sort of legal summons in a suit, but when none came he breathed easier.

Several days passed, and a few snow scenes were filmed to be used later, and worked into dramas. Mr. Sneed suffered a little cold from his unexpected bath, but that was all.

Meanwhile the weather had remained about the same. There was plenty of snow, but no more storms. Elk Lodge was voted the finest place in the world, and even Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon condescended to say that they liked it.

Then, one day, plans were made for filming a little drama in the snowy woods, and thither many members of the company went to act.

Ruth was supposed to be lost in a dense thicket, and Paul was soon on his way to find her, in the guise of a woodman. He had sighted Ruth, over a clump of bushes, and was making his way to her, when he heard her scream. This was not in the play and he wondered what could have happened.

"Quick!" he heard her cry. "He's going to jump at me!"

Paul broke into a run, and the next moment saw a deer, with large, branching antlers, spring through the underbrush directly in front of Ruth, while Russ, at the camera, yelled to drive away the curious animal.

CHAPTER XIII

THE COASTING RACE

"Oh, I'm so frightened!" cried Ruth.

"Don't be alarmed!" Russ called to her, while he continued to grind away at the camera. "He won't hurt you. This will make a dandy picture! I'm going to film the deer."

"Oh, but suppose he jabs me with his horns?" wailed Ruth, who was not quite so alarmed now. "They are terribly sharp."

"Don't worry!" Russ answered. "This is coming out great. The deer was just the one thing needed to make this film a success."

"Then I won't spoil it by coming in now!" called Paul, who was keeping out of the focus of the camera by crouching down behind some bushes. He had heard what Russ said, and had given up his plan of rushing to rescue Ruth. Evidently there was no need.

The deer, strange to say, did not seem at all alarmed, and stood gazing at Ruth with great brown eyes. She too, realizing that she was not to be harmed, acted more naturally now, and with an appreciation of what was needed to make the film a proper one.

She first "registered" fear, and then delighted surprise, at seeing the animal.

I might explain that in making moving pictures certain directions are given to the actors. As they can not depend on speaking words to let the audiences know what is going on, they must intimate, by appropriate gesture, or facial expression, the action of the play. This is called "registering," and when in the directions, or scenario, an actor or actress is told to "register" fear, surprise, anger, love, jealousy—in fact any of the emotions—he or she knows what is meant.

In this case Ruth was without specific directions save those called out by Russ. And often, in an emergency a good moving picture camera operator can save a film from being spoiled by improvising some "stage directions," if I may call them such.

"Shall I approach him, Russ?" Ruth asked, as she saw that the deer showed no intentions of fleeing.

"Yes, if he'll let you. It will make a dandy scene."

"Not too close," cautioned Paul, who was still out of sight behind the bushes, waiting until he could properly come into the scene. "He might accidentally hit you with a sweep of his horns."

"I'll be careful," answered Ruth. "I believe the poor thing is hungry."

"If we only had something to feed him!" exclaimed Russ. "That would work in fine."

"I have some lumps of sugar," said Ruth, speaking with her head turned aside. The reason for this was that she did not want the movement of her lips to show on the film, and the camera will catch and fix even that slight motion.

The reason Ruth spoke aside was because the little scene was being improvised, and she had no proper lines to speak. And, as I have already explained, often persons in the audience of a moving picture theatre are able to understand what is said, merely by watching the lips of the performers on the screen.

"Sugar! Good!" cried Russ. "See if he'll take it. I don't know what deer like best, but if they're anything like horses they'll revel in sugar. Go ahead!"

Ruth had in her pocket some lumps she had intended giving to the horses attached to the sleds in which they had come to the woods. She now took out some of these and held them out to the timid deer.

The beautiful creature, made bold, perhaps, by hunger, came a step nearer.

"Oh, that's fine!" cried Russ, squinting through the focusing tube to get clear, sharp impressions on the film. "Keep at it, Ruth."

The deer came nearer, thrusting forth its velvet nose. It sniffed at the sugar Ruth held, and then put out its lips and tongue and picked up the lumps.

"Fine!" cried Russ. "Maybe he'd like salt better, for I've read of salt-licks that animals visit, but sugar will do on a pinch; won't it, old fellow?"

Perhaps it was the loud, laughing voice that Russ used, or it may have been because there was no more sugar, but, at any rate, the deer, after taking the sweet lumps gave a sudden turn, and rushed off through the bushes, going

rather slowly because of the deep snow.

Russ caught every motion of the graceful creature, however, and called out to Ruth to pose with her hand shaded over her eyes, as though she were looking after the deer. She did this, and that ended the little scene with the timid woodland creature, who, if he ever saw moving pictures, would doubtless be very much surprised to perceive a presentment of himself on the screen.

"Come on now, Paul!" called Russ, indicating to the young actor to show himself so that he would get into the picture.

The other players who had come up on hearing Ruth call out were now ready for their parts in the play. They had kept out of sight of the camera, however, so as not to spoil the picture.

"Very well done!" declared Mr. Pertell, when Ruth had finished her part in the play. "That deer will make a very effective picture, I think."

"It was a dear deer!" punned Alice, and the others laughed.

On the way back to Elk Lodge the manager made an announcement that interested all in the company, the young people especially.

"I have a drama," he said, "that calls for a coasting race in one scene. I wonder if we couldn't do that to-morrow."

"Oh, riding down hill!" cried Alice, with girlish enthusiasm. "What fun! May I steer a bob?"

"Alice, you never could!" cried Ruth.

"Pooh! I've done it lots of times!" her sister answered.

"Yes, when you were a little girl, perhaps, with two sleds held together," laughed Mr. Pertell. "This will be different. Mr. Macksey tells me he has two big, old-fashioned bobsleds in one of the barns. Now I think we can get up two parties and have a big coasting race. The play calls for it, and the young men who steer the bobs are rivals for the hand of the same girl. She has made a condition that whoever gets first to the bottom of the big hill may marry her. So you see the plan of the play."

"Me for a bob!" cried Paul.

"I wish I didn't have to film the play—I'd steer one, too!" exclaimed Russ,

with a look at Ruth that made her blush.

"Must I get into this silly coasting play?" asked Mr. Bunn.

"You surely must," answered Mr. Pertell. "And I want to warn you of one thing—you are not to wear a high hat—it would only blow off and embarrass you."

"Not wear my high hat? Then I refuse to take part!" cried the tragic actor.

But Mr. Pertell paid no attention to him, for he had heard the same thing before.

The details of the coasting race were discussed on the way to Elk Lodge, and it was arranged that a partial rehearsal should be held next day.

That night, as Alice and Ruth were going to bed rather early, on account of the wearying work of the day, they heard voices out in the hall near their room.

"Listen!" warned Alice, raising her finger, for Ruth was talking.

"It's Mr. and Mrs. Macksey," said Ruth.

"I know. But what are they saying? It's something about those strange hunters who were seen about here once before."

Mr. Macksey, who had been summoned to the upper hall by his wife to fix a broken window, was speaking in his deep voice.

"So those fellows were around again; eh?" he asked.

"Yes, and I don't like it, Jake," Mrs. Macksey replied. "You know what it means if they kill any of the club deer. It may cost you your place here. The members of the club may say you were not careful enough."

"That's so, wife. I reckon I'd better look after those chaps. If they're trespassing on Elk Lodge I can have them arrested anyhow."

The next day was clear and calm, just right for taking pictures, and after breakfast the entire company went out on the hill where the bobsled race was to take place.

The hill had been prepared in advance by men from Elk Lodge, so that the sleds would attain good speed. The snow had been packed down, and a place made for Russ to set up his camera.

"Paul, you will steer one bob," said Mr. Pertell, as he was arranging the affair, "and Mr. Sneed will take the other."

"What, me steer a bobsled down that hill?" cried the grouchy actor, as he looked at the steep slope.

"Of course," said the manager.

"Something is sure to happen," declared Mr. Sneed.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Pertell. "All you have to do is to keep the wheel steady."

The company of players, with a number of men from Elk Lodge, added to fill the bobs, now divided themselves into two parties. Ruth was to go on the sled with Mr. Sneed, and sit directly behind him so as to show well in the camera. Alice was to ride next to Paul on the other sled. The bobs were long ones, with bells and large steering wheels in front.

"All ready?" called Mr. Pertell, when the players were seated.

"All ready!" cried Russ, indicating that the camera was prepared.

"Go!" ordered the manager, and the men detailed to push the bobs shoved them ahead. The moving picture coasting race was on.

CHAPTER XIV

ON SNOWSHOES

"Here we go!"

"Hold on tight, everybody!"

"Let's see if we can't win!"

With shouts and laughter the merry coasters thus enlivened the race down hill. In order to make the moving pictures appear as realistic as possible Mr. Pertell had told the players to forget, for the time being, that they were actors, and to imagine that they were just boys and girls, out for a real frolic.

"And I'm sure I feel like one!" cried Alice, as she clung to the sides of the bob, where she sat behind Paul.

"That's the way to talk!" he laughed. "Look out for yourself now, we're going to bump!"

At that moment they came to a "thank-ye-ma'am," as they are called in the country.

This is a ridge, or bump in the road, made to keep the rain water from rushing down the highway too fast. The ridge turns the water to one side. [115

As Paul spoke the sled reached this place, rose into the air, and came down heavily.

"Gracious!" cried Alice. "I was nearly bounced off!"

"I warned you!" laughed Paul. "There's another one just below. Watch out for it."

Paul's sled was a little ahead of the one steered by Mr. Sneed, and the latter was unaware of the treacherous nature of the road. So he did not warn his fellow coasters. The result was that two of those on the rear fell off, but as they landed in soft snow they were not hurt.

"All the better!" cried Russ, who was making the pictures. "That will add to it. Keep going, Mr. Sneed!"

"If I go much farther I'll fall off!" cried the grouchy actor. "I can't hold on much longer!"

"You've got to!" ordered Mr. Pertell. "I'm not going to have this picture spoiled."

"Please don't fall off, whatever you do!" cried Ruth, who was back of Mr. Sneed. "That would leave me to do the steering and I don't know the first thing about it."

"Well, I'll do my best," he said, as graciously as he could. "Certainly I don't want to make trouble for you, Miss DeVere."

"Thank you," she said, and then as she looked ahead and saw another bump in the road, she cried:

"Look out! We're going to hit it."

Now Mr. Sneed was still suffering from the effects of the first bump, and not wishing to repeat it he sought to avoid the second by steering to one side. But in steering a long and heavy bobsled, well-laden with coasters, there is one thing to be remembered. That is, it must not be steered too suddenly to one side, for it has a propensity to "skid" worse than an automobile.

This was what happened in the case of Mr. Sneed. He turned the steering wheel suddenly, the bobsled slewed to one side, and, in another instant, had upset.

"Oh, dear!"

"We'll be killed!"

These two expressions came respectively from Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon. Some of the men cried out and a number of the girls screamed; but, after all, no one was hurt, for the snow was soft and luckily the bob rolled to one side, not hitting anyone.

The moment he realized that it was about to capsize Mr. Sneed let go of the steering wheel, and gave a jump which carried him out of harm's way, so the only mishap he suffered was a rather severe shaking up, and being covered with snow. Considerable of the white stuff got in his mouth.

"Wuff!" he spluttered. "I—gurr—will never—burr—steer—another—whew—sled!"

By this time he had cleared his mouth of snow, and repeated his determination, without the interruptions and stutterings.

"Did you get that spill, Russ?" asked Mr. Pertell, who could not keep from laughing.

"Every move of it; yes, sir!"

"Good. I think we can make use of it, though it wasn't in the scenario. But we'll have to start over again. I want to get a good close finish."

"What's that you said?" asked Mr. Sneed, as he dusted the snow from his clothes, and looked at the overturned bob.

"I said," repeated the manager, "that we'd have to do the coasting scene over again, as I wanted to show a close finish of the two sleds at the foot of the hill, and now we can't, for one is down there, and the other is up here."

This was true enough, since Paul had steered his sled properly, and had reached the foot of the slope, where he and the others waved to their less fortunate competitors.

"Well, you can have the race over again if you like," said Mr. Sneed, with decision, "but I am not going to steer. I knew something would happen if I steered a bob."

"Well, you were right—for once," conceded Mr. Pertell, with a smile. "And perhaps you are right not to want to steer again. It may not be safe."

"I'll do it!" offered Mr. Switzer. "In der old country yet I haf steered sleds bigger yet as dis von."

