

Autumn Fruits

(Being the 16th part of the diary of Amelia Bourne-Phipps, starting her third and final year at Songmark Aeronautical Boarding School for Young Ladies. Golly!)

Tuesday September 20th, 1936

Dear Diary – after the troubles of the last week in the Albanian South Indies, it is a relief to get back home. Term starts on Monday, and indeed the first-years are already here and in class. I was spared the chore of acting as reception committee even had I been available – we are third-years now and above that sort of thing. Which is only another way of saying our Tutors are surely going to find us something much worse to do, soon enough.

As soon as I had said a less than reluctant farewell to Brigit Mulvaney and Zara, I was straight round to my bank with my wages cheque. That, and a rather fatter commercial log book, is certainly the bright side of things. Checking my account, I note that Father has paid my allowance and suchlike, which is always a relief. After all, according to the government back in England I am listed as an Enemy Agent, thanks to that awful squirrel Sippy Forsythe.

I was definitely reminded of that when I bumped into the dark-haired tabby girl who works at the British Embassy, and refused to replace my passport. She looked me over with a sneer and asked if I was banking ill-gotten gains from my paymaster.

I think Molly would have decided one may as well be hung for a pound as a shilling, and practiced the Roedean Nerve pinch on her (there is a way we have been taught where you make it look like they have fainted and you are solicitously trying to help them as they collapse.) It was tempting. But I just smiled politely and let her pass, hearing the manager address her as Miss Millicent. So, that is something learned. If she is training in the diplomatic corps, I would have thought gloating at unfortunates would be considered undiplomatic.

At last I was on a water-taxi again, chatting in Spontoonie with the taxi boatman and heading homewards to South Island. This time next week we will all be back in class and finding out just why third-years tend to have that haunted look. I have a few days to get back into the swing of things, and hope to make the most of it.

I had an awful shock when I got to the Hoele'toemi compound; it was shut up and deserted, with no sign of anyone! I had a rather bad minute looking around the empty compound, until I spotted one of the neighbours. She explained that tonight is the "Hoopy Jaloopy" festival, and most folk are out on the West beach building the giant tourist figure and getting ready for the party.

It was quite a relief. Tonight is the first full moon after the last tourist boat departed (only last week, I am told) and all the hotel staff and "custom" entertainers are home with their waiter's dress suits or specially designed traditional costumes packed away for the year. It made me realise rather how much I have come to rely on the Hoele'toemi family, as the prospect of moving into a tourist guest house rather chills now. And I could feel my training kicking in: by the time I had made sure there was nobody at home I had already thought of four Alternative Plans.

It was a fine meeting, with Helen, Maria and Saffina plus Mrs H and all the family! Well, all except two; Jerry and his father were here all last week but have now left again! So much for a perfect last week of the holidays. Helen is very happily established in the guest longhouse with Marti, and it is the village women's longhouse for me. I can hardly say "alone" as there are half a dozen young village girls there apart from my dorm, but I had hoped for different company. Helen has been settled with Marti since we came back from Cranium Island.

I asked after Molly, and Helen's ears went right down as she explained Lars is back in the Spontoon Islands now and Molly is spending all her time with him. Well, she will certainly not get the chance next week; our Tutors have made it very plain what they think of him. Everyone else is enjoying their final week of freedom, though Saffina was grabbed last week to act as first-year welcoming committee.

It really makes the holiday better, knowing the new year are hard at work right now, coming to terms with three-finger Poi several times a week and discovering how hungry the exercise makes you regardless. Some of Beryl's little Songmark guide was accurate, including the bits about how you will ache in places one never noticed existed before. The frightening thing is, our Tutors have often told us they try and make every year equally hard, so whatever sort of challenges are in front of us are liable to be awful!

I helped Mrs H and the neighbours complete the palm-leaf effigy. It is harder to build than in previous years, as believe it or not South Island is running out of rubbish! This past year

a lot of the young Spontoonies have been scouring up every pile of discarded roof thatching and delivering it to Casino Island where the rival German Scientists are turning it into gas or electricity. Even the cooking fire pits are looking very clean, as Professor Kurt pays good prices for wood ash for his industrial scale compost heap.

Still, by mid-afternoon there was a fifteen foot tall effigy standing on the beach, a rounded form with deafeningly loud shirt made from dyed sacking and a yard-long cigar made from palm fronds and cardboard. A tea-chest painted black forms his camera, and in authentic style he wears the Spontoonie script hat that translates “skirt-lifter”. The actual Spontoonie phrase is ruder than that sounds; these things never translate exactly.

The official festival only started at moonrise, so we returned for a few hours to Haio Beach. Molly was there first, alone in the village hut, and was rather embarrassed when we found her. I looked at the book she had been reading with such evident enjoyment, which I had expected to be “Extra-Spicy Pacific Adventures” although Molly has enough real ones anyway. Actually it was something I doubt is on sale anywhere – a technical report from the Bureau of Naval Design and Construction in Washington. She had propped the page open to a series of spark-gap photographs in thousandths of a second flashes, ‘*Model C 14” shell fired at 300 yards range on Charge Super, penetrating 16 inches of face-hardened Krupp Cemented Plate*’ as some of the captured German fleet was tested to destruction after 1918. Well, I hardly expected Molly to daydream about hearts and flowers. Seeing millisecond by millisecond how the traditional unstoppable force fares against the immovable object has its fascination I suppose, but to Molly so does setting buildings on fire.

As soon as I had seen it she hid the book in her day pack and whispered that Lars needed it back; I could see the “Secret” stamp on the front cover and can imagine there were never many copies printed. How Lars got it, is probably quite a story in its own right but one that will not be appearing in the Daily Elele. It is hard to say why the Spontoonies need anything like that if they already have those shells Lars got from Fiume; I can hardly see the local iron foundries casting any improved models! Those plain iron bollards they got from Rain Island are surely dummy training rounds.

Molly looks in the bloom of health, despite having been to Krupmark. She says it is much better than the horror tales she has heard from us; I suppose it suits her better than the rest of us. Having one place she is actually secure from G-Men with extradition warrants is an asset, I suppose. She says she has been making herself useful, and getting in some self-defence practice. Her eyes definitely gleamed when she mentioned Lars has promised her something very special as an Engagement present. I doubt it will come from a jewellery shop.

As the moon came up on the peaceful and mostly tourist-free islands, we gathered around the effigy on the beach. I suppose it was much as they taught us in Religious Education, of in olden times Kings ruled for a year signifying the fertility of the land then were sacrificed to ensure prosperity for the new year (the New Year theatrics with the old and new year characters is an echo of it.) The giant loud tourist is paying for many of the good things the Spontoonies enjoy, but at the end of the year – bonfire time!

There were some “tourists” present but not the sort the effigy shows. At any time of year there are travellers, explorers and treasure-hunters passing through, and every village having a giant effigy and party preparations is likely to get noticed. One snout was familiar from Casino Island, that Miss Fawnsworthy we met when I attended Reverend Bingham’s church. She was with a gentleman deer, a nice-looking buck in a fine linen suit who had a spread of horns one could have held up a week’s laundry on. One never sees stags in deep-sea diving helmets.

As the moon rose, the folk who have been sweating all Summer in waiter’s costumes and chambermaid’s outfits finally had their revenge. First the Priestess (one of Saimmi’s friends we have met) lit and blessed a small camp fire, which was used to light torches. Then there was a grand torchlight procession, finishing in them hurling their torches at the tubby effigy. I am sure alienists would heartily approve, as it acts as a safety valve for Repressed Intentions.

Although strictly speaking she is not qualified, nobody objected when Molly grabbed a blazing torch and thrust it into the already flaming image, probably close enough to scorch her fur. She does enjoy this; she threw back her head and laughed, lit most strikingly in the firelight as it gleamed in her eyes giving an effect film-makers would try long and hard to deliberately produce. For some reason I noticed the buck with Miss Fawnsworthy give a start and beat a hasty retreat towards the refreshments.

An excellent evening, as I am off “flight regulations” now and can have as much Nootnops Blue as I like. Whatever we are doing next week, it will certainly not be partying!

Wednesday 21st September, 1936

A day of relaxing after the party. The combination of my nerve-wracking South Indies trip and a very fine party left me feeling like a very flat but contented fur rug, just wanting to lie on the beach and soak up the still very nice Autumn sunshine. Actually I gave in to that temptation all morning while the rest joined me and we caught up on events. It will probably be a very long time before we can all do this again, just relax in the sunshine with nothing urgent to disturb us. In fact we can hardly count on it till Easter, and who knows what will be happening by then.

Molly and I have both been away for more than a week, in opposite directions. In fact they have been opposite in more than just compass bearings: whatever folk may complain about the Johnsons' family arrangements, they are certainly respectable people. Molly, on the other paw, has been helping Lars with what he does on Krupmark. She was a little vague about some of it; I think she realised too much information would only upset us.

Maria says the new Flying School is now in full swing; in fact they started their term a few days before the Songmark first-years. They are always neatly dressed, keep very much to themselves and are quietly being good citizens dividing their time between classes, flying and Church. No errant first-years being hunted down through the streets of Casino Island by their seniors! She has met the entire class and teachers, who came to the final service on South Island when the Chapel of the Sacred Heart was carefully dismantled. None of it was scrapped or burned even though a lot of the building is corrugated iron and timber that was green at the start and has seen better days since then. They have already planted decorative flower-beds on the site, where they will install a Calvary (possibly hoping the Native Spontoones will not recognise what it is.)

Thinking of first-years, Saffina has a few tales to tell us of some new arrivals. She managed to find out most of the girls Beryl had sold those misleading pamphlets to, and warn them. Unfortunately some had already generously showed them to other new arrivals, who she had not got to in time. So the first breakfast meal on Monday had five girls standing up and in tolerable close harmony singing Beryl's idea of the Spontoon National Anthem, "Allthings Bright and Beautiful" with rather rude lyrics in the second and third verses. Actually I am sorry I missed it.

Although I imagine Beryl will get called onto the carpet by our Tutors for that prank, she is a resilient rodent and will not lose any sleep over it. Besides, it all happened in Holiday time and she was careful to ask for the pamphlet's return before the first day of term – she is always very careful to cover herself. It is the first-years she will have to look out for: not all of them are liable to laugh it off!

Saffina says there were two "tough eggs" as she calls them who were taken in by the stunt (hopefully they did not use the "respectful Spontoonie Greeting" that is nothing of the sort). Both are Americans; a bobcat called Lucy Ulrich and a squirrel called Nancy Rote. Miss Rote has put it on her public form that she is training as a new kind of flying sleuth, and dedicated to the war against crime. Doubtless she and Beryl will not be short of lively subjects to debate.

The tourist stalls were all packed away for the season but there was one hut on the beach selling Popatohi, and we followed our noses to the delicious scent of salted fried fish with garlic and native herbs. Even if Molly and Maria would be totally herbivorous by nature, they have been brought up on fish and meat and it seems the body adjusts to it. I hear many Orientals have a similar problem with milk, even felines who by all usual rules should love it. Besides, as Molly points out, in our Songmark course we have a lot of wear and tear to make up for, and for the protein in one small fish she would have to chew through a basket of bamboo shoots (and most of the nutrition there would be from eating the basket.) I would have thought they are the ideal reducing diet, as the effort of chewing and digesting bamboo probably burns as many calories as they contain.

I recall a year ago hearing Jane Ferry (who is a vegetarian by choice and principle, rather than biology) almost being tempted by Beryl's argument that eating spare ribs is perfectly all right, as they are only spares and the animal can obviously do without them.

Back to earn our keep at the Hoele'toemi homestead, working hard to bring the taro harvest in. Well, the family like it. It is certainly more useful than potatoes in that one eats the green leaves as well as the roots, and indeed there is no part of the plant that goes to waste.

It was good to return to oiled, patterned fur for a few days. My third-year uniform is waiting, but I am equally proud of the insignia combed onto my fur. Helen's is even better, being Tailfast. I have to confess being rather envious.

(Later) An interesting meeting at the family supper; Saimmi appeared and brought a guest, her ancient superior Huakava. I had not met her in months, and was shocked at how frail she looked. And yet she is the High Priestess of the whole Spontoon chain! She took me out with Helen and Saffina, and gave us some instruction that we have never heard before. Huakava told us many stories, and asked that we remember and write them down. Looking at her, I can believe she might not last another winter, and we are diligently remembering everything she tells us.

One thing she said that quite caught us by surprise was mentioning Songmark, which was certainly built when the official history says, but on a “significantly older” site. Frustratingly, she did not say why it was significant, only that it was very well suited to its new children, and that it would be revealed when the time was ripe. A fascinating evening!

Thursday 22nd September, 1936

A more productive day, as we headed across to Casino Island to prepare for the new term. We have all sewed the third bar onto our Songmark shirts and blazers; unlike in the military one is not issued with the uniform and has to buy the approved pattern. It makes you definitely keen to take good care of it.

I saw the first of the Spanish school in town, whose uniforms certainly look neat and tidy, if a little old-fashioned. Ours are rather unflattering even when well tailored; one can only put so much glamour into a costume meant for overhauling engines or scrambling up a rock face. It is a frightening thought that we are already outnumbered and that is just by their first year!