"All right, you may try," said Mr. Pertell. "Now then, is anyone hurt?"

"I am not, I'm glad to say," laughed Ruth, who was brushing the snow from her garments. "But it was a narrow escape."

"Indeed it was!" snapped Miss Dixon. "It was all your fault, too, Mr. Sneed!"

"My fault, how?"

"You steered to one side too quickly. Don't you try that, Mr. Switzer."

"Indeed und I vill not. You can trust me!"

"Get ready then," ordered Mr. Pertell. "Come on back!" he called to Paul and his companions at the foot of the hill.

As the story in which the coasting race figured would have to be changed to make the accident fit in, Mr. Pertell had Russ get all the incidental scenes he could, showing the overturned bob being righted, the coasters getting ready for the new race, and the other bob being pulled up hill.

Once more the rival coasters prepared to start off, with Mr. Switzer replacing Mr. Sneed. This time there was no upset, and the two sleds went down close together.

Then something new developed. Mr. Switzer spoke truly when he said he had been used to steering bobs in Germany. He knew just how to do it to get the best results, and take advantage of every favorable spot on the hill.

Paul, too, seeing that it was to be a real race, as well as one for the benefit of the moving picture audiences, exerted himself to get the best out of his sled. There is little a steersman on a bob can do except to take advantage of the easiest course. And this Paul did.

On and on went the big bobs, nearing the foot of the hill.

"This is great!" cried Mr. Pertell.

"This will be some picture!" declared Russ, with enthusiasm. "Come on, Paul, he's going to win!"

"Not if I know it!" avowed the young actor.

"Oh, don't let them get ahead of us!" cried Alice in Paul's ear.

"I'll do my best," he said, with a grim tightening of his lips.

But it was not to be. Either a little more skillful steering on the part of Mr. Switzer, or a more favorable course enabled his sled to shoot ahead, just at the finish, and he won the race.

And then a curious thing happened. The sled kept on going, and slid into a little clump of bushes, from which, a moment later, a man with a gun sprang.

This man seemed as surprised at being thus driven from his shelter as were the coasters at seeing him.

"Ha! Vot does dis mean?" demanded Mr. Switzer. "Vos you vaiting for us

mit dot gun?"

Really the man did look a little menacing as he stood there with poised weapon, looking at the coasters.

"I beg your pardon," he managed to stammer, at length. "I did not see you coming."

"I guess it's our part to beg your pardon," said Mr. Sneed, who, though he did not steer the bob, had been obliged to ride on it. "We did not mean to run into you."

"No harm done; none at all," the man said. "I was hiding here, waiting for a chance to shoot at a fox that has a particularly fine pelt, but I guess I may as well give up. I heard the shouts of you folks, but I had no idea you would coast away down here."

"I didn't haf no idea like dot myself," confessed Mr. Switzer. "But if dere iss no hart feelings ve vill let comeons be bygones."

"That suits me," laughed the stranger, as he turned aside.

And, as he went away Ruth had a queer feeling that she had seen him before and under odd circumstances.

The coasting incident was over, the race had been successfully filmed, and the coasters were turning back up the hill, while Russ was demounting his camera, for there would be no more scenes taken at present.

"Did you notice that man, Alice?" asked Ruth, as she went up the hill beside her sister.

"You mean the hunter who looked as though he wanted to shoot some of us?"

"Oh, what a way to talk! But that's the one I had reference to. Did you notice him particularly?"

"Not very. Why?"

"Do you think you ever saw him before?"

Ruth put the question in such a peculiar way that Alice looked at her sharply.

"You don't mean he was one of the men who tried to get Russ's patent; do

you?"

"No. I can't, for the life of me, though, think where I have seen that man before, but I'm sure I have. I thought you might remember."

Alice tried to recall the face, but could not.

"I don't believe I ever saw him before," she said, shaking her head. "He might be one of the many actors we have met on our travels, or in going around with daddy."

"No, I'm sure he never was an actor," spoke Ruth. "Never mind, perhaps it will come to me later."

And all the remainder of the day she tried in vain to recall where she had seen that face before.

Mr. Macksey seemed a trifle disturbed when told of the man being on the hill with a gun.

"One of those pesky hunters!" he exclaimed. "I've got notices posted all over the property of Elk Lodge, but they don't seem to do any good. I guess I'll have to get after those fellows and give 'em a piece of my mind. I'd like to find out where they are stopping."

The next few days were busy ones for the picture actors, and a number of dramas were filmed. In one, two snow forts were built, and the company indulged in a snowball battle before the camera.

"And now for something new," said Mr. Pertell one day, as he called the company together in the big living room of the lodge, and pointed to something piled in one corner. "You'll have to have a few days' practice, I think, so I give you fair notice."

"More coasting?" asked Mr. Sneed, suspiciously.

"No—snowshoes, this time," replied the manager. "I am going to have you all travel on them in one scene, and as they are rather awkward you had better take a few lessons."

"Lessons on snowshoes!" cried Ruth. "Who can give them to us?"

"I have a teacher," said the manager. "Russ, tell Billy Jack to come in," and there entered from the porch a tall Indian, dressed in modern garb.

Miss Pennington screamed, as did Miss Dixon, but the Indian smiled, showing some very fine and white teeth, and said in a gentle voice:

"Don't be alarmed, ladies, I have no scalping knife with me, and I assure you that you will soon be able to get about on snowshoes."

CHAPTER XV

A TIMELY SHOT

Surprise, for the moment, made every member of the moving picture company silent. That an Indian should speak so correctly was a matter of amazement. Mr. Pertell smiled quizzically as he remarked.

"Billy Jack is one of the last of his tribe. He is a full-blooded Indian, but he has been to Carlisle, which may account for some things."

"I should say it would," murmured Paul Ardite. "I'm glad I didn't give a war whoop!"

"I learned to use snowshoes when I was a boy," went on the Indian, who, though roughly dressed was cultured. "I have kept it up ever since," he went on. "I have charge of a gang of men getting out some lumber, not far from here, and when Mr. Macksey told me there was a company of moving picture actors and actresses at Elk Lodge I spoke of the snowshoes."

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"And when Mr. Macksey told me of it," put in the manager, "I saw at once that we could use a scene with some of you folks on the shoes. So I arranged with Billy Jack."

"Is that your real name?" asked Alice, who had taken a sudden liking to the rugged son of the forest.

"That's one of my real names, strange as it sounds," he answered. "I don't much fancy it; but what am I to do?"

"I like it!" the girl announced, promptly. "It's better than being Running Bear or something like that."

"I had one of those names—in fact, I have it yet," he said, "but I never use it. Flaming Arrow is my real Indian name."

"Flaming Arrow! How romantic!" exclaimed Miss Dixon. "How did you come to get that?"

"Oh, when I was a boy an Indian from a neighboring tribe shot an arrow, with some burning tow on it, over into our camp, just in a spirit of mischief, for we were friendly. I snatched the arrow out of a pile of dry bark that it

might have set on fire, and so I got my name. I am a Western Indian," Billy Jack explained, "but of late I have made my home in New England. Now, if you like, I will show you how to use snowshoes."

A number of the queer "tennis racquets," as Alice called them, had been obtained through the good offices of Billy Jack, he having arranged for them in the lumber camp. Snowshoes, as you all know, consist of a thin strip of wood, bent around in a curve, and shaped not unlike a lawn tennis racquet, except that the handle or heel part is shorter. The shoes are laced with thongs, and the feet are placed in the centre of the criss-crossed thongs, and held there by other thongs or straps.

The idea of snowshoes is to enable travelers to make their way over deep drifts without sinking, the shoes distributing the weight over a larger area. They are not easy to use, and the novice is very apt to trip by putting one shoe down on top of the other, and then trying to step out.

Billy Jack, or Flaming Arrow, as Ruth and Alice voted to call him, first showed the members of the company how to fasten the snowshoes on their feet, allowing for the play of the heel. He put a pair on himself, first, and stepped out over a stretch of unbroken snow. Instead of sinking down, as he would have done under ordinary circumstances, he slipped over the surface as lightly as a feather.

"Now, you try," he told Mr. Sneed, who was near him.

"Who, me? Oh, I can't walk on these things," protested the grouchy actor.

"Try!" ordered Mr. Pertell. "I have a very important part for you in the new play."

"All right, if you say so, I suppose I must. But I know something will happen," he sighed.

It did, and within a few seconds after Mr. Sneed started out. He took three steps, and then, forgetting that the snowshoes were rather large, he tried to walk as though he did not have them on. The result was he tripped, and came down head first in a deep drift, and there he remained, buried to his shoulders while his feet were up in the air, wildly kicking about.

He was probably saying things, but they could not be heard, for his head was under the snow.

"Somebody help him out!" cried Mr. Pertell, trying to keep from laughing

too hard.

In fact everyone was so amused that, for the moment, no one rendered any aid to Mr. Sneed. But Flaming Arrow finally went over to him, and succeeded in righting him.

"Take—take 'em off!" spluttered the actor, when he could speak. "I am through with snowshoes."

He tried to unlace the thongs that bound his feet, but could not manage it.

"Better try once more," advised Mr. Pertell. "I really need you in the scene, Mr. Sneed, and you will soon learn to get along on the snowshoes."

"I never will!" cried the grouch. "Take 'em off, I say!"

But no one would, and finally, after Flaming Arrow had given a few more demonstrations, Mr. Sneed consented to try again. This time he did a little better, but every once in a while he would trip. He did not again dive into a snow bank, however.

Other members of the company had haps and mishaps, and Mr. Bunn stumbled about so that he lost his new tall hat in a drift, and he refused to go on with the act until the silk tile was dug out.

But finally after two day's practice, the Indian declared that the company was sufficiently expert to allow the taking of pictures, and Russ began to work the camera.

"Could we come over to your lumber camp some day?" asked Alice of Flaming Arrow, when the little drama was over.

"I would be pleased to have you," he replied, with a smile. "There are a rough lot of men there, but they are always glad to see visitors—especially ladies. It is rather dull and lonesome in the backwoods. This has been quite a little vacation for me."

"Then we'll come and see you; won't we Ruth?"

"I don't know, dear. We'll have to ask daddy," responded Ruth, rather doubtfully.

"Oh, he'll say yes!" Alice cried. "He likes us to see new sights, and I've never been in a lumber camp yet."

"Bring your father along," invited Flaming Arrow. "I think he would be interested."

Alice promised and then the Indian took his leave. He promised to come another day and bring a pair of skis, those long barrel-stave-like affairs, on which experts can slide down a steep hill, and make the most astonishing jumps.

It was a few days after the snowshoe film had been made that Mr. Pertell decided on getting some scenes farther back in the woods than he had yet gone for views. Ruth and Alice, with Paul and Mr. Switzer, were alone needed for those particular acts, and as there was a good road part way it was decided to go as near as possible in a sled, and use snowshoes for the rest of the trip, since there had been quite a fall.

Mr. Pertell went along to see that the proper posing and acting was carried out, and when he reached the place he had Ruth and Alice go on alone into the woods, Russ filming them as they advanced. Later Paul and Mr. Switzer were to come into the picture.

"That's about right," said the manager when Ruth and Alice were in a dense thicket. They were attired as the daughters of lumbermen, and this particular scene was one in a drama to be called "The Fall of a Tree."

"Begin now," ordered Mr. Pertell, and Ruth and Alice started the "business," or acting, called for. Russ was grinding away at the crank of the camera.

Everything went off well and that part of the play came to an end. For the next act another background was to be selected, and Russ went to it with his camera, leaving Ruth and Alice standing together in the thicket.

"We have to wait a few minutes, while Paul and Mr. Switzer go through their parts," said Ruth. "Then we'll go over."

"All right," Alice said. "Oh, but isn't it perfectly heavenly out here? I just love it at Elk Lodge!"

"So do I, dear! Hark! What was that?"

A sound came from the bushes behind them—a growling, menacing sound, and as they heard it the girls drew together in fright.

"It—it's some animal!" gasped Ruth. "Oh, Alice!"

"Look. There it is! It's going to spring at us!" cried the younger girl and with trembling finger she pointed to a crouching beast not far away. Its eyes gleamed balefully, and with sharp switchings of its tail it glared at the girls, ready to spring.

The moving picture girls were faint with fear, and too frightened to shout for help. But suddenly a voice behind them called:

"Don't be afraid! Stand still. I'm going to shoot!"