Thinking of Spain, Maria has heard from our old friend Consuela who has gone in the other direction from Father Dominicus’ flock in that she headed into their Civil War from the safety of Spontoon rather than visa versa. She writes to say she is flying air support against the Reds, working with an International mixed-arms unit of combined German tanks and Spanish infantry. Their commander is General Sancho de La Mancha, of the “Sancho Panzer Division”.

The islands are moving into the off-season, with the attractions closing up in the Treasure Point Amusement park. Some are being renovated, and I assume the Crazy Golf is having therapy. There is still a lot of activity as renovation work starts on the hotels in time for the rainy season (December in Spontoon is no time to have half a roof) and indeed some of the locals must have taken off their Tourist-pleasing costumes and slipped straight into their working overalls.

We had luncheon outside Lingenthals where they do various Continental cakes and such treats as we never see at Songmark. It was rather a pensive meal, with Helen pointing out this is the third September we have been here together. Things certainly change; now we have two junior years looking up to us. At least, Molly says if they do not look up they are going to be trodden down. I expect she is joking. Helen has been Tailfast for a year and a half now and plans to become Mrs. Hoele’toemi, and with Molly starting to think of Engagement presents (what is Lars going to give her, a howitzer?) our lives are definitely moving along.

Still, we are determined to enjoy what little time we have left before Sunday. We made the shopkeepers very happy, and had ourselves measured for the Rainy Season clothes we will soon be ordering. I would not fit into any snug garments made for me the first term I arrived here; we have filled out quite considerably especially around the shoulders, though the effect is not unflattering. Maria was rather strong to start with, and apart from Missy K and Irma Bundt (who should be back from Switzerland any day now) is by far the most powerful of us.

We are not the only Songmark girls enjoying our last days of freedom on Casino Island; Jasbir and Li Han met us as we headed back towards the water taxis. I hardly recognised either of them, having obviously been very busy with the fur dye and looking very different. Jasbir has fulfilled her ambition of dancing at the Coconut Shell, having evaded our Tutors’ disapproval by manufacturing a whole new identity. She said it was worth the trip to Gull Island, and after a very eventful week the Natives there cheerfully fibbed to the Spontoonie authorities that she was one of them.

Helen whispered that she had heard of the Gull Islanders, who have morals as unsavoury as the rest of their island, and darkly speculated just what else Jasbir was doing that week. She seems in the best of spirits and none the worse for it indeed; possibly there are more things than dancing that she took the opportunity to try before returning to take up her official position as Maharani in Utterly Pradesh after she graduates. She is doing two shows at the Coconut Shell a night, which is surely exhausting but keeping her fit for the coming term; this is the last week of the Season, and she invites us to come and watch! We happily accepted.

Her sister Meera has arrived and is already in class, the first time two in the same family have been accepted at Songmark. This is not just because they can pay the fees (which are the same for everybody) but from what Jasbir says, Meera has taken top marks in chemistry and applied aeronautics at Roedean. The school "Congreve Club" has been trying to cross the English Channel with a rocket, and even their failures provided some spectacular firework displays. Actually, this might be more dangerous if it works than if it fails; unlike Bleriot and his gentle aircraft touch-down in 1908, any rocket is likely to "land" rather like a ten-foot meteor at several hundred miles an hour with its tanks full of explosive fumes. Do the greenhouse-owners of Calais know about this, I wonder? From the way Molly's ears went up and her eyes lit at the description, I am sure she will feel kindly towards a girl whose hobby involves burning wood alcohol in red fuming nitric acid.

Back to South Island, where Molly discovered a note from Lars awaiting her at the post office. It is an invitation to a party, on Saturday! Her eyes shone wide as she contemplated that, and invited me along.

Helen's ears went down and her tail bottled out at that, and she reminded me of the last parties I had attended with Lars. Well, that was nearly a year ago, and none of us did anything we objected to.

Having seen Jasbir and her scandal-proof fur dye, I had an idea that should help sooth (some of) Helen's nerves. I compromised and promised her I would go as Kim-Anh, who needs the fresh air and exercise, not having been in my Siamese fur pattern since Spring. So that's settled. I have to admit, I am quite looking forward to it, and not wearing my own fur pattern may save a lot of trouble. If Jirry was here of course things would be different – and my tail drooped as I realised how little I will probably get away to see him in the third year.

A fine night under the stars, fresh fish and roasted breadfruit for us and poi for the rest of the Hoele'toemi family. We will be eating enough of that all too soon!

Friday 23rd September, 1936

Pouring with rain in the morning, which rather put a damper on our proposed lunch on Casino Island. Still, the rain does not deter some people as we met Prudence and her swimming team on the way to the beach. Most of them were in oiled fur, which generally had some interesting variation in the patterning for anyone who knows how to read these things.

Prudence was pleased to see us, and invited us to join them. Well, I'll swim with anyone, and Maria and Saffina agreed to join us (Helen rarely surfaces before luncheon, for some reason. I expect Marti may be glad of a rest next week.) Molly turned very pale around the nose at the prospect, made her excuses and left at a high rate of knots.

I had to admit I had never taken part in any formation swimming before; we all swim regularly but generally as a way for getting from A to B, or else for exercise in the summer heat. All Prudence's dorm is back, in fact they have stayed here all Summer. Although Prudence is the only one who is Tailfast, I can well imagine there is more for them here than at home. Belle has told me something of life in the Bible Belt, and Ada has a librarian friend who comes out here to meet her from that direction.

We kept our bathing costumes on, but as there are no tourists braving the weather, the rest of the regular team swam in Polynesian tradition. Certainly they all keep themselves extremely fit, as every one of them looked quite Olympic qualified.

Hmm. On that scale one might say Tahni is qualified for more than one event; I had read about Spotted Hyena girls and seen her in a bathing suit before, but the actual sight is quite a surprise regardless. A flat-chested spotted Hyena girl would probably pass the Army medical for males! One wonders what the missionaries made of it, trying to translate Adam and Eve to a hyena audience.

Anyway, it was all very respectable and fun; the sea is warmer than the land right now and after yesterday's relaxations we all put in a hard four hours of water polo and by lunchtime was aching all over in the default Term-time sensation. Songmark girls ache.

Lunch was Prudence's treat, as her friends thanked us for coming along. We dined at a small café just behind the Topotabo Hotel on Resort Bay that the swimming party almost filled to bursting. I noticed one of the advertising posters on the wall, with a feline girl wearing tropical fruit who could almost have been modelled on my friend Angelica! I doubt she would model a skirt of bananas for any money though, she had a violent aversion to them at school (not that we had much in the way of fresh fruit there, let alone exotics.)

It was rather odd, sitting at the table quite surrounded by Prudence's friends, who by their scent were taking a definite interest in us. Quite a few tails were twitching, and eyes locked on our every move in a rather hungry manner. Rather flattering really, though not my idea of fun. At least I do not switch to panicked "fight or flight" as Molly would in the circumstances.

It was a fine meal, with Prudence, Belle, Carmen and Ada filling me in on some of their adventures this month. What with filming and all sorts of sports events they have had a very busy time, and Prudence hinted they were called away on some official jobs. It would be just like Mr. Sapohatan to engage two separate groups of us and never tell each about the other. Certainly we will not be talking about what we do to anyone, and Prudence is as close-mouthed as we are.

One thing they could tell us about was having met Angelica, just after I did in late August. It is very odd indeed, what happens to her aircraft when she tries to fly it. Anyone would think she had the reverse of Adele Beasley's chronic bad luck, where everything goes wrong for the unlucky bunny when she's not in the air! I am starting to think the dice is loaded against Adele, as much as that pair Molly brought from Chicago in her first year. Nobody has seen Adele for most of the summer; the last time anyone did she was heading towards the seaplane ramps with Wo Shin. Not the safest of company to keep. When someone runs out of luck on Krupmark Island (her default mode) one hardly expects to see them again.

The party waved us a reluctant farewell, and we could feel their gaze on our tails as we left. Certainly it is nice to have options, however unlikely they might be. In the last week I have been invited to be a fifth wife in New Elohim City and today half the team have their tails going sideways looking at me! There is even that paper from Leon Allworthy that I will tear up now I know it will not be needed (not that I would have liked to have to use it). Had it been a genuine offer it would have been such a gentlemanly deed.

We spotted Molly getting off a water taxi, who rather spooked as she scented our fur from the company we had been keeping and the scent of their interest in us. Well, the café was crowded and I suppose we must have been soaking up female musk like blotting-paper. She has been back to the Temple Of Continual Reward, where a few matches of "dirty pool" helped restore her equilibrium. It has some interesting rule variants by her account, some almost like golf. If one knocks the ball off the table one must play it where it lies, which must make for difficulties getting back in scoring range of the pockets.

One thing she did mention rather alarmed me – she met two Portuguese gentlemen who were talking about going to Lars' party booked for tomorrow night. I got away with being Kim-Anh from Macau last time, as nobody on the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands challenged me to speak in Thai or Portuguese! Needless to say my cover would be blown in a minute if they spotted me as a Siamese and started asking me questions. I will definitely have to think about this one.

Back to Casino Island in the evening; we are certainly keeping the water-taxi folk employed. Although we have been past the Coconut Shell so many times, we have never seen an actual show there. A shell each (not a coconut one) got us front-row seats for the Sea View Revue, a rather well-done mix of song, dance and comedy. The main play, "*Whoops Vicar where's my wife's trousers?*" was one of those simple-hearted but fun efforts involving a lot of people just missing each other running between rooms in a long country-house corridor, pursued or pursuing each other as the farce built up brain-spinning levels of complexity.

Jasbir and Li Han have actually made it to the main chorus line, quite a feat. True, it is only for the last 2 weeks of the season, but they are putting everything they have into it, and the crowd was well pleased. We are booked to do a more Traditional dance tomorrow, as the S.I.T.H.S. has renewed their challenge at the dance school.

Just think, some Songmark third-years might have spent the Summer holidays relaxing at home or sitting on beaches. Actually I doubt any of us have been doing much of that, we have been warned what to expect this year and our Tutors will not be merciful if we turn up less fit than the last time we saw them.

Saturday 24th September, 1936

A day of defeats and successes – the last full day of our holiday, and indeed it was full. We took our Native costume to Casino Island where Mrs. Motorabe welcomed us back for the year, and spotted the whole senior class of the S.I.T.H.S. in the audience, looking gleeful.

We were short of two dancers from Jasbir's dorm, as Irma Bundt and Sophie D'Artagnan arrived late last night and are still busily unpacking. So it was just my dorm with Jasbir and Li Han, starting off with the dances we learned in our second-year. I thought we did rather well considering our lack of hard practice – until I saw the opposition.

Well, had it been an aerial dogfight they would have put their first fifty rounds straight through our engine. They have a new dance, a radical new development that works perfectly as a Hula story but gets there from a whole new direction. We could only look on with amazement and applaud furiously when they finished, the clear winners. Molly was looking on in awe wondering how we are ever going to top that performance. We had tried our best, but felt like a Sopwith Camel confronted with one of those new Hawker Hurricanes; outclassed completely no matter how well you fly it.

I wonder where they have got their new moves from? I did ask Mrs. Motorabe but she just smiled and promised she does not tell anyone trade secrets, and would keep ours just as safe from the S.I.T.H.S. team. It seemed to be rather oriental rather than Polynesian, but all in perfectly good Hula form and with no moves any judge would knock points off as less than authentic.

Helen and Maria returned to South Island for a final night in Haio Beach, but Molly and I headed out to an appointment with Madame Maxine's. Our carefully oiled fur was soaped and de-oiled till we were as Euro a pair of girls as one sees, then the two Siamese fur-dressers got to work on us. I had booked the appointment to be re-made as Kim-Anh Soosay, and had brought along the matching silken Cheongsam dress I was given on Krupmark. Of course, Kim-Anh had to wait awhile longer if I was expecting to meet people who could ask me questions about Macao that I could not answer – so I had to come up with an alternative fur pattern in a hurry. Fortunately I have the money now to invest in a really first-rate styling; Madame Maxine does not work cheap but the results show that.

An hour later I was looking in the full-length mirror at a sight that for an instant had my claws popping out with hostility. The Honourable Miss Millicent from the Embassy is just about my height and figure, and there is no language problem. Darker head-fur and tabby stripes like Saffina inherited from her mother, complete the picture. I am sure respectable Ambassadorial staff members do not go to Lars' parties, so I am fairly safe from meeting her. Besides, if I do not look like myself I have to look like somebody else, and it would hardly be fair on a friend to borrow their appearance if things go wrong.

Molly quite approved, and whispered that Lars always enjoys playing a good trick. It turns out that he actually is religious in a way, though not to any God one has to go to church or perform good deeds for. Some Scandinavian deity called Loki, whom I recall hearing of as a practical joker back in Religious Education. (It was a rather practical class at St. Winifred's, even if the lectures from the Thuggee Missionary were rather frowned on by the local vicar.) Perhaps I can persuade Molly to take up his religion; it can only be an improvement.

Molly looked quite striking in a new dress, a Rachorska creation that Lars evidently likes seeing her in. Certainly she will not be overheating. My own outfit was as simple as could be, about six ounces of silk and a pair of Oriental sandals; they have tabby cats in China and surrounding parts, though I did not plan on discussing my origins with anyone. Madame Maxine thought highly of the ensemble, which is totally plain but exceedingly glamorous at the same time, with not a scrap of jewellery (that anybody can see; while brushing me she found the gold wire in my tail but passed it without comment other than a rather raised eyebrow. I felt like asking her about it, but hated to give the impression I do not know myself.)

After two years of dodging the rickshaw traffic around Casino Island, I had never been inside one until tonight. Songmark students walk, when they are not double-timing it around the islands with our Tutors cheerfully shouting encouragement. Molly and I fit into one perfectly well as we have less weight between us than some of the tourists we have seen rolling between taxi, tour-boat and hotel bar. I have rarely felt uncomfortable on Casino Island, but dressed as I was I was glad to be in a rickshaw and not walking across the island.

I must say, Lars does know how to stage a wonderful party. It was a different place than last time, but had the same layout of courtyard with high walls protecting it from casual sight, and definitely solidly closing doors. There was a refined clinking of glasses from within, and Molly's eyes quite lit up. Lars met us at the entrance looking very smooth in a white suit that was tailored in very fine style; Molly's tail went sideways at the sight and she was running her fingers over his horns as if she had been parted from him all term and not two days. His horns are at their best; Lars sheds his every Spring, and Molly keeps one of last year's as a very treasured reminder.

There were one or two familiar snouts there, his employee Mr. Sstabeck the Komodo dragon gentleman I met my first time on Krupmark and a very handsome hare buck I had seen in the street there last trip. I discovered he is called Roger, and is one of Lars' pilots. Of course, in most circumstances I would love to talk aircraft with any pilot, but as far as I know Miss

Millicent is not air-minded and anything Lars' employees do with their aircraft they would probably not discuss especially with strangers.

Anyway, Lars introduced me to everyone (about twenty gentlemen, including the two Portuguese chamois) and half a dozen or so Euro girls. Oddly, none of them were Spontoonies as far as I could tell. He offered one arm to Molly which she happily took, and then offered his other to me. I did hesitate but it was very nice of him to invite me to the party, and we walked in to the head of the table with a very fine spread was awaiting.

There was little of the formal dinner side of things, though Lars did announce that he had acquired a profitable and reliable customer whose cheques never bounced and who was not too likely to vanish overnight leaving unpaid bills. Having seen what he brought back in the Parsifal, I think he probably means the Government, who are not too liable to run away with the money (Carmen has told us of many South American regimes who are not as reliable that way.) A lively swing band was playing, not one I have heard before in these islands, and they might well have been brought in from outside.

Lars dances very well in Euro style as well as Spontoonie, and there is about as much chance of him stepping on one's paws as of Adele Beasley getting into an unplanned spin. He might not have claws as such, but he has rather delicate fingers considering and found the wire ring in my tail-fur in a quite accidental fashion. I expected him to ask what it was, but he was the soul of discretion and said not a word, though he carried on touching it as we danced.

I must admit, I was getting distinctly relaxed by the end of the second dance, after which Molly claimed his attentions and they swept off in a brisk tango. It was a warm evening and I was glad not to have more than a thin silk dress on; the downside of course is that anyone can see that all there is under it is me. It is a perfectly Respectable dress in the Chinese style with my neck and shoulders modestly covered; having the sides slit to just about maximum altitude helps greatly in the more vigorous dances and is wonderfully cool. It does spread one's scent around very liberally, but I received no complaints about that.

It was quite an evening. I had one glass of champagne an hour, no more; enough to keep invigorated but with the dancing it burned off completely before the next hour. Lars introduced me to two of his new employees, tall and very smooth looking wolverines of Scandinavian stock called Nils and Erik respectively. If they were twins or litter-mates was hard to tell, but they were very similar and even their scent was almost identical. Both were very fine dancers, but I doubt they do that for a living.

I spotted Molly dancing with the Portuguese gentlemen and was rather glad she was keeping them out of my way; even though I am not dyed as Kim-Anh they are businessmen from Macao and might ask me what part of the Orient I hail from; not a question I want to answer.

Dear Diary: Lars certainly provides his guests with all the facilities they are likely to need. One thing that was not needed was a rickshaw home and crossing to South Island in the small hours, the water taxi folk can enjoy a restful night in after the stresses of the season. In my case, the stresses will start on Monday, and I made the most of my opportunities. The guest-house rooms were really very comfy. And I think Nils and Erik really must be identical twins.

Sunday 25th September, 1936

A late morning, which started with a very thorough grooming in a large bathroom that Molly and several of the girls were taking turns to use. Wolverine musk just does not come off! I did not like to try too hard with the more potent shampoos, for fear of losing my tabby stripes like a disgraced feline sergeant. It would not do to be recognised by just anyone; our Tutors would object though strictly speaking it is still holiday time. If asked I answered to the name "Milly" which is near enough, and indeed the original feline is never likely to hear of it. One hears of devoted film star fans having their fur dyed and styled to exactly resemble their idols; imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and it is cheaper per hour to look in a mirror rather than pay cinema prices.

Molly seemed to be in a complete daydream; one almost expected Lars to have promised her a regiment of heavy artillery to play with. She still had her snout striped quite artfully, and evidently had a very fine and varied evening. One thing nobody can accuse Lars of is jealousy.

Fortunately I had packed a respectable Euro costume for the return trip, which we made before lunch. There was time to stop off and swim before arriving at Haio Beach, which got most of the wolverine musk out of my fur. It must be like skunks, who lose control of their scent glands at times.

Helen was pleased to see us back safe, but looked at me with her ears down and grumbled that at least Molly has an excuse. Actually I rather enjoyed the evening, and will have something to look back on when sweating over whatever tasks our Tutors set us next week in steel toecapped boots with mud and oil in my fur. I helped her remove her fur oil and patterning, something she never likes doing, while she de-tabbed me and restored my head fur to its usual light shade. Molly says that whatever you do in dyed fur does not count, something I can hardly agree with. Still, anyone sneaking a peek last night would have seen Miss Millicent and not Amelia Bourne-Phipps, which certainly saved trouble.

A brief farewell to the Hoele'toemi family, as indeed we hope to be back when we can. Our Songmark uniforms are unpacked and smelling slightly of mothballs, and with our spirits resolutely set we started the mile-long walk back to Resort Bay and the water taxis.

(Later)

Well, here we are in our new third-year rooms, settled in and unpacked. We have checked in with our Tutors, who report that everyone is present and accounted-for. Adele Beasley was the last one in; she looks rather flustered but in good health.

When one sees one's Tutors rubbing their paws together in glee, it is rarely a good sign. I wonder just what they have lined up for us – whatever, we are getting our heads on the pillow well before lights-out tonight, for a good night's sleep. I would bet any money we are going to need it!

Monday 26th September, 1936

Our Tutors certainly believe in beginning as they mean to go on. This is not surprising, or encouraging. First off we were briefly looked over by Mrs. Oelabe who pronounced us provisionally fit, though the full medical would wait awhile till the second-years are checked over. The first thing on our timetables was a two hour run, with Miss Wildford pacing us on a bicycle calling out cheerful encouragement as we panted our way around several laps of the beach on Eastern Island. The wet sand was not a problem to run on but the loose dry dunes on the Eastern coast were a nightmare, and our steel-lined boots felt like lead diving boots by the time we had finished the first circuit of the island.

Still, it is some comfort that we are not the only ones suffering. Rounding the Northern tip we could see the row of crags half-way up the hill had the second-years swarming up them, chivvied on with Miss Blande providing encouragement via megaphone. Beryl panted that Miss Blande wears out three megaphones a term, and for once I can believe her. A ten minute swim followed, fully dressed, after which we were led through the showers the Airport staff use to wash the salt off our fur and clothing.

It was a very tired and dripping class that finished up on the airstrip, but our aches and pains were quite forgotten as we looked round Songmark's latest acquisition. I have no idea how they managed it, but we now have a Junkers Ju86 D to fly! It is a large monoplane, twin engined and very fast; we are glad to hear it is strictly third-years only. The first-years were busy at work in the next hangar on maintaining the Tiger Moths; if their timetable is anything like ours was they will be lucky to get flying by November.

Lunch was breadfruit and plantain mash, nourishing certainly but very digestible. Molly muttered that when we have a light digestible lunch it is a sign our Tutors are going to want us to do something energetic straight afterwards; she was unfortunately quite right.

Miss Wildford had us pick up climbing ropes and equipment from the Songmark compound and led us up the hill towards the Radio LONO tower. She waved her tail at the hundred-foot tower and told us to get busy; ten ascents to the aerial platform (up the girders and not using the handy ladder, of course) and ten abseils down the far side. Of course, she first made us demonstrate on the ten-foot side of the building that we had not forgotten our technique over the holidays; launching oneself over the edge of the main tower is no place to discover one has the rope the wrong way round. We were issued with heavy gloves for the descent part of it, and she sat back with a pair of binoculars and her notebook to keep score.

If anyone spent their summer holiday relaxing on a beach eating ice-cream all day, they were sorely regretting it by the time we had finished the first climb and abseil. I had kept generally very fit, but there are muscles and muscles, and I had not done any serious rope climbing since the escapades on Krupmark Island. Before that, it would have been the sailing voyage on the Liki-Tiki. Still, we were all the same and the ninth and tenth ascents were sheer agony. Irma Bundt has a lot of weight to haul despite her strength, and took a rather too-rapid

slide down to hit the ground on the final abseil. Her tail-bones were surely as bruised as her dignity.

Of course, having us do this is very easy for our other Tutors, who can spend the time we are busy with the hundred and one things needed to get Songmark organised for the new term. There are timetables to give out, classes to organise and everything; by the end of the day the mimeograph must have been running hot getting all our paperwork ready.

One good thing – we were welcomed back with a very decent meal, a dish with roast chicken and those fine banana blossoms called “Puso ng Saging”, which is probably half Songmark’s food budget for the week gone. Missy K asked plaintively if there was any poi to be had, but she was universally howled down. She has had all summer to gorge on the stuff, and no doubt will have plenty more tomorrow.

(Later) Our timetables are definitely packed, as always – ten hours a day scheduled! Molly’s jaw dropped when she saw what is piled up ahead of us; fortunately we have a still wider choice of subjects than last year. I have dropped the beach survival ones (a year of that tells you about all you need to know) and am taking more nautical classes, which always improve with practice.

Maria had some amusing things to say about what a ship’s cat was traditionally tasked with. She is keeping up with the journalism and is even submitting pieces to the Mirror, where they run it in the politics column. Actually, it is run as a rather odd series of parodies, with Maria from her Uncle’s political stance interpreting the day’s news along with a fanatical Starlingist (not Tatiana, she does not have that sense of humour) and an absolutely rabid Bakuninite Anarchist. The three interpretations are all rather skewed, and probably send a shiver down the spines of the Spontoonies who read them (and are thankful they live here instead.)

Helen was rather curious about some of the articles. Maria’s Uncle is not at all liked by many people, not all of whom are Reds or Ethiopians. Maria says it is a matter of style; although the newsreels rather play up his shouting and histrionics in front of crowds, she explains that is what her countryfolk actually want, and that he is much quieter in private. What plays well to one audience would not go well with another; by all accounts Germans very happily sit through full Wagner operas lasting six or eight hours. One hopes they have decent intervals; we hear much about the Iron Will these days, but without a break the national characteristic would have to be a nickel-steel bladder.

Just our luck, we are the first dorm to go on gate duty tonight. It is just as well we had a decent night’s sleep last night, as Molly and I are on the late shift. Straight to bed after supper for us!

Tuesday 27th September, 1936

Our first gate-watch of the year went quite uneventfully, I am happy to say. Helen and Maria shook us awake at two in the morning; by the time we were dressed Maria was already rattling the light fittings with her snoring, as unladylike as ever. We must ask Madame Maxine if there is anything that can be done about that. We are used to it, but any gentleman would find it disturbing, and she has only three terms left to make the most of her opportunities here.

It is rather a problem for Maria to find romantic company, what with her official position. A perfect match would be some high-ranking young Italian of the right politics, but there are none of them to be found around here. In fact, there are few at her level in Italy, and she already knows most of them. I certainly think Jasbir Sind had the right idea in the holidays; she left her reputation behind in safety along with her real fur pattern, and picked it up undamaged on her return. Whatever she might have done on Gull Island is nobody’s business.

Molly had the compensation of being allowed to carry my T-Gew on duty again, with the fixed saw-edged bayonet. She had something to show me that Lars had loaned her at the party; at first sight it looked like one of the regular 13 mm rounds. But I soon saw there was something odd about it, and when Molly demonstrated by trying to chamber it, obviously the cartridge is nearly an inch too long! She looked at it in interest and opined that someone has developed a much “hotter” round in the same calibre. And she would like to see the rifle it fitted.

Fortunately, as we were on the late guard duty there was nobody around; even the most hardened revellers are back before two, except on Casino Island where Beryl says the casinos are still open till dawn. So between walking around the perimeter to keep awake and checking the guard dogs were watered (they are only fed at breakfast-time, making them hungry and sharp all night) there was plenty of time to talk in the quiet.

I heard rather more about what she and Lars have been up to on Krupmark Island recently; she seems to rather like the place and reminiscences it is like the good old days in Chicago without the blizzards or any police to worry about. I suppose given her background it would be more home-like than threatening, and she recounted having met one of the bosses who live “up the hill” from Fort Bob. Lars has now fully re-established his business over there, and if anything is expanding with the necessary permissions from (and doubtless paying tribute to) the far more criminal ruling clique. She made no attempt to disguise her identity, and by her accounts her family name is still quite respected there. Krupmark must be about the only place in the world where it is.