The next moment a shot rang out. The beast quivered and then whirled in its death struggle, while strong arms reached through the floating powder smoke, and pulled Ruth and Alice back, and out of danger.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE CAVE

The animal, in its death struggle, bit and clawed at the snow and bushes about it, and actually came almost to the feet of the shrinking girls; but they were safe from harm, for the shot had come just in time.

"I guess I'll have to give him another bullet," said the man who had ended the career of the beast. "I'll put it out of its misery," and he did so. The shot, so close at hand, caused Ruth and Alice to jump nervously, and then, for the first time, as the beast stretched out, and lay still, they took a look at their rescuer.

"Why it's Flaming Arrow!" exclaimed Alice, in delight.

"At your service!" he laughed. "I am glad I happened to be near here."

"So are we!" exclaimed Ruth, with a nervous laugh. "What sort of a beast is that—a young bear?" [133

"No, it's a wildcat, and a mean sort of animal, once it attacks you. This one must have felt that it was cornered, for they are not usually so bold. It's a big one, though, and the pelt will make a fine rug for your room. May I have the pleasure of sending it to you?" he asked.

"Oh, can you make it into a rug?" asked Alice.

"Yes, I know something of curing, and I have the materials at my shack in the lumber camp. I'll make a rug for you, only I'm afraid it isn't big enough for two," he said, ruefully.

"Oh, Alice may have it!" exclaimed Ruth, generously.

"Then I'll get another for you," offered Flaming Arrow. "They usually travel in pairs, and the mate of this one is sure to be around somewhere. I'll get him."

Later the Indian did get another wildcat, whether or not the mate of the first one he shot could not be determined; but, at any rate, Ruth and Alice each received a handsome fur rug for their room.

The sound of the shots brought up the others of the moving picture

company, and Paul turned rather pale when he realized the danger Alice had been in.

"Why didn't you call for help?" he asked.

"We didn't need to. Flaming Arrow was right on the spot when he was needed," replied Alice.

"I happened to be out on a little hunting trip," the Indian explained, "and I saw the wildcat sneak in this thicket. I did not see the girls, though, until just as it was about to jump on them. Then I fired."

"And just in time, too," declared Ruth. "Oh, if that beast had ever jumped on me I don't know what I'd have done!"

"They're pretty bad scratchers," said Flaming Arrow. "I was clawed by one once, and I carry the scars yet."

"Will you be able to go on with the play?" asked Mr. Pertell of the girls, when he had heard the story.

"Oh, yes," returned Alice. "My nerves are all right now. We are getting used to such experiences," she laughed.

"I am all right too," Ruth agreed. "But it was a trying moment."

Flaming Arrow stood to one side and looked on interestedly while the remainder of the drama was being filmed, and then he showed the players the road to his lumber camp. He invited them to come over to it, but as the hour was late and as Mr. Pertell wanted to get a few more scenes in a different locality, it was decided to defer the visit to some other time.

Flaming Arrow said good-bye, and went off with the dead wild cat slung over his shoulder.

"Isn't he just fine!" exclaimed Alice, as she watched him stalking over the drifts on his snowshoes.

"I'm getting jealous!" laughed Paul, and there was more of meaning in his remark than his outward manner indicated.

"Well, I do like him!" Alice went on. "He is so big and strong and manly. And he can shoot straight!"

"Hereafter I'll bring along a gun every time we come out," vowed Paul.

"And I'm going to take shooting lessons."

"Yah! Dot vould be a goot t'ing," decided Mr. Switzer. "I gets me too a gun!"

"Gracious! The game around here had better seek new quarters!" laughed Alice. "Next we'll be having Mr. Bunn and Mr. Sneed taking up the calling of Nimrod."

Mr. DeVere was rather disturbed when he heard the story of the wildcat, and once more he spoke seriously of taking his daughters out of moving picture work.

"I really am afraid something will happen to you," he said. "I think you had better resign. I can earn enough for all of us now, for Mr. Pertell has given me another advance in salary."

"Oh, Daddy! We simply couldn't give it up!" cried Alice. "Could we, Ruth?"

"I wouldn't like to give it up," responded Ruth, quietly. She was always less demonstrative than her sister. "And really, Daddy, we don't run into danger."

"I know, my dear, but danger seems to have formed a habit, of late, of seeking you out," said the actor. "However, we will wait a few days. I suppose it would be too bad to disappoint Mr. Pertell now."

The next day, owing to a slight indisposition on the part of Miss Pennington, a drama that included her as one of the cast had to be postponed, and as no other was ready to be filmed, the players had a little holiday.

"Who wants to come for a trip to the ice cave?" asked Russ, when he found that he would not have to use his camera.

"What's the ice cave?" asked Ruth.

"Why, it's a cave made out of ice. There's one about two miles from here, and Mr. Pertell is thinking of having some scenes made there. I'm to go out and size up the situation. Want to come?"

"It sounds interesting," observed Ruth. "I believe I would like to go. Shall we, Alice?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Count me in!" cried Paul.

So a little later the four young people set off for the ice cave. This was a natural curiosity not far from Elk Lodge. Every year, at a waterfall in a local stream, the ice piled up in fantastic shapes. The flow of the water, and the effect of the wind, made a large hollow or cave at the cascade large enough to hold several persons. Mr. Pertell had heard of it and had laid one scene of a drama there.

There was a fairly good road almost to the ice cave, and then came a trip across an unbroken expanse of snow, the snowshoes being used, they having been carried strapped to the backs of the four.

"Oh, how beautiful!"

"See how the sun sparkles on the ice."

"And what big icicles!"

"Oh, if we could only keep that until Summer!"

Thus the young people cried as they saw the beautiful ice cave. It was indeed a pretty sight. Nature, unaided, had done more than man could ever hope to achieve.

"Let's go inside," suggested Russ.

"Will it be safe?" asked Ruth.

"Oh, surely. Why, we have to go in it when we make the moving picture, so we might as well get used to it. They say this ice lasts nearly all summer. It's down in a deep hollow, you see. Come on in."

"Go ahead! I'm game!" Paul said, grimly.

The girls hesitated, but only for a moment. Then they followed the young men into the cavern.

The entrance was rather small, and they had to stoop to get through it, but once inside the cave widened out until there was room for perhaps a dozen persons.

"What a lovely place for a dance!" cried Alice, as she slid about. "It's so slippery that you'd need those new slippers with rubber set in the sole. Come, on, try a hesitation waltz," she cried gaily to Ruth.

Paul whistled one of the latest popular airs, and Ruth and Alice slid about.

"Come on!" cried Paul to Russ. "I'm getting the craze, too."

The two young men danced together a moment, and then came an interruption that caused them all to look at one another.

There was a grinding, crashing sound outside, and the next moment the entrance to the cave was darkened.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RESCUE

"What happened?"

"There must have been an ice slide!"

It was Alice who asked the question, and Paul who answered it. Standing in the darkened ice cave, through the walls of which, however, some light filtered, the four looked anxiously at one another.

"It was the dancing that did it," declared Ruth, in a low voice. "It loosened the ice and it slid down."

"Perhaps not," said Paul, not wanting Alice blamed, for she had proposed the light-footed stepping about on the slippery floor of the cavern. "It might have slid down itself."

"Well, let's see what the situation is," proposed Russ. "We can't stay in here too long, for it's freezing cold."

"Yes, let's see if we can get out," added Paul. [140

"See if we *can* get out!" repeated Ruth. "Why, is there any danger that we can not?"

"Every danger in the world, I should say," spoke Russ, and there was a worried note in his voice. "I don't want to alarm you," he went on, "but the fact is that we are shut up in this ice cave."

"Oh, don't say that!" cried Ruth.

"Why shouldn't he—if it's true?" asked Alice. "Let's face the situation, whatever it is. Russ, will you see just how bad it is?"

Without speaking, the young moving picture operator went to the hole through which they had stooped to enter the cavern. In a moment he came back.

"It's closed tighter than a drum," he announced. "A lot of ice slid down from above and closed the entrance to the cave as if a door had been shoved across it. We can't get out!"

For a moment no one spoke, and then Paul asked, quietly:

"What are we going to do?"

"Have you a knife?" asked Russ.

"A knife? Yes, but what good is that?"

"We've got to cut our way out—that's all."

Ruth and Alice looked at each other. They began to understand what it meant.

"Someone from Elk Lodge may come for us—if we don't get back," murmured the younger girl, in what was almost a whisper.

"Yes, they may, but it's dangerous to wait," said Paul. "It is cold in here, and it isn't getting any warmer. It's like being locked in a refrigerator. We've got to keep in motion or we'll freeze."

"Then let's tackle that block of ice at the entrance," suggested Russ. "Get out your knife and we'll see if we can't cut a hole large enough to crawl through."

)] If you have tried to cut with a pocket knife even the small piece of ice which you get in your refrigerator, you can appreciate the task that confronted the two young men. A solid block of ice had slid down from some higher point, and had blocked the opening to the odd cavern. But the two were not daunted. They realized the necessity of getting out, and that within a short time. Though they were all warmly dressed, the air of the cavern was chilly, to say the least.

"Keep moving, girls!" called Russ to Ruth and Alice, as he and Paul chipped away at the ice. "This exercise will keep us warm; but you need to do something to keep your blood in circulation. Here, take my coat!" he called, as he arose from his knees, and tossed the garment to Ruth.

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" she answered, promptly. "You need it yourself."

"No, I don't," he replied, earnestly. "It only bothers me when I try to cut the ice. Please take it."

"But I can't get it on over my cloak."

"Yes, you can. Put it around your shoulders. I'll show you how." And he did it quickly, wrapping it warmly around her.

"Here, Alice, you take mine!" cried Paul, as he saw what his companion had done. "You need it more than I do, and I can't get at that ice with a big coat like this on."

In spite of her protests he put it about her, and the added warmth of the garments was comforting to the girls.

The boys, really, were better off without them, for they had much vigorous work before them, and in the narrow quarters the heavy coats only hampered them.

For it was an exceedingly narrow space in which they had to work. The fall of the mass of ice had crushed part of the opening into the cave, so that Russ and Paul had to crouch down and stoop in a most uncomfortable position in order to reach the block that had closed the doorway.

With their knives they hacked away at the frozen mass, sending the chips flying. Much of it went in their faces and soon their cheeks were glowing from the icy spray of splinters. Then, too, they had to stop every now and then to clear away the accumulated ice crystals that fell before the attack of their knives.

"Keep moving, girls," Paul urged Ruth and Alice. "Keep circling around or you'll surely freeze."

"Let's dance," suggested Alice.

"Oh, how can you think of such a thing!" cried Ruth, "when it was that which caused all the trouble."

"I'm not going to believe that!" declared Alice, firmly. "And it isn't such a terrible thing to think of, at all. It will keep us warm, and keep up our spirits."

And then she broke into a little one-step dance, whistling her own accompaniment. Surely it was a strange proceeding, and yet it came natural to Alice. The young men, too, took heart at her manner of accepting the situation, and chopped away harder than ever at the ice barrier.

"Think we'll make it?" asked Paul of Russ, in a low voice, when they had been working for some time.

"We've got to make it," answered the other. "We've just got to get the girls out."

"Of course," was the brief reply, as if that was all there was to it.

And yet, in their hearts, Russ and Paul felt a nameless fear. Ice, which melts so easily under the warm and gentle influence of the sun, is exceedingly hard when it is maintained at a low temperature, and truly it was sufficiently cold in the cave.

Now and then the boys stopped to clear away the accumulation of ice splinters, and to note how they were progressing. Yet they could hardly tell, for they did not know how thick was the chunk of ice that covered the cave opening. The edges of the opening itself were several feet in thickness, and if this hole was completely filled it would mean many hours of work with the pitifully inadequate tools at their disposal.

"How are we coming on?" asked Paul.

Russ looked back at the girls who, in one corner of the cave, were pacing up and down to drive away the deadly cold.

"Not very well," he returned, in a low voice. "Don't talk—let's work."

He did not like to think of what might happen.

Desperately they labored, eating their way into the heart of the ice. The splinters fell on their warm bodies, for they were perspiring now, and there the frosty particles melted, wetting their garments through.

Suddenly Paul uttered a cry as he dug his knife savagely into the barrier.

"What's the matter—cut yourself?" asked Russ.

"No," was the low-voiced reply. "But I've broken the big blade of my knife. Now I'll have to use the smaller one."