Actually, I am rather unsure as to whether to encourage her or not on this sort of thing. On the one paw, she has a second bolthole to go to if anything goes wrong at Songmark, unlike me. On the other, it is generally “a short life and a merry one” over there, from all accounts. She is very competent at most of the skills she needs ... but I have spent two years now trying to persuade her that there are better careers than dodging the forces of Law. My ears somewhat drooped as she recounted how she had helped Lars defend one of his warehouses against a hostile takeover bid. I am sure I would have done as much myself had I been there and my host’s property under attack, but I would not look back on it as the high-point of the holiday.

The one good thing about Krupmark is there is little chance of stray rounds hitting innocent bystanders. Molly confirms my impression that innocent citizens “are happiest living somewheres else.”

Some of the first-years are definitely in the habit of getting up early; it was just about dawn when Molly heard suspicious sounds coming from their side of the compound, and automatically assumed a break-in by hostile forces. She begged me to hand over the ammunition (our Tutors do not let her patrol with a loaded anti-tank rifle, indeed they would hardly issue her with a kitten’s catapult plus ammunition) but on investigation I spotted a very keen-looking dorm in their exercise kit limbering up for an early-morning run. They comprised a squirrel, a star-nosed mole, a bloodhound and an arctic fox; definitely a mixed bunch.

Of course, our Tutors insist that we investigate anything suspicious, and first-years getting up earlier than they have to is certainly unusual. If any dorm was scheduled to be up for exercises as a punishment it would certainly be in the notes we are given. So I let Molly go ahead and challenge them; a cocked T-Gew looks exactly the same whether it is loaded or not, and I must admit it is more intimidating with the saw-backed bayonet. As we found out confronting Kansas Smith’s hench-furs on Cranium Island, that is a very impressive weapon to look down the barrel of. Whether or not it actually makes any difference to be shot dead with a .22 small game rifle or a T-Gew, folk seem far more hesitant to risk it with the young cannon. I have seen what a round from that can do to an unripe watermelon – it is not just a matter of finding where the pieces landed, as the whole thing is atomised.

Well! It appears the squirrel is the Miss Rote who Saffina mentioned having fallen for Beryl’s practical joke with the so-called Spontoonie National Anthem; she was very cool and explained that she is the head of her dorm and believes in making an early start. By their accents she is an American, and the star-nosed girl is either Spanish or South American. The other two surprised me – one is the first German we have had in Songmark for two years since Erica graduated, and the other is British. I recognised from her hard, flat Irish tones she is definitely an Ulster girl – on my enquiry she is about as Orange as some others in the second-year are Red; one of those fierce and determined Protestants.

I let them get on with their exercise and returned to the guard-room to talk it over with Molly. I can never predict what our Tutors are going to do next; just when I thought they had stopped taking in British, Germans or Italians I am proved quite wrong. Eva is from Nuremberg and Maureen from Belfast, near the Shorts seaplane factory. Between them they should prove a source of endless irritation to some of Red Dorm, which may be no bad thing and fun to watch.

Molly regrets we missed the chance to wire our old second-year rooms for sound before we left; I quite agreed that it would be fun to hear the reaction when Liberty Morgenstern and Tatiana find out, to say nothing of Brigit Mulvaney (which is usually a good thing anyway.) All we need now in that dorm is an amateur Policewoman to send Wo Shin into fits!

Still, our Tutors would have been bound to spot the wiring over the Summer refurbishment and trace it to us. Oh well. One day folk may have radio transmitters that are a little smaller than a heavy suitcase, but I doubt it.

Breakfast was very welcome, as we had been up and walking around for six hours by the time the gong rang and we all assembled to eat. It feels strange being at the head of the dining room now, with the two years looking up to us. I have coached Molly on her manners, but she

still says it would make more of an impression eating out of hacked-out tins with a bayonet for cutlery. No doubt, but not the sort of impression I have tried to encourage.

Back into classes, where we started our reports on “what I did in my Holidays.” Happily I have my log-book for the Albanian South Indies to concentrate on and will try to gloss over some of the Krupmark Islands trip. I know I wanted that flight to gain money and experience, and I certainly got it – but not in the form I would have planned. Molly says she is going to give a full and honest account of her own rather different experiences, down to the number and calibre of rounds fired.

It would be nice to report that third-year girls who have done half a night of gate duty and only managed two or three hours sleep, are allowed a siesta to recover from it. It would be very nice. I wish it was true!

Wednesday 28th September, 1936

Not much time to write yesterday – or today either. Mrs. Oelabe spent the day working through my year giving us a detailed check-up; I passed with a clean bill of health, as did Helen, Molly and Maria. Well, apart from Molly’s slight case of Athlete’s paw; she will insist on wearing those high Russian boots from Vostok as a matter of style when sandals would be better in the Summer heat. Some types of deer go entirely bare-hoofed; Lars could if he wanted to, but Molly prefers her high, polished knee-length black boots. Sandals and Thompson machine-guns, she argues, do not go together and she is always keen on style.

The only one who seems to have any trouble is our unlucky bunny Adele Beasley. She looked healthy enough as far as I could see, but has been packed off to the hospital on Casino Island; Beryl is speculating freely about her catching diseases unknown to science. With Adele’s luck, this is depressingly possible. She looked perfectly well as far as I could see, apart from a slight rash around the nose that could have been anything.

We spent the afternoon working on the Junkers Ju86 until we know just about every rivet. Actually although it is a Junkers design this is made in Japan, a license build. The maker’s plates are in Japanese, and we were glad that Li Han speaks it well enough to translate. If there is a notice in an aircraft, it is important to know what it says.

There are some interesting modifications that seem to be fairly recent. Between the undercarriage struts there is a streamlined vertical stub that looks very like a bomb rack, though rather more elaborate. It has a fuel pipe and an electrical connection, neither of which connect to anything internally right now, though there are signs that equipment has been removed recently. We have been taught to look at scratches and such to compare ages; these are new and bright, and it looks as if some work was done over the holidays since it arrived here. I remember the faces of our third-years lighting up last term when they got to work on the aircraft on its arrival; it is in a different hangar to our Tiger Moth squadron and we never saw it very closely but I am certain the vertical stub was not there then.

Helen also pointed out that the underside of the rear fuselage has been comprehensively re-painted, which seems odd as the rest of it could also use a touch-up but has made do without. She whispered that the new Songmark aircraft was probably doing something interesting in the holidays; she had seen it flying out to sea several times. Oddly enough, once it had flown out alongside that Schneider Trophy entrant from Tillamook, the one with the evaporative cooling system that gives it a brief thirty knot burst of speed. Perhaps they were testing that mid-air refuelling the Russians have got working? That could explain the “bomb rack” having being a fuel tank, and obviously we hardly need it at Songmark. Having seen aircraft undercarriages collapse on heavy landings, a big tank of fuel is not something a student aviatrix wants underneath her tail as the aircraft scrapes and sparks along the concrete.

In a few weeks, Miss Devinski tells us, we will be flying it. It will certainly be the fastest thing I have flown; its official description is “mail plane” but one can see where the structure is braced to carry a bomb load. Some of the new “mail planes” are actually faster than the front-line fighters; a Gloster Gladiator or Hawker Demon would never catch this one! Many countries have budgets for military aircraft restricted by laws and treaties, but if a Government funded postal project wants to have an aircraft designed to carry five tons of “mail bags” across Europe at record speeds, there is little the League of Nations can do about it. Similarly, the Austrians are extending their alpine “rocket post” to provide parcel deliveries, which they explain they need larger and more powerful rockets for.

Of course, Maria is only mildly impressed. Then, she was flying fighters and Schneider Trophy prototypes before even starting Songmark; at any rate it is a step up from the Tiger Moths. We are all looking forward to starting flying the Junkers 86.

Back for the traditional meal of Poi, which is something we have at least got used to in three years here. It is always interesting to watch the first-years coming to grips with it (a difficult thing to do to three-finger poi.) The thing to do is tell oneself that it is healthy and nutritious, which is perfectly true. Just look at the Hoel'e'toemi family as living proof. I wish I could look at Jirry right now; the food would be a tiny price to pay.

Actually, some of the first-years seem to have started work on the problem already. There is nothing in the regulations about supplementing one's diet, and in some cases it needs it. One platinum-furred bobcat with pince-nez glasses and an accent like Helen's was liberally adding Tabasco sauce to her poi, which should be an improvement, and a lepine was spooning something greenish into her portion that I think is Japanese "Wasabe". Potent stuff, which has been the raw material for many practical jokes. I fell for the toothpaste trick myself last year.

At least the islands are not short of fish or fresh vegetables, and no Songmark girl ever gets up from the table hungry if she eats everything put in front of her. But then, "hunger is the best sauce" as our Tutors have pointed out frequently, and anyone who complains about the food is generally given extra exercise until it starts to look appetising. Fortunately I lost any fussiness I might have had as a kitten after years of experience with the school meals at St. Winifred's, which seemed to consist largely of suet now I look back on it. Still, that was a rather colder climate.

Molly says she is glad her species of deer is not the sort with multiple stomachs, which are handy for eating grass and brushwood on survival exercises but leave one no choice but to be a vegetarian. Awfully hard luck if one is stranded on a shoal with only shellfish to eat. The only time we felines eat grass it is to be sick, but I manage the taro greens and such perfectly well these days like most of the carnivores here. Of course there are still digestion problems; canines will eat just about anything including boiled cabbage if it is spiced enough, but one does not want to share the dorm with them afterwards. Or the one downwind, for that matter.

One of the nice things about being a third-year is that our quarters have an actual bathtub. Showers are all right in their place, but for relaxing and soaking sore muscles and bruises, a bath is the only thing. Of course, Songmark being Songmark, it is not as simple as just running hot water. There is an old boiler downstairs that has to be fed, and the staff has made clear it is up to us to do so – or not. Beryl has already been suspiciously spotted looking at the wooden slats under our mattresses, half of which could be missing without being obvious, till one tries to sleep on it (at which point they would be a useful training aid if our final year includes tests in being able to sleep crossways on a ploughed field.)

Thursday 29th September, 1936

Hurrah! We are back flying the Sea Osprey, and practicing "difficult" takeoffs and landings. That is, there is an area of the shallows to the North of Eastern Island marked out with buoys and we have to land in the area from any wind direction. Definitely tricky! The Sea Osprey is heavier by far than the Tiger Moths, and we can only do it by going in as if it was landing on an aircraft carrier (not something one would literally want to do in a flying boat.). Quite a few bruised tails in the class from where folk touched down rather heavier than they planned to. Happily, a flying boat can take a much heavier landing without damage than any undercarriage, which is good for Songmark qualifications but practically rattles one's back teeth out. There may be occasions when one has little choice; as Miss Devinski says, we already know what we should be doing in the usual circumstances, and in the third-year we have to get used to the unexpected.

The island waters are definitely emptying now; the tour boats are long gone and even the pearl-fishing season finished last week. I wonder what my friend Angelica is doing now? She was depending on that to pay her way and try to get off the islands, the last I heard of her. If our Tutors had not been timing us I would have taken a two-minute diversion over Main Island to see if her aircraft is still there. A bright silver aircraft rather stands out on a beach.

Back for a swimming session off Eastern Island, after which Miss Wildford had us demonstrating rock climbing without equipment for the first-years. They were all equipped with ropes and safety mats, while we were not and were tired out with soaking wet paws as well. A few of us added to our bruises; Missy K dislocated a finger quite badly and had to have it re-set "in the field" before heading to the hospital to have it strapped up. Re-setting it basically involves

having the tip pulled hard until it pops back into place: we learned some new words in Spontoonie that Helen says she is going to have to check on.

Sophie D'artagnan went up the rocks in fine style, including one very severe pitch next to Beryl's attempted route that is listed in our books as "Plummeting Mousie." She is full of praise for her new tennis shoes, which she picked up for eighty cowries in Ferry Square Market. They were going cheap as they are apparently a consignment of rejects; something went wrong with hardening the rubber and they still feel rather sticky. Sophie shrugged and admitted they would probably wear out in twenty miles on a hard road, but for sticking to steep smooth rocks she has found nothing to match them. An interesting idea, but I am sure it will never catch on.

Adele Beasley is back in class; she whispered that the Doctors cannot find out exactly what is wrong with her, but are confident it is not contagious by most normal means. She has to shower on her own though. I asked her if she had been anywhere exotic in the holidays; she "froze up" like one sees rabbits caught in motor-car headlights and would not say another word.

(Later) At least our Tutors are busy enough this time of year to leave us a few evenings of peace. That is to say, we have textbooks to read and all sorts of things to do, and although technically we could head out to Song Sodas, nobody does.

After all this time, we are well and truly in our Third-year at Songmark! We have spent two years looking forward to doing entirely without Passes, but discover there are all sorts of snags. Apart from our work, there is gate guard duty and on top of that one dorm is on Alert, in theory, to run after errant second-years. That leaves three dorms who could in theory head out right now and have a fine evening at Mahanish's only ten minutes walk away; we would not technically be breaking any rules. The trouble is, with the amount of work we have to do, we simply can't afford the time!

Friday 30th September, 1936

Something of a treat today; on Casino Island they are having a sports festival celebrating the end of the Olympic year. Most of the local population were busy running around serving tourists at the time, so they missed most of it.

All three years of us were invited to attend, and happily our Tutors let us go. Perhaps they need a rest, after the strains of getting another year underway. What that meant was we third-years had to take charge, arranging water-taxis, cinema tickets and everything else. It would have been such an opportunity for the second-years to desert en masse and spend the day in a pub, but that is what we earn our freedom from Passes preventing.

The Coconut Shell has occasional outdoor film screenings, and there was a free showing of the official Olympic Games documentary. "Olympia" is decidedly impressive! It might be just a bit prejudiced in places (we certainly didn't see that long-jumper from New South Zion getting his Gold medal) but it is quite a staggering piece of film. We had our eye on Red Dorm as usual, and even Tatiana was grudgingly acknowledging it as "very good propaganda."

The six Olympic teams paraded to the cheers of the crowd, including Beryl's friend Piet van Hoogstraaten with the rest of the "Screaming Sculls" rowing team. Even the bobsled team turned out to rapturous applause; they all survived though three of them are still in plaster. I can imagine the Althing pondered awhile on whether or not to sponsor them, considering the example it will set. If the Main Islanders take it up as a popular sport the hospitals are going to be busy; I have seen that track and it frankly terrifies me! Perambulator wheels are decidedly not designed to make sharp pull-ups at sixty miles an hour, as the "g" force at the bottom where the track levels out is more than wire spoked wheels can take.

Bobsled, crawl and freestyle swimming, diving, wrestling and rowing - certainly these islands chose their strengths well apart from the bobsled. But then, as a "novelty value" of a tropical country competing in the Winter Sports it was much talked about, and I doubt the Tourist Board believe "no news is good news."

Saturday 1st October, 1936

October already! Last night was a rare thing, sharing the early Gate Guard with Susan de Ruiz rather than Helen, Molly or Maria. There is going to be some disturbance this year; from what Susan says that her dorm is going to change members for the first time since the first year. In fact, nobody has moved around since our Tutors put Prudence's dorm together having spotted their common interests.

I was not too surprised to learn that Adele Beasley is making the swap with one of the other girls who will be going to try her luck against Beryl and Missy K. Personally I would not want to have Madeleine X as my dorm leader, but from what I hear it can only be an improvement. Susan says she overheard the Tutors saying something about them having failed one Songmark girl last year (Zara, I think) and not wanting to have to do it again so soon. I have no idea what Adele was doing in the holidays, but Miss Devinski does not look approving at her.

Actually, I breathed a sigh of relief. I know Adele wanted to join me and Helen, but we have quite enough to do keeping Molly approximately the right side of law and sanity. We have heard about a few things the Tutors have planned for us this term, including the cold-weather trips to the Aleutian Islands, and having Adele running into her usual luck would not help matters. I have visions of her falling through the ice even after Missy K, Maria and Irma Bundt in full kit have successfully stamped over it.

Another relief was that we have the day off. It seems to be quite true that Songmark third-years have more leisure time – but knowing our Tutors, that is because we absolutely need it. It was hard to hide a smile seeing Red Dorm being drafted to shepherd the first-years around; we have had enough of that (though Jasbir's dorm are kept at Songmark to be sent out if THEY need rescuing/bailing out of prison.)

Beryl's ears went right down at the sight; it seems she had bets with Molly that by the start of term at least one of Red Dorm would have killed off, seriously injured or successfully framed another for something serious. Somehow they seem to have buried the hatchet, and not in each other. I am sure our Tutors are happy about that, but personally the idea of them presenting a united front against the world is something I think the League of Nations should be worrying about.

We followed Maria's lead in terms of heading out shopping, with our first stop being Ferry Square Market where she wanted to get a pair of those reject tennis shoes that Sophie was sticking her way up the rocks in. She was out of luck – at least, they had her size but nothing in a style to fit bovine feet! The world would be a very different place if there was only one species to cater for; mass-production would be easier but most of the cobblers and custom tailors would be out of a job. Helen and I snapped up a pair each which fit perfectly; even if they wear out by Solstice we can hardly complain at eighty cowries apiece.

Just to the West we ran into a group of Father Dominicus' new arrivals; their apparent leader being a Spanish Lynx girl was one of those I met back in the Summer term when she was applying to join Songmark. They were very cool but polite, but we could spot the fur on their hackles going up at the sight of us. The leader asked us politely if we were heading out to the Casino, or perhaps a tavern. One hopes they have not met Beryl.

I could tell Molly was going to erupt, but a firm booted paw pressing on her instep gave her the idea of keeping quiet as I moved into the lead like a fleet flagship in icy waters. Molly is not a subtle orator (I keep trying to explain there are some problems that simply cannot be solved with firepower or cold steel), Helen has not quite the vocabulary and Maria gets too passionate about things, even now. Hurrah again for the St. Winifred's debating society! I little thought I would be putting its lessons to use like this.

The opening rounds were us introducing ourselves; their leader being Beatrice Esparanza, who had been booked to go to the Spanish school this year had it been open (she had already paid the first term's fees which are non refundable and Father Dominicus cannot help with that; no wonder she was irritated.) Having been turned down by Songmark and bounced out of Spain with nothing to show for it but bills would upset anyone. She politely enquired if being a pirate and smuggler was on our third-year official timetable; I told her it was not, and countered that she obviously wanted those lessons or she would not have applied to join us in the first place. First salvo to us, I think.

It is interesting that they already know quite a lot about us; at least she recognised Molly and Maria by sight. Having seen her first rounds bounce off me, she switched her aim to Molly, politely enquiring just what the job prospects are for a gun moll in the Spontoons. (Molly has an unfortunate name in that respect and one can imagine her Father meant it to be fitting.)

Fortunately, Molly had seen this one coming and was almost polite back; actually smiling and pointing out the prospects were better than being a Missionary in these islands (true enough). She added that if she was a Spanish gun moll she would be putting her talents to good use and not hiding on the far side of the planet; we have heard a lot about their Civil War where the Reds' idea of a successful campaign is not seizing bridges and high ground but "liquidating class enemies." I saw Beatrice's tail droop at that one and she broke off the engagement.

Watching them retreat, Maria whispered that she looked forward to the next encounter, which I doubt we will wait long for. Between studying her Uncle's speeches and her continuing journalism and reporting courses, she is developing quite a debating style and it will be something to see her engaging fellow Continentals with it. Piracy and smuggling might not be on the timetables, but Songmark girls learn a lot that never gets in the prospectus!

A more good-natured encounter took the rest of the morning as we met our friendly rivals at the dance school. The S.I.T.H.S. seniors have carried on developing that new style; it is not something we could just copy. They have a source of some exotic dances that they are interpreting in Polynesian style, and our imitating that would look like four tourists. Dance comes from within, and we have not managed to find where they got their new diet from.

Still, we did our level best, and were applauded for it. Maria no longer storms off in a black mood if we come second; in the showers she was quite coolly admitting they have something we will need to work hard to challenge.

Helen had been very quiet, but suddenly came up with one tradition we have not seen danced much around here – we do know some Orpington Island dances, and even our rivals admit we have a right to use them since we became honorary members of the Chicken Spirit cult. Of course, how a Chicagoite, a Texan, a Milanese and a Barsetshire girl will interpret that could be something nobody would expect, or hopefully be able to counter. It is certainly a plan.

Feeling much more cheerful, we dashed across the road to The Missing Coconut. The S.I.T.H.S. team were there of course, and so were three first-years escorted by Saffina. One of them I recognised as the arctic fox Eva from Nuremburg, who is in that dorm who like getting up early.

I took the chance to ask her about her Songmark application – and was amazed to learn her full name is Eva Schiller, Prof Schiller's niece! The Prof recommended she apply, and somehow our Tutors agreed. She is certainly aviation-crazy, and told me a lot about the gliding schools up on the Hartz Mountains where every Summer holiday thousands of fresh-faced young furs learn all about the peaceful joys of soaring flight, sponsored by their Government. If only all governments did that.

It seems Professor Schiller has left the Pacific for awhile, and is on the quest in Palestine for something presumably to grace his Chancellor's rockery. Perhaps they need a new rockery to go with the expanded "living room" he keeps saying Germany needs; at any rate he seems to want these "Stones of David", whatever they are. Eva is full of admiration for his work, and wants to join the Ahenerbe after she graduates. I suppose it is very like being a treasure-hunter except that your own Government supports you and the money is not the important thing. By Eva's accounts the Prof failed to find the original Horn of Heimdal in the Vanierge territory this Summer; she was wistfully speculating about finding it herself someday. Well, every girl should have an ambition.

One of her friends was someone I recognised by sight and accent; Jasbir's sister Meera has a slightly different fur pattern but is the only Indian Mongoose in the new first year. She is quite a jolly girl, fresh from Roedean on our South coast, and we had a lot to chat about. Meera is used to hardship and danger, having broken tailbones and a collarbone on the playing field at Australian Rules hockey, and one paw has the fur rather oddly bleached. She explained it is a souvenir of the Congreve Club's experiments in home rocketry; pure hydrogen peroxide is nasty stuff by all accounts. I am glad our aircraft only run on eighty-five octane petrol!

We left them chatting with some of the S.I.T.H.S. students, who had overheard us and seemed very interested in Meera's hobbies back in England. I wonder what this "Goddard Club" is that they were inviting her to join?

It is a pity Jasbir could not come to the dances today. Oh well, perhaps things will be turned around next week. If we are "on call" back at Songmark then at least we should get a chance to practice our dances. The local teams have evidently been at work all Summer on their new moves, and it is nothing we are going to beat inside a week.

Sunday October 2nd, 1936

A damp day, but a cheerful one for me. We headed out to South Island in a rather leaky water taxi (it being the overhead roof that leaked, fortunately not the hull) and arrived at the Hoele'toemi household about nine. Certainly there is little to tempt us to stay at Songmark on a Sunday morning. For the first time, Maria is not with us; the Chapel of the Sacred Heart is no more and she is attending St. Paul's on Casino Island while the new church is built. To hear some of her congregation go on about it, anyone would think the Spontoonies had dynamited a gothic

Cathedral on South Island; that Chapel only seated forty people at a squeeze, and was a corrugated iron and timber affair that had seen better days long before the Gunboat Wars. Really, no great loss as architecture; I hear when furs started to dismantle it, the last half collapsed of its own accord. For some reason they have been unable to build that Calvary they planned on the site.

Still, I quite forgot all that and the pouring rain when I got down to Haio Beach. Jirry is back! A very welcome sight indeed; nobody minded at all when my tail went sideways at the sight of him. The whole family were there, including Moeli who I had not seen for some time. She whispered that she had been spending a lot of time at sea with her husband and kitten and their family. Officially Moeli is married to a fisherman, which is perfectly true as far as it goes. The Natives of No Island eat little else.

Despite her brother being back, Saimmi spent three hours with Helen, Saffina and myself in our religious training. We are learning other things now, base on the “seeing through fire” system. My other notebook is getting rather full. One thing is useful, being able to spot “The flow of the world” as Saimmi called it. Exactly how this works is hard to describe. But she says the Priestesses had six hours warning before the arrival of the belligerent fleet in the Gunboat Wars. It told folk nothing specific as to the direction or number of invaders, but they did know a lot of people were heading this direction and not with Spontoon’s welfare in mind.

Saimmi says she is quite troubled, and expects to be taking up a heavy load in the near future; her own “Fire dreams” have assured her so. She is quite young for a priestess but perhaps she will be promoted a level (not that they actually have formal levels. It is not like the old days in Barsetshire, with Archbishops rivalling to be made Cardinal and planting heretical material in each others’ libraries as sabotage.)

Back for luncheon, and then a leisurely afternoon. I had a lot to talk about with Jirry, or more properly “confess.” It makes for rather a long list, but the one redeeming thing was, everything was in what looked like a good cause at the time. Even Lars’ party was something I had to attend if Molly was going, to keep an eye on her. This is hardly the first time I have bared my soul and my diary, either. It is not as if I had any ambition to “visit every cabin on the Ark”, quite the reverse – but one way or another I do seem to be on the way there, and sitting down to think about it I can hardly say how or why.

I suppose most “Euro” males would drop me like a hot potato, but happily the Polynesian ideal of a good “Wahine” is rather more flexible. From what Mrs. Hoele’toemi tells me, they were rather mystified on first contact with Euros as to their attitude to our brides ideally marrying in white (so to speak); a Polynesian male is far happier with a girl who can choose him through experience rather than blind faith. Actual divorces here are really very rare. Jirry first seemed more concerned that no harm had come to me, and secondly that I had enjoyed myself. It is not as if my “adventures” took place when he was available, he points out. And he is certainly the only one I would like to settle the family longhouse with.

Still, there is the matter of us being Tailfast again. I would dearly love to be, if only I could confidently promise to stick to it. If a thing’s worth doing it’s worth doing well, to be sure – and to be Tailfast with Jirry Hoele’toemi is exceedingly worth doing.

The rest of the afternoon was rather more relaxed and very much more fun – in no time Helen was pounding on the door of the Guest longhouse reminding me were expected for tea at Songmark. To judge from the state of her own neck-fur she had been having just as fine a time, and indeed Marti was pressing a raw tamarind to a somewhat bitten ear. It is wonderful having a feline friend like Helen; there is no need to explain these things to her.