It was a serious thing, for it meant a big decrease in the amount of ice Paul could chop. But opening the small blade of the knife he kept doggedly at the task.

It was growing darker now. They could observe this through the translucent walls of the cave.

"Do you think they will come for us?" asked Ruth, in a low tone.

"Oh, yes, of course. If we don't get back by dark," responded Russ, as cheerfully as he could. "But we'll be out before then. Come on, Paul. Dig away!"

But it was very evident that they would not be out before dark. The ice block was thicker than Russ and Paul imagined.

"Please rest!" begged Alice, after a period of hard work by the two young men. "Please take a rest!"

"Can't afford a vacation," returned Russ, grimly.

But when he did halt for a moment, to get his breath, there came from outside the cave a sound that sent all their hearts to beating joyfully for it was the voice of some calling:

"Where are you? Where are you? Alice! Ruth!"

"Oh, it's daddy!" cried the girls together, and then Russ took up the refrain, shouting:

"We're in the cave! Get axes and chop us out! We've only got our knives!"

"We'll be with you in a moment!" said another voice, which they recognized as that of Mr. Macksey. "We'll have to go for a couple of axes!"

And then, as the hunter started back to Elk Lodge, Mr. DeVere, who remained outside the ice cave, explained through a crevice in the ice wall that made conversation possible how, becoming uneasy at the failure of his daughters to return, he had set out, in company with Mr. Macksey to look for them.

In their turn Ruth and Alice, with occasional words from Russ and Paul, told how they had become imprisoned.

"Are you hurt?" asked Mr. DeVere, anxiously.

"Not a bit of it, but we're awfully cold, Daddy," replied Alice.

"We must give the boys back their coats," said Ruth to her sister in a low tone. "They are not chopping now, and they'll freeze."

Russ and Paul did not want to accept their garments, but the girls were insistent, and made them don the heavy coats. Then the four walked rapidly around the cave to keep their blood in circulation.

"I wish Mr. Pertell would come and bring the camera," said Russ. "He could get a good moving picture of the rescue."

"Maybe he will," suggested Paul.

There was a little silence, and then Mr. DeVere called, from outside the cave;

"Here they come! Now you will soon be rescued! There's help enough to chop away the whole cave!"

CHAPTER XVIII

SNOWBOUND

Alice and Ruth fairly flew together, holding their arms tightly about one another in the excess of their emotion, as they heard this joyful news shouted to them by their father.

Ruth cried on her sister's shoulder. She could not help it. Perhaps Alice felt like crying, too, so great was the relief; but she was of a different temperament. She laughed hysterically.

"Is Mr. Pertell there?" called Russ, getting down close to the hole he and Paul had made in the ice barrier to enable his voice to carry better. "Is he there, Mr. DeVere?"

"Yes, he's there, and I guess the whole company."

"Has he the camera?"

"That's what he has, Russ."

"Good! Tell him to get a moving picture of the rescue. We can fix up a story to go with it." [149

"I will, Russ!" exclaimed the actor.

Then, as those within the ice cave waited, they faintly heard other voices outside, and a little later the sound of axes vigorously applied told that the ice which had imprisoned them was being chopped away.

Fast and furiously the rescuers worked. The ice flew about in a sparkling spray as the keen weapons bit deep into it, and the hole grew larger and larger.

Meanwhile Mr. Pertell was operating the moving picture camera, getting view after view of the rescue. There were enough helpers so that his aid was not needed in chopping the ice.

"There she goes!" cried Mr. Macksey, as his axe went through an opening and into the cave. "I've made the hole!" and he capered about like a boy, so delighted was he that he had been the first to bring aid to the imprisoned ones.

"Oh, now we can get out!" cried Ruth, as she saw the head of the axe come

through.

"As if there had ever been any doubt of it," laughed Alice. She could laugh now, but even with all her gay spirits, there had been a time, not many minutes back, when it was quite a different story.

The hole once made, was soon enlarged, and then, when it was of sufficient size to enable a person to crawl through, Russ shouted to the rescuers;

"That'll do! Don't chop any more! We can wriggle out."

"Surely, yes," agreed Ruth, as the young moving picture operator looked to her for confirmation. "I'm not a bit fussy," she added. "I've done harder things than crawl on my hands and knees out of an ice cave."

"Don't chop any more!" called Paul, for Russ was leading Ruth to the opening.

"Come ahead!" called Mr. DeVere, and a moment later he was holding his daughter in his arms. Alice soon followed, and she too was clasped tightly.

"Hurray!" cried Mr. Switzer, as Russ and Paul emerged from their strange prison. "Dis is der best sight vot I have yet had in more as a month. Half a pretzel!" he exclaimed, holding out one of the queer, twisted things. He was never without them since the sled breakdown. He said they were his mascots.

There was a scene of rejoicing, and even the gloomy Mr. Sneed condescended to smile, and looked almost happy.

"There, I guess we can use this film in some sort of a play, if I have to write it myself!" exclaimed Mr. Pertell, as he finished grinding away at the camera crank. "I can call it 'Caught in The Ice,' or something like that," he went on, "We can make some preliminary scenes, and some others to follow, and get quite a play out of it."

"I'm glad you thought to bring the camera," said Russ. Even in the stress of what had happened to him and his companions, his instinct as a moving picture operator was ever foremost.

"We had better get them to Elk Lodge, and feed them upon something warm," suggested Mr. Macksey. "I told the wife to have a good meal ready, for I knew they would be chilled through."

"It *was* pretty cold in there," confessed Alice.

"Oh, don't let's talk about it!" cried Ruth. "It was too terrible."

An examination of the exterior of the ice cave showed that just what the young men surmised had taken place. A large chunk of ice had slid down from above, and had jammed against the opening to the cavern.

Back at Elk Lodge, with warm garments on, the four who had passed through such a trying experience soon forgot their troubles. They had to tell all over again just what had happened, and the young men were considered quite the heroes of the hour.

The next day none of the four was any the worse for the experience, save in the matter of a nightmare memory, and that would gradually pass away.

Feeling that the two girls were not capable of doing any hard work in posing for the camera that day, Mr. Pertell announced another vacation, save that Russ was engaged in making some scenes of snow and ice effects.

Late in the afternoon, when the shadows were lengthening, and the long winter evening was about to close in, Alice, who was out on the side porch, saw Mr. Macksey coming in from the barn. The hunter had an anxious look on his face, and as he walked toward the house he cast looks up at the sky now and then. And Alice heard him murmur:

"I don't like this! I don't for a cent, by hickory!"

"What's the matter now?" she asked, merrily. "Have you seen some of those strange men about again, hunting on your preserves?"

"No, Miss Alice. Not this time," he replied, slowly.

"What is it then?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't like the looks of the weather."

"Do you think we're going to have another blizzard?" and there was a note of alarm in her voice.

"I'm thinking that's what's coming," he made answer. "I never knew the weather to act just this way before except once, and then we had the worst storm I ever remember. That was when I was a boy, and more snow fell in that one storm than in any three winters put together."

"Gracious! I hope that won't happen now!" cried the girl.

"So do I," went on the hunter. "And I'm going to take all precautions. I'll get the men, and we'll pile the fodder in the barn so if we can't get out to feed the stock they won't starve for a week, anyhow."

"Does it ever happen that you can't get out to the barns?" Alice wanted to know.

"Indeed it does, young lady. When there is a heavy fall of snow, and the wind blows hard, it drifts almost as high as the house. Yes, I think we're in for a storm, and I'm going to get ready for it. Best to be on the safe side."

A little later he and a number of his hired men, as well as some of the picture players, were engaged in looking after the horses and cows. Great piles of hay and grain were moved from the barns where the fodder was kept in reserve, to the buildings where the stock were stabled.

"How about our rations?" asked Mr. Bunn, who was not of much help in work of this sort. "Have we enough to last through a storm?"

"Well, we've got some," Mr. Macksey admitted. "But I own I would like a little better stock in the Lodge. I counted on some supplies coming in to-day; but they haven't arrived. We'll have to do the best we can."

"What is all the excitement about, Alice?" asked Ruth as she came out to join her sister on the porch.

"A big storm coming, Mr. Macksey says. They're getting ready for it. I want to see it!"

"Oh, Alice. Suppose it should be a blizzard!"

"Well, I want to see it anyhow. If it's going to come I can't stop it; but I can enjoy it," Alice remarked in her characteristically philosophical way.

There was a curious humming in the air, as though someone, a great way off, were moaning in pain. It did not seem to be the wind, and yet it was like the sigh of a breeze. But the gaunt-limbed trees did not bow before this strange blast.

The air, too, had a bite and tingle to it as though it were filled with invisible particles of ice. The clouds were lowering, and as the afternoon wore away there sprang up in the west a black band of vapor, almost like ink.

Alice induced Ruth to pay a visit to the barn, to watch the preparations for providing for the stock. Even the animals seemed uneasy, as though they sensed some impending disaster. The horses, always nervous, were doubly so, and moved restlessly about, with pricked-up ears, and startled neighs. The cows, too, lowed plaintively.

"Well, we've done all we can," announced Mr. Macksey, as night came on. "Now all we can do is to wait. There's plenty of fuel in the cellar, and we'll not freeze, at any rate."

There was a sense of gloom over all, as they sat in the big living room of Elk Lodge that night, and looked at the blazing logs. Everyone listened apprehensively, as though to hear the first message of the impending storm.

The sighing of the wind, if wind it was that made that curious sound, was more pronounced now, and as the blast came down the chimney it scattered ashes and embers about, and at times rose to an uncanny wail.

"Oh, but that gives me the shivers!" exclaimed Miss Pennington, tossing aside the novel in which she had tried to become interested. "This is positively awful! I wish I were back in New York."

"So do I!" added her chum.

"Oh, but a good snow storm is glorious!" cried Alice. "I am just wild to see it."

"That's right," exclaimed her father, with a smile. "Take a cheerful view of it, anyhow."

Some one proposed a guessing game, and with that under way the spirits of all revived somewhat. Then came another simple game, and the time passed pleasantly.

Mr. Macksey, coming back from a trip to the side door, startled them all by announcing:

"She's here!"

"Who?" asked his wife, looking up from her sewing.

"The storm! It's snowing like cotton batting!"

Alice rushed to the window. She shaded her eyes with her hands at the side of her head and peered out. It seemed as though the lamplights shone on a

solid wall of white, so thickly was the snow falling.

The wind had now risen to a blast of hurricane-like velocity and it fairly shook Elk Lodge, low and substantial as the house was.

By ones and twos the picture players went to their rooms, and soon silence and darkness settled down over the Lodge. That is, silence within the house, but outside there was the riot of the storm.

Two or three times during the night Alice awakened and, going to the window, looked out. She could make out a dim whiteness, but that was all. Around the window there was a little drift of snow on the sill, where it had been blown through a crack.

And in the morning they were snowbound. So heavy was the fall of snow, and so high had it drifted, that some of the lower windows were completely covered, from the ground up. And before each door was such a drift that it would be necessary to tunnel if they were to get out.

"The worst storm I ever see!" declared Mr. Macksey, as he closed the door against the blast. "It would be death to go out in it now. We are snowbound, by hickory!"

CHAPTER XIX

ON SHORT RATIONS

Apprehensive as all had been of the coming of the big storm, and fully warned by the hunter, none of the picture players was quite prepared for what they saw—or, rather, for what they could not see. For not a window on the lower floor of the Lodge but was blocked by a bank of snow, so that only the tops of the upper panes were clear of it. And through those bits of glass all that could be seen was a whirling, swirling mass, for the white flakes were still falling.

Not an outer door of the house but was blocked by a drift, and it was useless to open the portals at present, as the snow fell into the room.

"But what are we to do?" asked Mr. Pertell, when the situation had been made plain to him. "We can't take any moving pictures; can we?"

"Not in this storm," Mr. Macksey declared. "It would be as much as your life is worth to go out. It is bitter cold and the wind cuts like a knife!" [159

"I wish I could get some views," spoke Russ. "It would give New York audiences something to talk about, to see moving pictures of a storm like this."

"You might go up in the cupola on the roof," suggested Mr. Macksey. "You could stand your camera up there and possibly get some views."

"I'll do it!" cried Russ.

"And may I come?" asked Alice, always ready for an adventure of that sort.

"Come along!" he cried, gaily.