Monday October 3rd, 1936

An interesting joint trip for us all today; out to Main Village, Main Island! It has been the first time for ages we have been there, and it is rare for Songmark third-years to all have the same lessons together, exercise and sports excluded.

We can already fly most things with a joystick, and this year we should be able to drive most things with an engine. Other places might expensively hire vehicles out and have the drivers show us how to use them on a test track – but that is not the Songmark way of doing things. I will be taking my Day Skipper’s exam on boats next Spring, but this term we are concentrating on wheels rather than hulls.

At nine sharp we were at the main depot of the Ministry of Public Works, on the Western side of Main Village. They had a dozen or so lorries there of the kind they use for road

and telephone repairs wherever there is a road to take them – from what I could gather, the idea is we can make ourselves useful if they ever need drivers.

Last year we roared around the Songmark compound in ancient Ford and White lorries that were at the end of their days (literally, for the one Maria broke the steering of) but these are rather more modern machines, mostly five-tonne vehicles with double back axles. The main model seems to be a Vostok design; nobody else builds things from monochrome magnesium alloy castings half an inch thick! It hardly had to say “Made in Tsarogorod” with that rather distinctive engineering.

One of the reasons why they are buying in Vostok vehicles is that they simply do not rust. The Spontoon climate is very hard on motor-cars and lorries; distances are typically so short the engine never gets a chance to fully warm up, and a combination of the salt spray and warm, moist climate absolutely eats ordinary bodywork. These are built with “Sacrificial corrosion” like ships have, involving bars of pure magnesium on the undersides that corrode away but are easily replaced and save the main structure.

I must say, they build them tough in Tsarogorod. One of the drivers was telling us that last year one of the lorries went off the road on Main Island and rolled a hundred feet into a stream gorge – it was winched out, the shattered windscreen removed and a few loosened connections fixed, and driven back to the depot. Having no chassis as such, all the strength is in the bodywork.

A morning of tentatively driving around the depot was followed by six of us being put to work immediately as drivers, while the rest rode on the back. Helen was driving on the way out, as we picked up a load of telegraph poles from the main timber yard and roared out westwards along the coast road towards the “Chinese” village at the main river delta downstream of Sacred Lake. It is the first time we have ever driven on Main Island, and indeed few people do so. The only motor vehicles we saw were other official vehicles, three farm lorries and “The Bus” which stops everywhere and carries everything. If there is a spare piece of bodywork visible on “The Bus” it is grabbed hold of by a Spontoonie hanging off the outside, or immediately festooned with nets of produce heading in to market.

Once we got to the village, it was another draft of free labour generously provided by Songmark to the Althing. I suppose we can hardly complain (except for Madeleine X, who does so anyway; she is what they call a “groggnard” in French but at least does the job despite her grumbling.) Anyway, an afternoon of very hard work putting up new telephone poles followed, which had us all drooping like dishrags by five o’clock.

At least Helen was fresh when we drove out. I ached all over just climbing back into the cab, and had to keep us on the road back to the depot. After that, it was out with the hoses and toolkits as we cleaned up and maintained the vehicles, another hour of hard work with our Tutors standing by with their notebooks out and ready to swoop on any slacking!

Still, we had some compensation. The idea of a large plate of Songmark’s infamous three-finger poi was actually starting to seem good by the end of that, but instead we were told we would be dining in Main Village. Considering we see the place every day in the distance, it is surprising how rarely we get to set paw there – even for us, there are stern restrictions on travelling around Main Island.

Main Village may not have five-star hotels like Casino Island, but a lot of the chefs naturally live here, and in the off-season some retire to show any interested Natives just what they are missing – and for a price that would have any tour-boat diverting here if they were allowed to. I must say, the “Lucid Lobster” may look more like a longhouse than the Marleybone, but its kitchens coped admirably with the sudden invasion of two dozen hungry Songmark girls and their tutors. I really must get the chef’s recipe for “Steak-fried chicken.”

Tuesday, October 4th, 1936

Back to Main Island, with Maria and Molly getting their turn at the wheel while the rest of us added to our collection of splinters hauling new telephone poles. After yesterday, the girls who had forgotten to bring whisker tweezers with them were noted by the Tutors; it must have been galling for Madeleine to ask Ada Cronstein to pull a splinter out from where she could not get to it. I thought Ada was rather excessively thorough “checking her for more” but there is always a price to pay. It is probably as close as Ada is going to get to Madeleine’s tail fur.

Unfortunately there were no more chicken dinners, and by lunchtime we were back on Eastern Island at our various courses. I had rather a surprise when Miss Devinski pulled me in quietly and asked if I would be willing to do one extra – something I would never be officially

marked on, but she thinks would be a good idea for both Molly and myself. When she added that Saimmi had approved, I volunteered immediately for both of us. Our dear and long-suffering tutor seemed quite relieved, though gave me no other information. We shall see.

It was quite fun to head up to the crags on the Northern hillside and watch the first-years starting to scramble up the practice boulders. Our own routes are rather harder; alas Miss Wildford has spotted our dodge with the sticky rubber tennis shoes and forbidden us to climb in class time with them! We are back in Songmark issue boots, hauling twenty pounds of water sacks as we climb (at least, I am. Maria is carrying more like thirty and Beryl complaining fifteen is far too much.)

Our guidebook is certainly filling up with new routes! Despite carrying the handicap weights we are heading out onto the smoother, more featureless pieces of the cliff * and not falling off too often. One thing Li Han thought up last year we are still allowed to use; a bag of wood ashes to dip one's paw pads in to improve the grip. It does one's claws no good I am sure, but it is better than the Portland cement Beryl suggested using. Not for herself, of course.

- (Editor's Note: extract from the 1985 edition of "Rock Climbs of the Nimitz Sea region: Kanims and Spontoon area." The following is listed as "*An early classic*" and certainly dates from this time:

"ETERNAL FOUNTAIN OF FILTH. Grade: HVS (Hard Very Scary) Location: Lion's rock, far East end of exposure just SE of the octagonal anti-tankette pillbox. Shares same start with SEVEN PILLARS OF FOLLY, but breaks left across almost featureless manky slabs dotted with sparse chickenheads and one foul open green gulley almost impossible to grasp. Climbers with high pain thresholds could attempt to jam snout in to prevent barndoor, then dyno like crazy towards the crux, a dismal cheese-grater. Cratering is highly likely. A remote exposed route with no easy break-outs before the crux; the first ascent notes strangely say "*if you always use this little protection you should stay a nun.*")

Friday October 7th, 1936

A long, hard week indeed, and one where we have found out what being a third-year at Songmark really means. It means everything we have got used to previously, is no longer enough. Molly says she could sleep for a week, even if she has to do it alone. Ten hours a day of classes!

Whatever deal Songmark has with the Althing, we are the currency they pay it in. All morning we were cleaning and repairing the Ministry of Public Works vehicles, some of which seem to have had little more than "a lick and a promise" recently. Still, I suppose we know more about engines than most folk, and we are getting in free driving practice. The vehicles are very sturdy, with some interesting features. The load beds are reinforced with fitting plates for various equipment (some carry cranes or fire-engine type ladders) and they all have four or six screw-down stabilisers. If the vehicle is needed as a crane, it can be lifted off its tyres on the jacked anchors that swing down to make it a sturdy mounting.

Helen whispers that in the Gunboat Wars they had howitzers firing from the backs of lorries; certainly a five-tonne lorry could mount something of the sort, and the half-inch thick alloy bodywork should be at least splinter-proof though no tank. Still, these are a Vostok model, and it is probably the equally prepared Vostok designers who wanted them to have this ability in reserve. The Grand Duchess has Joseph Starling just across the water, and if every Vostok built utility vehicle is capable of military use – well, she needs all the help she can get.

Just when we had staggered back exhausted after changing engines and tyres all day, Miss Devinski pulled Molly and me aside and told us we had a special class booked for this evening. We just had time to shower and grab a hasty bite of grilled fish and plantain mash before she was calling us away again. One generally associates "ravening" with wolves rather than deer, but Molly can do it rather convincingly when hungry.

It was rather interesting. We were told to go to Song Sodas, order an ice-cream apiece and wait to be called. That part we could both do very happily, having missed the dessert at Songmark (stewed local Jackfruit and coconut cream by the scent; very nice.)

Song Sodas is an interesting old building, with the main restaurant and quite a few smaller rooms that are booked for parties and such. From what I heard from our senior years before they left, it sees a lot of use with Songmark girls and their native friends if one only has a one-hour pass. Some of the rooms I had never been into; they are locked when not in use.

Molly was the first to be called in by the regular waitress who was evidently just passing the message on; she was gone for nearly an hour while I finished off my dessert and chatted with

the waitress, a Spontoonie girl who is an absolute grave of secrets yet has some tales she can tell. She emerged looking rather dazed and staggering; I had not seen her looking like that since Cranium Island, when Saimmi did her best for her. She whispered that she was all right, and that I should go in. Feeling rather unnerved, I went into the dimly lit back corridor and saw there was one door standing open that I had never been through before.

There were two furs waiting for me on the far side of a table with a vacant comfy chair: Miss Blande and a snake gentleman I had not seen before. Miss Blande gave an odd, rather tight smile and gestured for me to sit down while she explained things.

Well! Of course we have trained in first aid and taking precautions about all sorts of things, but it seems Songmark have finally found someone who can train others to resist hypnosis. I suppose it is something proper Adventuresses might well be exposed to, sometime in their careers. Although Miss Blande did stress it was entirely voluntary and I could refuse if I really wanted to stay as I am (an odd sort of phrase, I thought) she mentioned that although Songmark was footing the bill, this was going to be expensive and I should finish the course if I decide on it.

I have never given up half-way on anything yet (bailing out of a flight in a Flying Flea hardly counts as giving up after the wing or tailplane departed first) and I volunteered on the spot. It would be bad manners to have our Tutors go to all this trouble then refuse to take advantage of the offer.

That being said, I was introduced to Mr. Sabass, a very imposing black cobra gentleman with the quiet voice and penetrating eyes one gets in many reptile folk. Miss Blande sat in the corner and watched, but took little further part in things. He began by asking if I had ever been hypnotised before – I told him I had not, but I had seen it done on stage back in England, with a spinning mirror rather than the traditional watch. He nodded, his hood flaring slightly, and asked if he could attempt it on me. Then things got somewhat blurred.

It was rather like that time with Saimmi; the next time I noticed the clock on the wall the hands had jumped forty minutes, though it was hard to say just how. Miss Blande was still watching over me, so I had no real worries on that part. Mister Sabass straightened up, and announced he was finished for the time being, but he would have to go and think things over before our next session. Fascinating! I suppose he was satisfied with my performance, whatever it was. If only more training was like this, where one learns by having it poured straight into you.

We were excused gate guard tonight; Helen and Maria were very interested in our evening but there was rather little Molly or me could actually tell them. Molly said Mister Sabass had mentioned looking for blocks and commands, whatever those may be.

Actually I feel no different, though I suppose it is not something I would notice. We are booked for more sessions on Friday nights, which should be interesting.

Saturday October 8th, 1936

Definitely it is looking like Autumn now; howling winds and rather heavy rain in the morning.

At least breakfast was more leisurely than usual, with us not having to dash out anywhere. It was interesting to watch Adele Beasley settling into her new dorm, though it has not changed her luck overnight. She had a stack of buttered toast, and was just heading towards the tables when Jasbir totally accidentally tripped her with her tail. The plate went flying, and every one of the six slices of buttered toast spun in the air and landed butter-side down. Poor Adele! Interestingly, Susan de Ruiz seems to be watching over her with her notebook in paw.

We were kept in as call-out by our Tutors, while a very apologetic Jasbir and co headed out for their dance practice. Fair's fair. I wonder if Jasbir has brought anything interesting back from Gull Island? I recall Beryl mentioning a folk dance she learned at Saint T's, a Surrey midden dance called "Great lumps o' muck" which should be relevant to everything I have heard about Gull Island. Helen was quite happy to give our Casino Island trip a miss; choppy seas in a fifteen-foot water taxi are never much fun, and as Molly puts it, Helen gives her impression of a fire hydrant.

Still, we kept trim and practiced in the dining hall having cleared the chairs and tables off to one side, with some more dance practice. In fact we were hard at it four hours till lunchtime as we tried to develop some brand new routines to catch the S.I.T.H.S. lead. Just repeating the Orpington Island dances will not do; we shall have to come up with an "Interpretive Hula" that nobody else has seen before and yet follows all the traditions.

As none of the first-years have earned passes to go anywhere, not surprisingly we drew rather a crowd. Most of them looked in for five minutes and left, but at the end we had three who

were quietly watching and taking notes. Not surprisingly Meera Sind was one, but the others were Eva Schiller and Svetlana Cherenkov, a surprisingly graceful wolverine girl from Vostok. She tells us she has studied ballet back home, and although a grass skirt is not quite a tutu it should be very useful training.

Dear Diary: we have actual Songmark girls this year from Germany, Vostok and Ulster. What ARE our Tutors thinking of? If they had been exiled types like Hanna Meyer's family I could understand it, but Eva is a much-decorated and proud member of her country's equivalent to the Girl Guides, and goes definitely misty-eyed whenever she speaks of her homeland. The talkies are full of parodies of her Party, but I have known her Uncle and those three wolves we think of as G-U-U and they are nothing like the stereotype, and Eva was a leading light in some "Winter Help" state charity. Possibly that is why they were sent here.