The cupola was more for ornament than use, but it was large enough for the purpose of Russ. After breakfast he took his moving picture camera up there, and managed through the windows, to get some fairly good pictures. The trouble was, however, that the snow was falling so thickly that it obscured the view. At times there would come a lull in the storm, and then Russ was able to get scenes showing the great black woods, and the white banks of snow.

"Oh, but it's cold work!" he cried, as he stopped to warm his hands, for the little room on the roof was draughty, and the snow blew in.

"It's a wonderful storm," cried Alice. "I wouldn't have missed it for worlds!"

All that day the storm raged, and all that night. There was nothing which could be done out of doors, and so the players and the men of the Lodge were forced to remain within. Great fires were kept up, for the temperature was very low.

The wise forethought of Mr. Macksey in providing for the stock prevented the animals from starving, as they would have done had not a supply of fodder been left for them. For it was out of the question to get to the barns.

After two days the storm ceased, the skies cleared and the sun shone. But on what a totally different scene than before the coming of the great blizzard!

There had been plenty of snow in Deerfield before, but now there was so much that one old man, who worked for Mr. Macksey, said he never recalled the like, and he had seen many bad storms.

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"Well, now to tunnel out!" exclaimed Mr. Macksey when it had been ascertained, by an observation from the cupola, that the fall of snow was over. "We'll see if we can't raise the embargo."

But it was no easy matter. All the doors were blocked by drifts, and in making a tunnel through snow it is just as necessary to have some place to put the removed material as it is in tunneling through the side of a hill.

"We can't start in and dig from the door, for we'd have to pile the snow in the room back of us," said the hunter. "So the only other plan is to get outside, somehow, and work up to the house, tossing the snow to one side. I may have to dig a trench instead of a tunnel. I'll soon find out."

Finally it was decided that the men should go to the second story, out on a balcony that opened from Mr. DeVere's room, and get down into the snow that way. They would use snowshoes so as to have some support, and thus they could attack the drifts.

This plan was followed. Fortunately Mr. Macksey had thought to bring in snow shovels before the storm came, and with these the men attacked the big white piles.

It was hard work, but they labored with a will, and there were enough of them to make an effective attack. Mr. Macksey, in spite of the fact that he had food and water for his stock, was anxious to see how the animals were doing. So he directed that first paths, tunnels or trenches be made to the various barns.

In some places, around the lee of a building, the ground was bare of snow, and in other places the drifts were fully fifteen feet high.

Russ, who had not gone out to shovel snow, was observed to be nailing some light broad boards together in a peculiar way.

"What are you making?" Ruth asked him.

"Snowshoes for my camera," was his surprising answer.

"Snowshoes for your camera?"

"Yes, I want to get out and take some views, but I can't stand the thin legs of the camera on the snow. They'd pierce through it. So I'm going to put a broad board under each leg, and that will hold the machine up as well as snowshoes hold me."

"What a clever idea!" she cried. "I'm going to watch you. What sort of views do you expect to get?"

"Some showing the men digging us out. We can get up a film story and call it 'Prisoners of the Snow,' or something like that."

"Fine!" cried Alice. "I'm coming out, too."

She and Ruth got their snowshoes, and by this time the men had a deep trench up to the front door, so that it was not necessary for the girls to go out by the way of the balcony. They were delighted with the strange scene, and Russ obtained many fine pictures of the men laboring in the snow.

It was hard work to tunnel and trench out to the barn where the animals were, but finally it was done. They were found to be all right with two exceptions. A horse had died from getting into the oat bin and eating too much, and a cow was frozen, having gotten away from the rest, and broken into a small outbuilding.

But the rest of the stock was in good condition, and, as Alice said, they seemed almost human, neighing or lowing at the sight of the men.

"I believe they were actually lonesome," said Alice.

"Indeed, animals do get that way!" declared Mr. Macksey.

As the snow was so deep, no dramas could be filmed in it, so Mr. Pertell and his players were enjoying enforced idleness. The time was spent, however, in learning new parts, in readiness for the time when some of the snow should have melted.

Many more paths, tunnels and trenches were made, but it was impossible to go more than a short distance from Elk Lodge, even on snowshoes. Later, when the snow had packed more, and a crust had been formed, it was planned to take many pictures of various happenings in the great piles of white crystals.

Three days after the storm saw little change in the appearance of the country and landscape about the hunting lodge. It was snow, snow, snow everywhere—on all sides. Within the house it was warm and cozy, and for months afterward it was a pleasant recollection to talk of the hours spent about the great fire in the living room.

But in spite of the fact that his animals were safe, except for the two that had died, Mr. Macksey seemed worried. Several times he paid a visit to the cellar, or the store room, where the provisions were kept, and more than once the girls heard him murmuring to himself.

"What is the trouble?" Alice asked him once, as he came up from a trip to the cellar.

"Well, I'm afraid you folks will have to go on short rations if the supplies don't come in soon from the store," he replied. "I've got plenty of meat on hand, but other things are somewhat scarce."

"Then we won't starve?" she asked.

"Well, maybe not actually starve, but you may be hungry for certain things."

"Oh, I'm not fussy!" Alice laughed. "I can eat anything."

The storm was so severe and so wide-spread, that, in about a week, there was an actual shortage of provisions at Elk Lodge. The meals had to be curtailed in regard to certain dishes, and there were loud complaints from Mr. Bunn and Mr. Sneed, as well as from Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon. But

the others made the best of it.

"I wish I had never come to this horrid place!" exclaimed Miss Pennington, when her request for a fancy dish had to be denied.

"You may go back to New York any time you wish," observed Mr. Pertell, with a grim humor, as he looked out on the great piles of snow. It would have been impossible to get half-way to the station.

Miss Pennington "sniffed" and said nothing.

But there was no actual suffering at Elk Lodge. Before it got to that point Mr. Macksey hitched up six horses to a big sled and made his way into town. He brought back enough provisions for a small company of soldiers.

"Now let it 'bliz' if it wants to!" he cried, as he and his men stocked up the storeroom.

CHAPTER XX

THE THAW

"Now for some hard work," said Mr. Pertell one day, about ten days after the big storm. "I think we can safely go out, and make some of the scenes in the play 'Snowbound,'" he went on. "There will not be much danger that we will be caught in another blizzard; will there?" he asked of Mr. Macksey.

"I should hope not!" was the answer. "I don't believe there is any snow left in the clouds. Still, don't take too many chances. Don't go more than ten miles away."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of going half that distance!" said Mr. Pertell. "I just want to get a scene or two at some place where the snow is piled in fantastic forms. The rest of the story takes place around the Lodge here."

"Is it the one that is something like the story of Lorna Doone?" asked Alice, who had been reading that book. [167

"That's the one," said Mr. Pertell. "And I think I shall cast you as Lorna."

"Oh, how nice!" she laughed. "But who will be John Ridd? We need a great big man for him!"

"Well, I was thinking of using Mr. Macksey," went on the manager, with a look at the hunter.

"What? Me have my photograph took in moving pictures!" cried the keeper of the Lodge. "Why, I don't know how to act!"

"You know how a great deal better than some that are in the business," returned Mr. Pertell, coolly. "Present company always excepted," he added, as Mr. Bunn looked up with an injured air. "What I mean is that you are so natural," he continued. "In fact, you have had your pictures taken a number of times lately, when you and your men were clearing away the snow. So you see it will be no novelty for you."

"But I didn't know when you took my pictures!" objected the hunter.

"No, and that's just the point. Don't think of the camera at all. Be unconscious of it. I'll arrange to have it masked, or hidden, if you think you

can do better that way. But I have some scenes calling for a big man battling in the snow to save a girl, and you and Miss Alice are the proper characters. So I hope you won't disappoint me."

"I'll do my best," promised Mr. Macksey. "But I'm not used to that sort of work."

However, when the preliminary scenes for the big drama were filmed he did some excellent acting, the more so as he was totally unconscious that he was acting.

Several days were spent in making films of the play, for Mr. Pertell wanted to take advantage of the snow.

"It won't last a great while longer," remarked the hunter. "It's getting warm, and there'll be a thaw, soon."

He proved to be a true weather prophet for in two weeks there was scarcely a vestige of the snow left. It grew warm, and rained, and there was so much water about, from the rain and melting snow, that it was nearly as difficult to get about as it had been in the big drifts.

But the thaw proved an advantage in one way, for it opened up the roads that had been well-nigh impassable, and mail and other supplies came through.

The storm, while it gave Mr. Pertell a chance to make some fine pictures, had one drawback. He was not able to send the reels of film in to New York for development and printing. He lost considerable time and some money on this account, but it could not be helped.

But with the passing of the snow the highways were clear, and traffic to and from the village was made easy.

One day Mr. Macksey came back from town with a good-sized bag, filled with mail for the picture players.

"Oh, here's a letter for you, Ruth, and one for me!" cried Alice, as she sorted them over. "One for daddy, too! Oh, it's a big one!"

The moving picture girls were busy over their epistles for some time, as there proved to be a number of missives for them, from relatives, and from friends they had made since posing for the camera. But when Alice read all hers and was passing some of them to her sister, she happened to glance at her

father's face.

"Why Daddy!" she cried, "what is the matter?"

"Oh—nothing!" he murmured, hoarsely for he had caught a little cold, and his voice was almost as bad as it had been at first.

"But I'm sure it's something!" Alice insisted. "Is it bad news? Ruth, make him tell!"

The three were in Mr. DeVere's room, where they had gone to look over the mail.

"Oh, it isn't anything!" declared the actor, and he tried to slip into his coat pocket the letter in the large envelope that Alice had handed to him.

"I'm sure it is," she insisted. "Please tell me, Daddy."

The letter fell to the floor, and Alice could not help seeing that it was from a firm of New York lawyers.

"Oh, is it the trouble about the five hundred dollars?" the girl cried. "Is Dan Merley making more trouble?"

"Yes," answered Mr. DeVere. "He has brought suit against me, it seems. This is a notice from the lawyers that if I do not pay within a certain time I will be brought to court, and compelled to hand over the money."

"Can they make you do that, Daddy?" asked Ruth, anxiously.

"I'm afraid they can, my dear. As I told you, I have no proof, except my own word, that I paid Merley. He still holds my note, and that is legal evidence against me. Oh, if I had only been more business-like!"

"Never mind, Daddy!" Alice comforted him, putting her arms about his neck. "Perhaps there will be a way out."

"I hope so," her father murmured, in broken tones.

"How did the lawyers know you were here?" asked Ruth.

"They didn't. They sent it to the apartment, and the postman forwarded it to me."

"They can't sue you up here in this wilderness though; can they?" asked Alice.

"I don't know anything about the law part of it," replied Mr. DeVere. "I presume, though, that they can sue me anywhere, even though I have paid the money, as long as Merley holds that note. They can make a great deal of trouble if they wish."

"Poor Daddy!" Ruth sighed.

"Oh, but I mustn't make you worry this way," he said spiritedly. "I shall find some way to fight this case. I'll never give in to that scoundrel."

"I wonder where he is?" mused Alice. "We thought he was injured in the accident, and would not bother you."

"This notice does not mention him," replied Mr. DeVere, as he paused over the letter again. "It merely speaks of him as 'our client.' He may be in the hospital, for all I can tell."

They discussed the matter from all viewpoints, but there was nothing to be done.

"You will have to reply to the lawyers, though; won't you, daddy?" asked Ruth.

"Oh, yes, I must write to them. I shall state the case plainly, and, though, I have no proof, I shall ask them to drop the suit, as it is an unjust one."

"And if they don't?" suggested Alice.

"If they don't—well, I suppose I shall have to suffer," he replied, quietly. "I cannot raise the money now."

"Oh dear!" cried Alice, half petulantly. "I wish the blizzard was still here!"

"Why, Alice!" cried Ruth.

"Well, I do! Then there wouldn't have been any mail, and daddy wouldn't have received this horrid letter."

"Oh, well, it's best to know the plans of one's enemies," said Mr. DeVere. "Now I know what to expect. I think I shall write to Dan Merley myself, and appeal to his better nature. Surely, even though he was not entirely sober when I paid him the money, he must recall that I did. I confess I do not know whether he is merely under the impression that I did not pay him, or is deliberately telling a falsehood. It is hard to decide," he added, with a sigh.

Mr. DeVere sent a letter to Merley the next day, and a few days later an answer came back from New York, from the same firm of lawyers who had served the legal notice, to the effect that their client had left the matter entirely in their hands, and that the money must be paid. Mr. Merley, the lawyer said, preferred to have no direct communication with Mr. DeVere.

"That settles it! They mean to push the case to the limit!" exclaimed the actor.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE STORM

"That's the way to drive!"

"Come on now!"

"Faster, if you can make the horses go!"

"Get all that in, Russ!"

It was a lively scene, for a spirited race in cutters was in progress between Mr. Bunn and Mr. Sneed. It was taking place on the frozen surface of the lake, and each actor had been instructed to do his best to win. The race was a scene in the big snow drama, and it was being filmed several days after the events narrated in the preceding chapter.

The thaw was over, there had been a spell of cold weather, and Deerfield was icebound. The lake was a glittering expanse, and the ice on it was thick enough to support a regiment.

"A little more to the left, Mr. Sneed!" called Russ, who was taking the pictures. "I want to get a better side view." [175

"But if I go too far to the left I'm afraid I'll run into Mr. Bunn," objected the gloomy actor.

"No matter if you do—if you don't run into him too hard," cried Mr. Pertell. "It will make it look more natural."

"If he runs into me—and does me any damage—I shall sue him and you too!" declared Mr. Bunn. "This is a farcical idea, anyhow. You said I might get a chance to do some Shakespearean work up here; but so far I have done nothing."

"I'll see what I can do on that line next week," promised the manager. "Go on with this race now. The idea is for you, Mr. Sneed, to be in pursuit of Mr. Bunn. You must look as though you really wanted to catch him. Put some spirit into your acting."

"It is too cold!" complained Mr. Sneed. "I would a great deal rather be sitting beside the fire in the Lodge."

"No doubt," commented Mr. Pertell, drily. "But that won't make moving pictures. Come on, now, start your horses again," for they had, so far, been only rehearsing.

Finally Mr. Pertell was satisfied that the play would be done to his satisfaction, and gave the word for Russ to start unreeling the film.

Away started the two cutters over the ice, and the two actors really managed to put a little enthusiasm into their work. Then, as Russ called to Mr. Sneed to edge over a little to the left, as he had done before, at the rehearsal, the gloomy actor pulled too hard on one rein. His horse swerved too much, and, the next instant, the cutter upset, and Mr. Sneed was neatly deposited on the ice.

Fortunately he fell clear of the vehicle, and was not entangled in the reins, so he was not hurt. The horse, an intelligent animal, feeling that something was wrong, came to a stop after running a little distance.

"Stop! Stop!" called Mr. Pertell to Mr. Bunn, who was still urging on his horse, unaware of the accident to his fellow actor. "The scene is spoiled. Don't take that, Russ. Sometimes I like an accident on the film, but not in this case. It would spoil the action of the play. It will have to be done over again."

"Not with me in it!" said Mr. Sneed, as he got up and went limping toward shore.

"Why not?" asked Mr. Pertell. "Why don't you want to do this act?"

"Because I am hurt. I knew something would happen when I got up this morning, and it certainly has. I may be injured for life by this."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the manager. "You're not hurt. You only think so. Here, Mrs. Maguire, give him that bottle of witch hazel I saw you use for little Tommy the other day. That will fix you up, Mr. Sneed."

"Humph!" exclaimed the "grouch." And then, as the motherly Irish woman, with a quizzical smile on her face, started to the house for the liniment, Mr. Sneed said:

"Oh, you needn't make such a fuss over me. I suppose I can go on with this, if I am suffering. Bring back the horse."

The overturned cutter was righted, and the play went on. This time no mishap occurred and the race was run to a successful finish.

"Now, Alice and Ruth, you will get into the larger cutter, and with Paul for a driver we'll make the next scene," directed Mr. Pertell, and so the making of the play went on.

The filming of the big drama was to occupy several days, as some of the scenes were laid in distant parts of the game preserve belonging to Elk Lodge, and there was not time to take the company there, and come back for other scenes, the darkness falling early, as the year was dying.

There came fair weather, and storms, alternating. A number of fine films were obtained by Russ, some of them showing weather effects, and others views of the ice at the falls where the two girls and their companions had been imprisoned in the ice cave.

It was on one comparatively warm afternoon that Alice, who had been out in the barn to give some sugar to a favorite horse, came back and called to Ruth:

"Let's go for a walk. It's perfectly lovely out, and it will do us both good."

"All right!" agreed Ruth. "I've been sewing all morning and my eyes are tired. Where are you going?"

"Oh, in a direction we have never taken before."

"Don't get lost," advised their father.

"We won't," returned Alice. "Don't you want to come, Daddy?"

"Too busy. I'm studying a new part," he said.

So the two moving picture girls started off, and soon were tramping through the woods, following an old lumber trail.

"This leads to the camp of Flaming Arrow," said Alice, for they had paid the promised visit some time before. "Shall we take it?"

"Yes, but not all the way to the lumber camp," objected Ruth. "That is too far."

"Oh, I wouldn't think of going there now," responded Alice. "I mean to branch off on the new path I spoke of."

The day was pleasant, but there was the hint of a storm in the feeling of the air and in the clouds, and the hint was borne out a little later, for a fine snow

began sifting down.

The girls kept on, however though Ruth wanted to turn back at the first white flake.

"There's going to be a storm," she declared.

"What of it?" asked Alice, with a merry laugh. "It will be all the more fun!"

But a little later, when the wind suddenly sprang into fury, and lashed the flakes into their faces with cutting force, even Alice was ready to turn back.

"Come on," she cried to her sister. "We'd better not go to the snow grotto—that was a natural curiosity I wanted to show you. But we'll have to wait until another time."

"I should think so!" exclaimed Ruth. "This is terrible! Oh, suppose we should be lost?"

"How can we be, when all we have to do is to follow the path back to Elk Lodge?"

Alice thought it would be as easily done as she had said, and Ruth trusted to the fact that her sister had been that way on a previous occasion. But neither of them realized the full force of the storm, nor how easy it was to mistake the way in blinding snow.

They emerged from a little clump of woods, and then they felt the full force of the blast in their faces.

"Oh, Alice, we can't go on!" cried Ruth, halting and turning her face aside.

"But we must!" Alice insisted. "We've got to get back. We can't stay out in this snow. It's a small-sized blizzard now, and it is growing worse."

"Oh, what shall we do?" cried Ruth, almost sobbing.

"We must keep on!" declared Alice, grimly.

They locked arms and bent their heads before the blast. They tried to keep to the path, but after a few moments of battling with the storm, Ruth cried:

"Alice where are we?"

"On the way to Elk Lodge, of course."

"No, we're not. We're off the path! See, we didn't come past this big rock before," and she pointed to one that reared up from the snow.

Alice paused for a moment, and then, with a curious note of fear in her voice, she said:

"I—I am afraid we are lost, Ruth. Oh, it is all my fault!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE THREE MEN

They stood there together—the two moving picture girls—in the midst of the sudden storm. They stood with their arms about each other, and the frightened eyes of Alice gazed into the terror-stricken ones of Ruth.

"Alice," cried Ruth, "do you really think we are lost?"

"I'm afraid so. I didn't notice which way we were going; but, as you say, we didn't pass that rock before. We must be lost!"

"But what are we to do?"

"We've got to do something, that's sure!" Alice exclaimed. "We can't stay here and freeze."

"Of course not. But if we go on in the storm we may be snowed under."

"And I'm more afraid to stay here. We must keep on the move, Ruth."

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"Yes, I suppose so. Oh, if we could only see our way! We can't be so very far from Elk Lodge."

"We are not," agreed Alice. "We did not walk fast, and we have not been gone very long. The Lodge can't be more than two miles away; but it might just as well be two hundred for all the good that does us in this storm."

Indeed the snow was so thick that it was impossible to see many feet ahead. The white flakes swirled, seeming to come first from one direction, and then from another. The wind blew from all points of the compass, varying so quickly that the girls found it impossible to keep it at their backs.

"Well, there is one thing we can do," said Alice, when they had advanced a few steps and then retreated, not knowing whether it was better to keep on or not.

"And what is it?" asked Ruth. "If there's any one thing to do in a case like this I want to know it."

"We can go over behind that rock and get a little protection from the wind and snow," Alice went on. "See, the snow has drifted on one side; and the

other is quite bare. That shows it affords some shelter. Let's go over there."

"Come on," agreed Ruth. She caught her sister's arm in a firmer grasp, and the two girls plowed their way through the snow. They had, heretofore, been on a sort of path, that had been formed over the crust. The girls had on their snowshoes or they would have scarcely been able to progress. As it was the going was sufficiently difficult.

"Oh, wait a moment!" panted Ruth, half way to the sheltering rock.

"What's the matter?" asked Alice, quickly. "Are you ill?"

"No, don't worry about me, dear. I'm only—out of breath!"

"I positively believe you're getting stout!" laughed Alice, and Ruth was glad that she could laugh, even in the face of impending danger. "You must take more exercise," she went on.

"I'm getting plenty of it now," observed Ruth. "Oh, but it is hard going in this snow!"

Together they struggled on, and finally reached the rock. As Alice had surmised, the big boulder did give them shelter, and they were grateful for it, as they were quite exhausted by their battle with the storm.

"What a relief!" sighed Alice, as she leaned back against the big stone.

"Oh, isn't it!" agreed Ruth. "But, Alice, if we are so played out by that little trip, how are we ever going to get back to Elk Lodge?"

"I don't know, dear," was the hesitating answer. "But we must get back. Maybe the snow will stop after a little, and we can see our way. That is really all we need—to see the path. I'm sure I've been out in worse storms than this."

"It is bad enough," responded Ruth, apprehensively. "See how it snows!"

Indeed the white flakes were coming down with increased violence, and the wind swept and howled about the rock with a melancholy sound. The girls huddled close together.

"Can you ever forgive me for bringing you out in such weather as this?" begged Alice, self-reproachfully.

"It wasn't your fault at all, dear," Ruth reassured her and her arms went about her sister in a loving embrace. "I wanted to come. Neither of us knew

this storm would make us get lost."

Alice said nothing for a moment. She was busy arranging a scarf more tightly about her throat, for she felt the flakes blowing and sifting on her, and did not want to take cold. The girls were warmly dressed, which was in their favor.

For five or ten minutes they remained under the lee of the rock, not knowing what to do. They realized, though neither wanted to mention it to the other, that they could not remain there very long. Night would settle down, sooner or later, and they could not remain out without shelter. Yet where could they go?

"If it would only stop!" cried Ruth.

"Yes, or if someone from Elk Lodge would come after us!" added Alice.

"I'm sure they will!" cried Ruth, catching at this slender hope. "Oh, Alice, I'm sure they'll come."

"And so am I, as far as that is concerned," agreed Alice. "The only trouble is they will not know where to come. Don't you see?"

"But they know where we were going—you mentioned it to daddy."

"I know, but don't you understand, my dear, we're not where we said we would go. We're lost—we're off the path. If it was only a question of someone from the Lodge following the proper path it would be all right. But we're far from it, and they will have no idea where to search for us."

"Couldn't they trail us with—with bloodhounds?"

"Oh, I don't believe it will get as desperate as that. Not that there are any bloodhounds at Elk Lodge. But there are some hunting dogs, and I presume they might be able to follow our trail. Won't it seem odd to be trailed by dogs? Just as if we were fugitive slaves!"

"I don't care how they trail us, as long as we get back to Elk Lodge!" and there was a sob in Ruth's voice.

The next moment Alice, on whose shoulder Ruth had laid her head, uttered a cry.

"Oh, what is it?" asked the elder girl. "Do you see someone? Are they coming for us?"

"No, but the snow is stopping, and I can see a house—two of them, in fact."

"A house! Good! Is it far off?"

"No, not far. Come on, I believe we can reach it."

As Alice had said, the snow had ceased falling almost as suddenly as it had set in, and this gave the girls a clear view. They had made a little turn from their original direction in getting to the rock, and they had a view down in a little glade. There, as Alice had said, nestled two houses; or, rather log cabins. One was of large size, and the other smaller.

"Let's go there!" suggested Alice. "We can get shelter, and perhaps there is someone in one of the cabins who will take us to Elk Lodge. We can offer to pay him."

"They wouldn't want it," declared Ruth. "But come on. We mustn't lose any time, for the snow may set in again at any moment. We must get there while we can see."

The wind, too, had died out somewhat, so that it was comparatively easy travelling now. Together the girls made their way over the snow toward the smaller of the two cabins, that being the nearer.