Still, the first-years were polite and very interested in Native dances. A lot more so than (say) Madeleine X has ever been in her 3 years here; although she dances in the Euro style she does not even dance the Tango as it is "un-French" despite Paris being a famous place to dance it. Helen once asked her if she danced the supremely Parisian can-can much at home, which kept her quiet but fuming for awhile.

Lunch was the usual. Oddly enough, Meera quite likes it. They grow various yams and taro in her home state of Utterly Pradesh, and Poi is only a development of the same, as yoghurt is to milk. Her sister Jasbir has never actually complained either; I suppose a Maharani can eat more or less what she wants and taro is considered rather lower class. Our Tutors dropped by in the afternoon to watch our progress: after an hour's break and a look through our books we got back into some serious dance exercises, developing the ideas we hashed out in the morning.

It is surprising how tiring dance makes one; by the end of another three hours we felt as if we had been running round the dunes with our packs and boots on. Still, we have deliberately worked out the most energetic dance we have ever seen; most people would simply not be able to keep up with it. Of course the S.I.T.H.S. team are fit and well practiced, but Helen has the good idea of designing one that even they cannot match, and that we would have stood no chance at even last year. All those hours swimming and trotting round the dunes heavy laden will finally pay off, and well before we graduate.

Miss Devinski came in to watch, and stayed a few minutes to see us teaching some first-years the moves. The squirrel girl Miss Rote came in, took one look at us and then bounced out as if her tail was scorching. Very odd.

Molly has yet to be convinced that virtue is its own reward, but after half an hour of us passing on some of the basics to an interested pawfull of first years, Miss Devinski beckoned her over and gave us some cheering news. We were not actually invited to go to Mahanish's in the evening, but our Tutor suggested it would make a nice change. Last year or the year before Molly would surely have grumbled about people stating the obvious; now she took the hint and thanked Miss Devinski very politely before we double-timed it back towards the showers.

Hurrah! Ten minutes had our fur combed and us dressed in our best: another five minutes and we were out of the compound with Spontoonie straw hats and capes tied tight on against the steady rain. It is dark just after seven now, especially in this weather, and the lights of the runway shone reassuringly as we followed them along to the cluster of buildings that pilots look forward to after the end of a long flight.

It is a long time since we were at Mahanish's – of course we could have gone any day in Summer, but Mrs. Hoele'toemi is an excellent cook (she is teaching us) and somehow we seem to have decided to keep the airport restaurant for term time treats. It is usually what we think of as "So near and yet so far" as we tuck into the admittedly very filling and wholesome Songmark fare.

As there are fewer flights on Sundays, a lot of pilots are "off flight rules" for the evening and catching up on lost time. Molly and Maria seemed very keen to join them. I stuck to a single Nootnops Blue and Helen did the same – our Tutors are not vindictive and we are off gate guard tonight, but I prefer at least some of the party keeps their wits about them.

The meal was excellent (Maria insisted on buying this time round) and a "Foxtrot Oscar" strength chicken chilli with rice and chutney had Helen and me almost melting on the floor – in a good way, the way one finishes a run totally tired out. Molly and Maria contented themselves with taro leaves with shrimp and coconut cream; oddly enough they like the Polynesian dishes if anything better than I do. It is a good thing we burn four thousand calories a day at Songmark; Maria has mentioned some of her aunts get rather plump with age. Apart from her famous Uncle, she does not seem to like most of her relatives. The only cousin she has mentioned in detail is engaged in producing less alarming versions of classic operas for a junior

audience; by Maria's account he has a 37 percent cosier version of "Cosi fan tutti" which makes a complete mess of the plot.

It was certainly a time to sit back and consider things – we have been coming here nearly two years now, since that first time we broke out of Songmark and then had to form a pyramid to get back in! It seems a lot longer somehow. Looking around the restaurant, it is full of pilots and ground staff chatting or complaining about flight schedules and the strange things that passengers do. I must ask Jane Ferry if her family pulp fiction publishers do a title "Tourist folk do the darnest things" as there would certainly be a ready market for it here.

Helen has less to worry about; she will certainly be Tailfast again this coming solstice, and the June one if at all possible – and I hope to be as well. This time next year she may be the junior Mrs. Hoele'toemi, but knowing what we do about these islands I rather doubt she will have a career of nothing but hoeing the taro patch and looking after striped kittens.

Maria could return to Italy any time after she graduates, but from what she hints she might be more valuable to her Uncle on this side of the world. After all, it would be rather a waste to train her for three years in local knowledge and then not use it. By some accounts, her adventures in Italy are what caused "Il Puce" to lose the last of his head-fur; not only is she far from the scandal sheets here but in fact after Songmark training she is far less scandalous (or if it comes to it, far less likely to get caught. Her journalism and reporting training, she says, is helping her learn all the tricks of the trade. It is rather like training a world leader as an assassin, so they know just what to look out for.)

It is Molly and myself who have the real career moves to plan. Molly has some ideas about commerce that she is keeping very close to her chest-fur; she has mentioned she can raise capital from her friends at the Temple of Continual Reward. They are often left with funds they need to sink into "legit biz" as she calls it. Otherwise – she shrugs, and says there is always Krupmark Island.

An excellent evening, rather enlivened by spotting four first-years cautiously entering clad in re-dyed Songmark overalls and tourist-stall bush hats, though their Australian accents need a lot more work to be convincing. We very carefully did not notice them, and let them get on with their first-ever "breakout". Ah, traditions! We wonder what the Tutors have in store for them on their return. It might spoil things to let them know getting back in will be harder than however they got out.

Sunday October 9th, 1936

It seems far more than a week since we were back on South Island; five ten-hour days of solid work tend to rather saturate one's memory. If our brains are getting a rest it is only because we are hard at work with sports or exercise (and with one of the sports being orienteering, even that needs a fair amount of calculation.)

Still, it was as welcome as ever to get to Haio Beach and the Hoele'toemi compound. All the family were there except the senior Mr. Hoele'toemi, and we do not ask where he goes when he is not around. If I was to fully list the various things we have learned not to ask about – well, any Agent would pay a lot to read it. I hope none of them use my Lexarc Shorthand.

Moeli has some happy news for us – there will be a new kitten (or similar) in the family next year! Mind you, it is not one who will be listed in the Meeting Islands ministries. She tells me by tradition she will be attended only by Main Island doctors and priestesses, but she hopes all will go well. It might be rather a giveaway if the Ministry of the Interior had a large file of Spontoonie Citizens registered as belonging to no island. At least the sea folk pay no taxes – on the other paw they are very undemanding about needing roads, medical provision or housing, so the treasury can hardly complain. How the folk at the registry of births, marriages and deaths explain things might be an interesting read.

Molly and Maria have still never met that side of the family – and I am sure many of the "euro" Spontoonies do not really believe they exist. After all, in the Museum of Anthropomorphology there is that whole section clearly explaining how the legend is faked for the films. Moeli's husband and daughter are certainly not special effects!

Saimmi taught us all morning; she seems quite pleased with our progress. Helen is doing very well considering her attitude to religion when she first got here; perhaps being exposed to the more practical and applied side of things has helped. Saffina was already a fully qualified Witch Doctor (a fairly compatible profession) and of course I have seen Archbishop Crowley demonstrating some other spectacular things that are not special effects either. He is held up quite rightly as the example that all keen and devout youth should follow; even his detractors

cannot argue he must have needed more than mundane powers to scale the peak of Kanchunga the way he did before the Great War. Anyone who can climb not only the crumbly chalk of the white cliffs of Dover (which he did) but the treacherous snows of the Himalayas must certainly have some deity or other on their side. His enemies may have called him “the Great Beast” but he took that as a complement, much in the way Maria does when Liberty calls her a total fascist.

Oddly enough, Saimmi was asking me about the reformed Church back in England – she rarely has much to say about “Euro” religions, but now there are military chaplains there who have a rather more practical side than providing church parades and the like. I wonder what these “Warrior Priestesses” are that she mentions; if Spontoon had any I should think we would know by now. There are the Wild Priests of course, but those are something rather different.

Before lunch we went back to the Hoele’toemi compound, where I helped Moeli putting on her fur markings. It was quite an experience, knowing what some of the new ones meant. When she had finished and bounced out to proudly display them, I admit that I traced one of the designs on my own tummy fur for a minute, thinking about it, before hurriedly brushing it smooth. Nobody wears fur markings they are not entitled to, it would be the worst sort of social gaffe. I recall having to brush out my “Tailfast” sign before we went to Vostok and it expired; that gave me a pang then and it would be far worse having to do it now. In a very real sense, being Tailfast is like giving someone the keys to one’s spirit.

An excellent luncheon followed, of baked whole fresh-caught fish and taro greens. Moeli points out that she is not exactly eating for two, but if the regular Native diet is nutritionally a square meal already, she is making sure hers positively bulges at the corners. Not the sort of useful tip they gave us back at Saint Winifred’s.

Afterwards – it would have been impolite and bad for the digestion to bolt one’s dessert and run, but Jerry and I were rather soon exploring the sights of the three-yard jungle. He has some disappointing news for me – he is taking several voyages with his father, and for the next few weeks will not be on Spontoon much. Interestingly, he mentions picking up some specialist pieces of British engineering that are coming from Rain Island. Spontoon’s ally has a lot of heavy engineering anyway, so it must be something rather special to have to send the design to Sheffield to have it fabricated. That is one of the five cities in the world that has rolling mills and forges capable of making battleship armour, but I rather doubt that is what we will be getting.

A very fine afternoon followed. One cannot actually see much in three-yard jungle, but there was everything I wanted in view a lot closer than that.

Monday October 10th, 1936

A busy morning indeed. We are preparing to fly the Junkers 86; the aircraft was flying all morning with Miss Windlesham at the controls as she took us up a dorm at a time for a half hour circuit of Main Island. There is a co-pilot’s seat and just enough room behind for three people to crane their necks enough to watch the control panel, so we all managed to gain some experience if not exactly paws-on. The dorms who were not flying acted as ground crew, checking the aircraft as thoroughly as if it had come in from a mission over the Front (whichever front that might be) and might have unsuspected holes in critical places. Fortunately there were none.

We had one piece of good or possibly bad luck; when my dorm were asking permission to land we were told to make another circuit of Eastern Island, as another flying school were taking off. So! The Spanish school have taken to the air; we had watched them opening crates and assembling their machines in the hangar across the runway for the past few weeks. Still, we got to see them in flight. Given the circumstances that made them leave Spain, most of Father Dominicus’ first years are not “First years” at all strictly speaking, but were senior years at Barcelona who have gritted their teeth and started from scratch here.

To celebrate our first flights, at lunchtime we were allowed to visit Song Sodas, where our Tutors bought us a Nootnops Red apiece, a rare treat. There are tables outside that we used, though it is getting rather late in the year. Most of us had our field-glasses, and we eagerly watched our new rivals at work.

There are always hazards to sitting outside, though. Miss Windlesham had just handed us out our glasses when there was a raucous screech from above and something landed in Adele’s glass with accuracy that bomb aimers could only dream of. Pesky seagulls. Poor Adele! With nearly thirty glasses on the table, her usual luck struck again. The gull sounded exceedingly pleased with himself, and sat on the roof of Song Sodas flapping his wings in amusement while we all wished for our self-defence weapons and a good supply of Number Six gage shot cartridges.

This time round, at least the rest of her dorm shared their own drinks with her, something Missy K or Beryl would never have done (Beryl would sell water to travellers perishing in the desert for “all the market will bear.”) Susan de Ruiz had her notebook out again, scribbling calculations. For some reason, she then came over and asked Molly where she could find a large number of honest dice. I assume Beryl would have known best of all, but would probably have on principle provided a set that are only honest “to a certain value of honesty”.

The afternoon was spent between swimming exercises and piloting the Sea Osprey, which is obviously a good trainer for the Junkers in as far as it has twin engines. I got another good look at our rivals’ aircraft, a flight of eight sleek French Dewoitine biplanes which have only just left squadron service, and would be front-line fighters still across most of the world. I think our Tiger Moths are much better and safer primary trainers, but the Spanish school was known for accepting a certain accident rate and its replacement seems to have followed on the traditions. Still, I would love to take a flight in one.

A fine meal followed, with plenty of fish stew and baked imported potatoes. Who would have thought plain potatoes would be thought of exotic here? We certainly see few enough of them. They will grow in the Spontoonie climate but with the warm dampness they are very prone to all sorts of disease, as some of the original Plantations found out and went bankrupt. There are several villages partly of Irish descent on Main Island, who one would have thought would have learned about the risks of potato monoculture before they left home.

Our Ulster girl Maureen was the only one who did not seem to be delighted. Then, she has probably had them several times at home.

It was a good thing we had a filling tea, as I had early gate duty and one gets rather peckish around midnight. Just my luck to be on with Madeleine X, who grumbled throughout the night about being saddled with an albatross round her neck. Which is rather an odd description of Adele, who looks pure-bred lop rabbit to me. At least Adele’s luck is not contagious; in fact Beryl has tried to get her to go with her to the Casino, probably on the assumption that all the misfortune in the neighbourhood will head towards the bunny-shaped misfortune magnet.