They reached it, struggling, panting and out of breath, and after waiting a moment, to allow their laboring hearts to quiet down, that they might speak less brokenly, Alice knocked at the door. There was no answer.

"Oh, suppose they should not be home?" cried Ruth.

"That seems to be the case," spoke Alice, as she knocked again, without result.

"What shall we do—go to the other cabin?" asked Ruth.

"Let's see if this one is open," proposed Alice. "They may be hospitable enough to have left the door unlocked."

As she spoke she tried the latch. Somewhat to her surprise the door did open, and then to the astonishment of both girls they found themselves in an unoccupied cabin.

"Oh dear!" cried Ruth. "What a disappointment!"

"Isn't it?" agreed Alice. "Well, we can try the other."

They stood for a moment in the main room of the small cabin, and looked about. There was nothing in it save a few boxes.

"We could make a fire—I have matches, and we could break up the boxes on the hearth," said Alice. "Shall we?"

"No, let's go to the other cabin. I'm sure someone will be there," suggested her sister.

"Come on!"

They stepped to the door, but at that instant the snow began again, harder than before.

"No use!" cried Alice. "We're doomed to stay here, I guess."

"Well, it's a shelter, at any rate," sighed Ruth. She was not frightened now.

"And there's another good thing," went on Alice. "These cabins are a definite place. If a searching party starts out for us Mr. Macksey will be sure to think about these, and look here for us. I think we are all right now."

"We're better off, at any rate," observed Ruth. "I believe we might make a fire, Alice."

"That's what I say."

They had taken off their snowshoes, and now, by stamping and kicking at the boxes, they managed to break them up into kindling wood. Soon a little blaze was crackling on the hearth. The warmth was grateful to the chilled girls.

They stood before it toasting their cold hands, and then, when Ruth went to the window to look out, she called:

"It's stopped snowing again. Don't you think we'd better run to the other cabin while we have the chance?"

"I suppose it would be wise," agreed Alice. "We really ought to start for Elk Lodge, and we could if we had a guide. Come on."

Together they started for the larger cabin, but when half way to it they saw three men coming out. The men had guns over their shoulders, and they headed down the trail, away from the girls.

Not before, however, the two sisters had a good view of the features of the trio. And instantly the same thought came to both.

"Did you see who one of those men was?" gasped Ruth.

"Yes, it is he! And those are the same two men who were with him before," answered Alice.

"Dan Merley—the man who is going to sue daddy for that five hundred dollars!" went on Ruth, clasping her hands.

"And with him are the two men who were present when the street car accident happened in New York—Fripp and Jagle. They are the hunters who have been annoying Mr. Macksey."

"Oh, what shall we do?" asked Ruth. "We can't appeal to them for help, not after the way Merley behaved to us."

"Of course not! Oh, isn't it provoking? Just as we see help we can't avail ourselves of it. The men are getting farther and farther away," Alice went on. "If we are going to appeal to them we must be quick about it."

"Don't call to them!" exclaimed Ruth. "It might be dangerous. They haven't noticed us—let them go. But Alice, did you see how Merley seems to have recovered from his accident? He walks as well as the others."

"Yes, so he does. I'm glad they didn't see us. But I have a plan. There may be other persons in the cabin. When the three men are out of sight, and they will be in the woods in a little while, we can go and ask help of whoever is left in the cabin."

"Yes," agreed Ruth, and they waited, going back to the small cabin. "I remember now," Ruth added after a pause, "that man who was in the bushes the time of the coasting race was Fripp. I knew I had seen him somewhere before, but I could not recall him then."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PLAN OF RUSS

The three men, with their guns on their shoulders, passed out of sight into a clump of woodland.

"Now's our chance," said Alice. "We'll slip over to the other cabin, and see if we can get help. These men are evidently up here on a hunting trip, and they may have a man cook, or some sort of help in the cabin. Whoever it is can't refuse to at least set us on the right road. We don't need to mention that Mr. Merley is going to sue our father."

"I should say not," agreed Ruth. "Oh, that horrid man! I never want to see him again. But isn't it queer how soon he recovered from his injury?"

"Rather odd. We must tell daddy about it when we get back."

"If we ever do," sighed the older girl.

"If we ever do?" repeated Alice. "Why of course we'll get back. I don't believe it is going to storm any more."

"I hope not."

On their snowshoes the moving picture girls made their way to the second cabin. But again disappointment awaited them, for there was no answer to their repeated knocks.

"No one at home," spoke Alice. "Shall we try to go in?"

"It would do no good," Ruth decided. "If it is shelter we want we can get it at the other cabin. And as there is no one at home here we can't ask our way. Besides, those men might come back unexpectedly, and I wouldn't have Merley and his two companions find us in their cabin for anything!"

"Neither would I. That Merley would be mean enough," Alice declared, "to charge us rent, and add that to the five hundred dollars he is going to make daddy pay."

"Oh, Alice! What queer ideas you have. But, dear, we mustn't linger here. I wonder if it would do to follow those men?"

"Follow them? What in the world for?"

"Why they seem to have taken some sort of a trail, and it may lead out to a road that will take us to Elk Lodge."

"It isn't very likely," Alice declared. "I'm sure I know the general direction in which Elk Lodge lies, and it's just opposite from where those men went. I think, now, that the storm has stopped, that we can get back on the path."

"Then, for goodness sakes, let's try!" proposed Ruth. "It seems to be getting darker. Oh, if they would only come for us!"

"Let us try to help ourselves first," counseled Alice.

The girls retraced their steps, going back toward the smaller cabin. They stopped in for a moment to see that the blaze they had kindled on the hearth was out, for they did not want a chance spark to set fire to the place. But the embers were cold and dead, for the wood had been light, and there was not much of it.

Then gliding over the crust on their snowshoes, Ruth and Alice got back to the sheltering rock.

"Let me look about a bit," Alice requested. "I think I can pick up the trail again. If I could only get back to the point where we got off from I would be all right."

She walked about a little and then, passing through a small clump of trees, while Ruth remained at the rock, Alice suddenly gave a joyful cry.

"I've found it!" she called. "Come on, Ruth. It's all right. I'm on the proper path now."

Ruth hurried to join her sister, and confirmed the good news. They recognized the path by which they had come, and soon they were traveling along it, certain, now, that they were headed for Elk Lodge.

And their adventures seemed to be over for that day at least, for, on covering about three-quarters of a mile they were delighted to see, hurrying toward them, Russ and Paul.

"There are the boys!" cried Alice.

"And I was never more glad to see anyone in all my life!" exclaimed Ruth.

"We're not lost now, and don't really need them," said Alice.

"Well, don't tell them that—especially after they have been so good as to come for us," advised Ruth.

"Silly! Of course I won't!"

"Well, you two seem to have the oddest faculty for getting into trouble!" cried Russ as he and Paul reached the girls. "The whole Lodge is worried to death about you, and we're all out searching for you."

"Oh, it's too bad we gave so much trouble," responded Ruth, contritely. "But we couldn't help it. We were lost in the storm."

"We thought that likely," Paul said. "Your father is quite worried."

"Is he out searching, too?" Alice asked.

"No, his throat troubles him," the young actor replied. "But every other man at the Lodge is. Mr. Macksey told us to come this way, and if we didn't locate you we were to meet him at some place where there are two cabins."

"We just came from there," Ruth said, "and we had the oddest adventure. I'll tell you about it when we get back. We tried to get a guide to show us the path, but as it happened we didn't need one. Oh, I believe it's snowing again!"

Some white flakes were sifting down.

"It's only a little flurry," decided Paul. "And it won't matter, for the path back is very plain now. But what happened?"

The girls told him, and when he heard that Merley was in the neighborhood, and apparently uninjured, Russ said:

"I always thought that fellow was a faker. I'd like to know what his game was."

"Do you think it is a game?" asked Alice.

"Yes, and I think it's more of a game than the game they are after up here. I think they're hatching some plot."

They arrived at Elk Lodge a little later, and leaving the girls with their father, Russ and Paul went after the other searchers, to tell them that the lost ones were found.

"You must not go away alone again," cautioned Mr. DeVere to his daughters, when all the searchers had returned, and there was a joyful reunion in the big living room.

"We won't!" promised Alice. "I was really a bit frightened this time."

"A *bit* frightened!" cried Ruth. "I was awfully scared! I could see us both frozen stiff under the snow, and the dogs nosing us out as they do travelers in the Alps."

"I'm glad that didn't happen," laughed Russ. "For I suppose if it had Mr. Pertell would have insisted on having a moving picture of it, and I would have been too prostrated with grief to be able to work the camera."

"Well, we're all right now," declared Alice. "And such an appetite as I have!"

"Did you tell your father about Dan Merley?" asked Russ.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Ruth. "Listen Daddy, whom do you think we saw?"

"Not Dan Merley up here?" cried the actor.

"Yes, he was with two other men—those who were with him when he was hurt by the street car."

"Dan Merley up here?" mused Mr. DeVere. "I wonder what he can want? Can he be going to make trouble for me?"

"We won't let him, Daddy!" cried Alice. "If he walks over here to ask for that five hundred dollars again, I'll——"

"You say he was walking around?" cried Mr. DeVere.

"Yes, on snowshoes," answered Ruth. "He was walking as well as anyone."

"And he was supposed to be seriously hurt!" murmured the actor. "Where is that paper?" and he looked about him.

"What paper?" asked Ruth.

"That New York paper I was just reading. There is something in it I want to show you. I begin to see through this."

The journal was found, and Mr. DeVere glanced through it rapidly, looking

for some item. Russ and the two girls watched him curiously.

"Here it is!" cried the actor. "It is headed 'Brings Damage Suit for Ten Thousand Dollars.' Listen, I'll just give you the main facts. It says Dan Merley had started an action in one of the courts demanding ten thousand dollars' damages for being hurt by a street car. Merley claims he will never be able to walk again, because his back is permanently hurt. And yet you saw him walking?" he appealed to the two girls.

"We certainly saw him," declared Ruth.

"Then that is a bogus damage suit. He isn't hurt at all. The court should know of this, and so should the street car company. I shall write to them!"

"Wait!" cried Russ. "I have a better idea."

"What is it?" asked Mr. DeVere.

"I'll get some moving pictures of him," went on the young operator. "I'll take a film, showing him tramping around, hunting, and when that is shown to the street car company's lawyer I guess that will put an end to Mr. Merley's suit. I'll film the faker!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PROOF ON THE FILM

Enthusiastic over his new idea, Russ gazed triumphantly at Mr. DeVere and the two girls. They did not seem to comprehend.

"What—what was that you said?" asked Mr. DeVere.

"I said I was going to make a moving picture of that faker," repeated Russ. "Excuse that word, but it's the only one that fits."

"Yes, he really is a faker and cheat," agreed the actor. "And, Russ, your idea is most excellent. It will be the best kind of evidence against the scoundrel, and evidence that can not be controverted."

"That's my idea," went on the young operator. "Some of these accident fakers are so clever that they fool the doctors."

"Do they really make a business of it?" asked Ruth.

"Indeed they do," Russ answered. "Sometimes a gang of men, who don't like to work for a living, plan to have a series of accidents. They decide on who shall be 'hurt,' and where. Then they get their witnesses, who will testify to anything as long as they get paid for it. They hire rascally lawyers, too. Sometimes they have fake accidents happen to their wagons or automobiles instead of themselves. And more than once conductors or motormen of cars have been in with the rascals."

"It doesn't seem possible!" protested Alice.

"It is though," her father assured her. "I read in a newspaper the other day how two fakers were found out and arrested. But they had secured a large sum in damages, so I presume they figured that it paid them. I knew Dan Merley was an unprincipled man, but I did not believe he was an accident swindler. But you can stop him, Russ."

"I don't see how you are going to do it," remarked Alice. "I mean, I don't see that Dan Merley will let you take a moving picture of him, to show to the court, proving that he is a swindler."

"I don't suppose he would—if he knew it," laughed Russ. "But I don't

propose to let him see me filming him. I've got to do it on the sly, and it isn't going to be very easy. But I think I can manage it."

"I wish we could help you," said Ruth.

"Perhaps you can," the young moving picture operator answered. "I'll have to make some plans. But we've got a big day ahead of us to-morrow, and I can't do it then. I'll have to wait."

"Do you think I had better write to the court, and to the lawyers of the street car company?" asked Mr. DeVere. "Your plan might fail, Russ."

"Well, of course it might, that's a fact. But there is time enough. I'd like to try my way first, though, for it would be conclusive proof. If you sent word to the lawyers, and they sent a witness up here to get his evidence by eyesight, Merley might hear of it in some way and fool them. He might pretend to be lame again, if he knew he was being watched.

"Then, too, he could bring his own witnesses to prove that he was lame and unable to walk. It would be a case of which witnesses the court and jury would believe.

"But if I get the proof on the film—you can't go back of that. Just imagine, working a moving picture machine in one of the courts!" and he laughed at the idea.

"Perhaps you won't have to go to that end," suggested Ruth.

"No, we may be able to give Merley a hint that he had better not keep on with the suit," Mr. DeVere said. "Well, Russ, I wish you luck."

A little later all the members of the company had heard of Russ's plan and Mr. Pertell said that as soon as the big drama was finished Russ could have as much time as he wanted to try and get a moving picture film of Merley.

"I'll have to go over to that cabin, and sort of size up the situation," Russ decided. "I want to get the lay of the land, and pick out the best spot to plant my camera. I suppose it will have to be behind a clump of bushes."

"Oh, no! I know the very place for you!" cried Ruth.

"Where?" he asked.

"In the second, or small cabin. You can hide yourself there and focus your camera through the window. Then you can film him without him seeing you."

"Good!" cried Russ. "That will be the very thing!"

As Russ had said, the next day was a very busy one for him, and all the members of the company. Several important scenes in the big drama were made. A few of them were interiors, in the barn or in the living room of Elk Lodge, and for this the players were thankful, for the weather had turned cold, and it was disagreeable outdoors.

Still, some snow scenes were needed, and the work had to go on. Russ had one of his hands slightly frost-bitten using it without a glove to make some adjustments to his camera, and the tips of Mr. Sneed's ears were nipped with the cold.

This happened when the actor was doing a little bit which called for him to shovel a supposedly lost and frozen person out of a snow bank. Of course a "dummy" was put under the snow, and the real person, (in this case Mr. Bunn,) acted up to the time of the snow burial. Then a clever substitution was made and the film was exposed again. This is often done to get trick pictures.

Mr. Sneed was shoveling away at the snow bank. His ears had been very cold, but suddenly seemed to have lost all feeling. He was rather surprised, then, when the act was over, to have Mr. Switzer rush up to him with a handful of snow and hold some over each ear.

"Here! Quit that! What do you mean?" cried the grouchy actor.

"I got to do it alretty yet!" exclaimed the German.

"Quit it! Stop it!"

"No, I stops not until I haf der cold drawed out of your ears. They are frosted, mine dear chap, und dis is der only vay to make dem proper. I know, I have been in der Far North."

"That's right—it's the best way. Hold snow on your frosted ears or nose, whatever it happens to be," declared Mr. Pertell. "You can thank Mr. Switzer for saving you a lot of trouble, Mr. Sneed."

"Humph! It's a funny thing to be thankful for—because someone washes your face with snow," declared the grouchy actor.

It was two days later before Russ had time to carry out his plan of "filming the faker," as he referred to it. Then he and Paul, with Ruth and Alice, went to the two cabins. Russ took along a special moving picture camera made for

fast work, and one with a lens that admitted of a long focus.

"For Merley may not come very near the small cabin," the young moving picture operator said. "I may have to get him a long way off. But I don't want to miss him."

When the four were in the vicinity of the place they proceeded cautiously, for they did not want to expose themselves. From a screen of bushes Russ took an observation, and announced that the coast was clear.

"We'll slip into the cabin, and stay there as long as we can," Russ said, and they ran across an open space. As far as they could tell they were not observed.

Two hours passed, and Russ was beginning to be afraid his plan would be a failure, for that day at least.

"But I'll come back again to-morrow, and the next day—until I film that faker!" he exclaimed. "I'm going to expose him!"

"Look!" exclaimed Paul, who was standing near a window. "There are two men over near that other cabin. Is one of them Merley?"

Russ and Alice reached the window at the same time.

"There he is!" Alice cried.

"And walking as well as any man," Russ exclaimed. "Here's where I get him!"

The moving picture camera was brought to the casement, and a moment later Russ began clicking away at it. He had it focused on Merley who, with Fripp, was walking about the other cabin. Merley walked without the suspicion of a limp, and a little later he took a shovel, and began clearing snow away from some of the walks.

"Good!" cried Russ. "Better and better! If he can do such strenuous work as that he isn't hurt. This cooks your goose, Dan Merley!"

He continued to grind away, getting the proof of the fellow's criminality on the sensitive film.

"Oh, they're coming over this way!" exclaimed Ruth. "What shall we do?"

"Nothing," declared Russ, calmly. "The nearer he comes the better pictures

I can get. Don't be afraid. Paul and I are here."

Merley had indeed started toward the smaller cabin. He was walking rapidly and well, and Russ got some excellent pictures. Then Fripp, who remained at the larger cabin, called to his companion, who turned back for some reason.

"Good!" cried Russ. "I've got him going and coming! Oh, this will be great!"

He continued to grind away at the film, and soon had sufficient pictures.

"But how are we going to get away without them seeing us?" asked Alice.

"We can wait until dark," Russ said.

But there was no need. A little later the two men went into the large cabin, and presently came out with their guns. There was no sign of Jagle. But Merley and Fripp started for the woods, and as soon as they were out of sight the four emerged from the small cabin, Russ carrying his camera that now contained the proof on the film. They hurried back to Elk Lodge.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MOVING PICTURE

The last drama of the backwoods had been filmed. The unexposed reels were sent in to New York, together with the one made of Dan Merley, showing a supposedly injured man walking vigorously about.

"And now good-bye to Elk Lodge," sighed Alice, when they were packing up to go back to New York. "I'm sorry to leave it."

"So am I!" added Ruth. "We have had some lovely times here."

"And strenuous ones, too," spoke Alice.

"Oh, but won't I be glad to see dear old Broadway again!" cried Miss Pennington, affectedly.

"And won't I!" sighed Miss Dixon. "I want to see the sights."

"As if there weren't finer ones here than any in New York!" murmured Alice.

"Everyone to their notion, my dear," remarked Miss Pennington, in a pert manner. [208

The last days at Elk Lodge were ones of delight. For the weather was good, and there was plenty of snow, which made fine coasting. There was also skating, with a number of straw rides.

The members of the picture company gave themselves up to pleasure, and Russ put away his cameras and joined in the fun with the others.

"I don't care what happens now!" he cried. "I don't have to film it."

Paul and Russ, with the two girls, paid another visit to the vicinity of the two cabins. There was a deserted look about the larger one, and a cautious examination revealed the fact that the occupants had gone.

"I suppose he has returned to New York to prosecute his suit against the street car company," said Ruth.

"And also his one against daddy," added Alice.

Three days later the moving picture company returned to New York.

"And what are the next plans—I mean what sort of pictures are you going to make next?" asked Mr. DeVere of Mr. Pertell.

"I haven't quite made up my mind. I'll let you all know a little later," the manager answered.

"I hope it isn't any more snow and ice," remarked Mr. Bunn.

Mr. Pertell only smiled.

Mr. DeVere and his daughters went to their apartment, Russ accompanying them. His mother and brother were glad, not only to see the young operator but the DeVere family as well.

The next day Mr. DeVere received a call from a lawyer who said he represented Dan Merley.

"I have come to see if you are ready to pay that five hundred dollars before we go to court, Mr. DeVere," the lawyer said, stiffly.

"I haven't got it," answered the actor.

"Very well then, we shall sue and you will have to pay heavy costs and fees, in addition to the principal."

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Mr. DeVere was very much worried, and spoke of the matter to Russ. The young operator laughed.

"Dan Merley will never collect that money," he said.

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't think—I know. Give me that lawyer's address, and then don't do anything until you hear from me."

It was two days later that Russ said to the actor:

"Can you make it convenient to be at our film studio this evening?"

"I think so—why?" asked Mr. DeVere.

"You'll see when you get there."

"May we come?" asked Ruth.

"Surely," Russ answered. "I think you'll enjoy it, too!"

Rather mystified, but somehow suspecting what was afoot, the two girls accompanied their father to the studio at the appointed hour. Russ met them and took them into the room where the films were first shown after being prepared for the projector. It was a sort of testing room.

"I think you have met this gentleman before," said Russ, as he nodded at one sitting in a corner. It was Dan Merley's lawyer.

"Oh, yes, I guess Mr. DeVere knows me," returned the latter. "I understand you have come here for a settlement," he went on.

"Yes," said Russ, smiling.

"A—a settlement!" murmured Mr. DeVere. "I—I am not prepared to settle. I have not the money!"

"You don't need the money," declared Russ. "You have brought Mr. DeVere's promissory note with you; have you not?" he asked the lawyer.

"I brought it, at your request," was the answer. "But I tell you, here and now, that it will not be surrendered until the five hundred dollars is paid."

"Oh yes," said Russ gently, "I think it will. Look! Ready!"

As he spoke the room was suddenly darkened, and then, on the big white screen, there sprang into prominence life-size moving pictures of Dan Merley, showing him walking about the backwoods cabin, and shoveling snow. The likeness was perfect.

"I—er—I—what does this mean?" stammered the lawyer, springing to his feet.

"It means that Dan Merley is a faker!" cried Russ, as the lights were turned up again, and Mr. Pertell came up from the booth where he had been working the moving picture machine.

"It means that he is a faker when he says he was injured by the street car," cried Russ, "and we're going to show these pictures in court if he persists in the suit. And it means he's a faker when he says Mr. DeVere owes him five hundred dollars. It means he's a faker from beginning to end! We've got the proof on the film!" and his voice rang out.

"Oh, Russ!" cried Ruth, and she clasped his hand in delight.

"I—er—I—" stammered Mr. DeVere as he sank into a chair.

"Daddy, you won't have to pay!" exclaimed Alice, joyfully.

"How about that, Mr. Black?" asked Russ of the lawyer. "Do you think your client will go on with the street car suit?"

"Well, my dear young man, in view of what you have shown me, I—er—I think not. In fact I know not." The lawyer was beaten and he realized it.

"And about Mr. DeVere's note?" asked Russ.

The lawyer took out his pocketbook.

"Here is the note," he muttered. "You have beaten us. I presume if we drop both suits that you will not show these pictures in court?"

"It won't be necessary," said Russ. "If the suits are withdrawn the pictures will not be shown. But they will be kept—for future reference," he added significantly.

"I understand," spoke the lawyer. "You are a very clever young man."

"Oh, the young ladies helped me," laughed Russ.

"Good-night," said the lawyer, bowing himself out.

"There you are, Mr. DeVere!" cried Russ, as they were on their way from the studio. "You'd better destroy that note. It's the only evidence Merley had, and now you have it back. Tear it up—burn it!"

"I will indeed! I never can thank you enough for securing it for me. Those moving pictures were a clever idea."

The next day formal notice was sent to Mr. DeVere that the suit against him had been withdrawn, and Merley had to pay all advance court charges. The actor would not again be made to pay the five hundred dollars. The suit against the street car company was also taken out of court. And Dan Merley and his confederates disappeared for a time. It seems that Merley went to the woods to hunt as a sort of relief from having to pose all the while in New York as an injured man. He felt at home up in that locality, having been there many times before.

"Well," said Mr. Pertell to Mr. DeVere and the girls one day, when he had called to see them, "I suppose you are ready for more camera work by this

time?"

"What now?" asked Ruth. "Can't you give us something different from what we have been having?"

"Indeed I can," was his answer. "How would you like to go to Florida?"

"Florida!" the girls cried together. "Oh, how lovely."

"That's answer enough," said the manager. "We leave in a week!"

"I wonder what will happen down there?" asked Alice.

And my readers may learn by perusing the next volume of this series, to be entitled "The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms; Or, Lost in the Wilds of Florida."

"It seems too good to be true," spoke Alice that night, as she and Ruth were talking over what dresses they would take.

"Doesn't it! Oh, I am just wild to go down South!"

"So am I. I'd like to know what part we're going to."

"Why?"

"Oh, you know those two girls we met in the train. They were going somewhere near Lake Kissimmee. We might meet them."

"We might," answered Ruth sleepily. "Put out the light, dear, and come to bed. We will have some busy times, getting ready to go to Florida."

And thus we will take leave of the moving picture girls.

Transcriber's Notes

Obvious punctuation errors corrected.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word

and the original text will appear.

END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE MOVING PICTURE GIRLS SNOWBOUND

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