Although Songmark is off the main road leading to the airfield, there is some local traffic to the various houses mostly staffed by airfield support folk. Walking along inside the wire, I noticed a Spontoonie canine couple kissing goodnight, which was nothing exceptional. What surprised me was a rather wistful whine from beside me. It was the female of those three rather odd guard dogs, standing on her hind legs with her forepaws braced against the wire, looking out at the scene. To judge from her expression and her tail angle, one might almost think moonlight and roses had more appeal than kennels and dog biscuits. When she noticed me looking at her she dropped down to all fours again and trotted off in something of a sulk.

All in all, it was a rather wearing evening by the time I roused Maria and Helen. To be accurate, I roused Helen and she helped me rouse Maria. It is just as well that the Songmark beds are not deep and luxurious, but as adequate for a very tired girl as the food is for a hungry one. Getting her started in the middle of the night is like trying to turn over a Schneider Trophy engine with the starting handle of a family motor-car – not impossible, but awfully hard work.

Wednesday 12th October, 1936

A very busy two days, but well worthwhile – today I flew the Junkers! The aircraft has dual side-by-side controls but Miss Windlesham had hers disconnected (but with one paw never far from the master reconnect switch in case of emergency.) I was the last of my dorm to fly, and with the exception of one small bounce on takeoff, managed two circuits of Eastern Island without trouble. Typically, our dear tutors always plan for safety; the first instruction was to climb to five thousand feet before trying anything else, which gave us plenty of room for gliding back to the runway. I have heard that the aircraft first landed on Spontoon in a dead-stick landing, and having seen how well it does (not) glide, our Tutors do not want to risk repeating the experience without plenty of spare altitude.

I suppose that with a Tiger Moth, if the worst comes to the worst we could put it down on one of the beaches and have it dismantled and taken back to Songmark by ship. In fact, the story is that one of the first ever Songmark class actually did that, and still managed to pass the course. Landing an aircraft this big on a beach intact would be a miracle; it is too heavy and would be sure to sink the undercarriage in and flip up onto the nose like that first Tarrant Tabor prototype did on the runway.

Anyway, all went very smoothly and I managed a good 3-point landing. Miss Windlesham was quite pleased, and commented that she had been in aircraft landings that would break a cargo of coconuts, but mine would have safely have landed eggs. Quite a relief!

We assembled for a fine celebratory meal of bacon and eggs, which is a rare treat at Songmark. Traditionally it would be part of a "flight breakfast" but with only one aircraft to share between my whole year it made more sense to have the meal after we had all finished. The other way round would have me eating the flight breakfast the day before the flight, which is not quite the point. I spotted someone was missing from the table; I had seen Adele qualify on Tuesday as one of the first to fly, but there was no sign of her. I asked Susan de Ruiz who told me a rather strange tale. It seems Adele was on this morning gate guard, and was just feeding the guard hounds before our breakfast when the island's animal vet turned up for their regular check-up. He had a long talk with Adele afterwards and then another with Miss Cardroy at the gate, before Adele left with him heading towards Casino Island, and we have not seen her since. Very strange.

We could see every snout twitching in the junior years' areas, as they scented the meal they would not be getting for a year or two. It is something for them to look forward to. One feels rather sorry for Ada, though she had a double ration of eggs. If there is one scent guaranteed to persuade a vegetarian to turn omnivorous it is frying bacon, and both Molly and Maria tucked in very happily. Maria has told us that most poor Italian bovines would be unable to eat this meal; having been brought up without meat, a vegetarian type simply could not stomach it.

Madeleine X dropped in the snide remark that Maria's Uncle is hardly going to be changing that trend; it was a French ruler who declared his ambition of "a chicken in every pot" and Il Puce's policy of guns before butter is not helping matters on the home front. At least we had the good sense to settle fertile areas such as Canada and New Zealand; the only "broad, fertile acres" Il Puce has added to the benefit of his New Roman Empire are in the Sahara or Ethiopia – not somewhere that is going to be providing the victors with much edible reward.

Happily, Maria has learned to control her temper in the past two years. Otherwise, there would not be a chicken in a French pot but probably a cooking pot rammed over the ears of a French canine girl. Madeleine has NOT improved noticeably since we met her; she is the type who gives canine females a bad name.

Thursday 13th October, 1936

Our logbooks are certainly filling up; this morning I notched up another half hour in the Junkers! It is not as manoeuvrable as the Tiger Moth of course and needs to be gently led through manoeuvres rather than thrown into them, but is marvellously fast. It is the first time I have ever exceeded two hundred and fifty knots in level flight.

Certainly, there are more monoplanes and fewer biplanes around on Spontoan every year. Pan-Nimitz Airways have upgraded their landplane fleet to brand new DC-2s, which are very sleek and a great advertisement for the company. It is quite awhile since we saw a passenger biplane on floats; in fact it was probably that converted Handley-Page Clive that took me to the Albanian South Indies and back. That one was out again the day after I brought it back to Spontoan; a commercial aircraft cannot afford to sit idle however old it may be.

Adele is back; she mentions she has been to the hospital again but otherwise keeps her snout firmly shut. Very mysterious.

Friday 14th October, 1936

It looks as if the Summer season is definitely over; today our flying was cancelled as almost typhoon-level winds lashed across the island. There were palm fronds torn off and tumbling along the street, and we were all called out to help the airport staff lash down parked aircraft.

It is a good thing folk have radios these days; scheduled flights into Spontoan were cancelled, and anyone awaiting a connection at Hawaii will have to make do with the local version of hula and beach-parties awhile longer. Any aircraft too far out to turn back would be in real trouble, as the wind is blowing from the North and Eastern Island's runway is at ninety degrees to it, giving a Force Nine side wind. At least when that giant Russian bomber arrived in the similar storm in our first term it could land upwind.

We took the time to look through the latest consignment of aviation magazines. Certainly the world is moving on while we are out on Spontoan; there was an article on new airfields being built, or rather dug, in England. Having London served by Croydon on the

Southern edge of the suburbs is less satisfactory every year as the houses encroach on it. Landplanes are never too safe to land without a runway, as we found out while being briefed on the Junkers; it seems the new "runways" are being constructed from abandoned gravel pits near Gatwick and some little village called Heathrow that will have a mile and a half of sheltered water to land a flying boat on. Paris already has its main airport on the Seine and Eva Schiller has much to praise about the new Berlin-Wannsee seaplane docks on Lake Havel.

One airport customer who was pictured in the magazines as well as live in the departure lounge was the famous Lady Pamela Fenwick, that fine and famous British aviatrix! She has always been something of a heroine of mine, though her temper as she found out all departures were cancelled was rather fiery. She thwacked her boot with her riding crop and marched out in rather a huff, with her entourage trailing like tenders and oilers after a battleship. We have followed her progress eagerly (at least I have) in the Daily Elele and the Daily Birdwatcher all Summer, but it is the first time I have seen her close to.

Helen was asking me about how fully pedigree gentry get along socially. What she really meant was how someone could be in our aristocracy and have a very definite strain of North African fox in the family. I explained about pedigrees, which is something Helen's family never took much store by (though she could have one if she had the paperwork; her family are all tigers as far as she ever heard.) Technically speaking, a Prince or Princess from Britain could marry into the royal families of Japan or Thailand despite their being different species stock. None have actually done so yet, but the century is still fairly young. The Japanese royalty have about the longest documented pedigree in the world, even if one takes their full claim to be descendants of the Sun-God with a pinch of salt. Not a safe thing to do around our second-year friend Rumiko.

Beryl butted in with one of her usual stories, having observed a pretty vixen in a respectable maid's outfit in the departing retinue. If you believe Beryl, Lady Pamela keeps a personal maid who acts as an extremely personal secretary – in that any gentleman wanting an "appointment" must convince her that he is worthy of her employer's time. Of course Beryl would say things like that, and historically the idea is not actually unknown. From everything I have read and seen of Lady Pamela, she can make up her own mind exceedingly well without needing anyone's advice.

The wind slackened somewhat in the afternoon but the rain if anything got worse. We spent a dull afternoon in the hangars on routine airframe maintenance; just because we are third-years and get the occasional treat our Tutors do not let us forget the basics.

(Later) Molly and I were back in our oilskins after tea for the blustery hike out to Song Sodas. I had rarely seen the place look so empty, but it is scarcely the weather for lemonade and ice-creams, and nobody will be out getting their fur soaked tonight unless they have to.

As before, Miss Blande and Mr. Sabass were awaiting us in one of the small rooms. It looks as if Song Sodas was designed first as a nest of small store rooms and cubby-hole offices and then extensively re-modelled. This time I went first, while Molly picked at a mint and alfalfa ice. She seemed rather more affected by last week's encounter than I was.

Mr. Sabass pulled his notes out and explained that he had first looked for mental blocks and active commands, like the ones stage hypnotists give to subjects to make them (say) believe their chair is uncomfortably hot a minute after they resume their seats. Those are apparently easiest to spot, but neither me nor Molly actually had any "in play." He then explained that he would be looking deeper today for long-term blanks and blocks, and that would take rather longer.

Again, the evening rather blurred, like going in and out of a daydream, until I definitely heard Mr. Sabass click his finger-claws and I saw the clock had moved on an hour. He frowned and shuffled a sheaf of notes, and for Miss Blande's benefit as well as mine he gave me a summary.

Rather oddly, he said that although I had been mildly hypnotised in the past, there were no active compulsions and any blocks that had been there had never been enforced, and had been allowed to fade past the point he could read them. On the other paw, there was something else that he did not recognise as hypnosis, which seemed more recent. In the next sessions, he intends to try and find out what and at least proof me from anyone else ever hypnotising me. This could be handy. I wonder if I was accidentally put under the influence watching the Barx Brothers filming? They are certainly a mesmerising performance.

I called Molly in as requested, then relaxed waiting for her and read the back issues of the Daily Elele as I slowly got through a hot chocolate with extra cream and the rain hammered on the windows outside. Definitely not an evening for ices.

Thinking of food, when we got back Helen was rather worrying about Red Dorm and their year being in charge of our food next week; later than our timetable a year ago, the second-years have been given our food budget and will be putting the meals on our table. I pointed out that they may be feeding us but we are marking them – and if anyone slips in what the Spontoonie language calls “bowel-fruit” into our stew, we have some suspects ready to paw. That was the gourd Prudence and co. found on our first survival class on Main Island, and they at least will not have forgotten the taste.

Saturday, 15th October 1936

A busy day, with my dorm starting early and getting in practice for our new dance. We are not quite ready to launch it in public, but all the moves are starting to come together quite nicely. Helen says we will need reinforced leis to dance this one in, as the standard flower braids would not hold up under the strain.

Happily both Jasbir’s dorm and mine are free from guard duty, so by ten we were out on Casino Island again with our dance costumes in our packs. This time we have official supporters, the first-years Eva, Svetlana and Meera are very interested about joining the dance classes and have their papers (and our Tutors’ permissions) already filled in.

On the way, Eva asked if she could take a look at the giant compost machine that Professor Kurt von Mecklenburg und Soweiter has generating three hundred kilowatts for the Casino Island grid on a warm day. We could spare ten minutes so had the engineers give her a quick tour. The Professor is off on Main Island busy with the plans for a full-scale installation that makes this look like a teapot; what he really wants would involve a pipeline for deep, cold ocean water to cool the condensers. Collecting five tons of “bio waste” a day on Casino Island is not impossible, but his new installation wants to eat twenty and that will mean direct access to Main Island and the plantations there with their crop wastes. I expect the Althing will be happier with that; the Casino Island plant is actually importing choice wastes from the fish cannery, and though there have been no significant spills as yet it is a risk best avoided. Having many gallons of boiling ether ready to leak at the first accident (or sabotage; I never did hear anything about that investigation) is something else better done in the far corner of a plantation field.

Eva is quite an engineer for her age; we had to drag her away while she was still debating with the plant manager about using Stirling Engines or Tesla Turbines to replace the converted ex-marine steam axial that the pilot plant is using. I think she will fit in quite happily at Songmark. Though she has various decorations from the League of German Maidens, there is not one for Ruthless Efficiency, or so she tells us. Her other suggestion was to use petroleum rather than ether in the turbine, which is certainly cheaper and no more explosive, plus one whiff of it leaking will not knock out anyone trying to fix the leak.

The first-years went off with one of the teachers to start learning the basics, and we took the chance to challenge the S.I.T.H.S. to a public contest in two weeks time. Everyone seems keen on a showdown with the press present; it is heading into the off-season and without the antics of the tourists there is less local news than folk have become accustomed to.

Our own dance was what one might call a “holding action”; we dropped no hints we had anything special up our sleeves, and with the S.I.T.H.S.’ new style they would walk right over what we danced today. They still might, and we just hope they have no new surprises for us. As we finished our piece we could already hear their supporters rehearsing authentic Polynesian victory chants; Maria whispered that they had better check their books for some authentic Defeat Chants for when we have our next showdown.

One surprise was another of the first-years turning up on her own, that Nancy Rote girl. First-years are not supposed to go about alone on Casino Island (she could have come along with us perfectly legally from Songmark had she wanted to) and I was honour bound to report her to our Tutors when we got back. Miss Nordlingen slapped a week’s kitchen duty on the silly squirrel; we may not have too many rules here but we have to keep the ones we agreed to.

As with every year tutor, Miss N will have her paws full – it is too soon to say so far exactly who will be causing trouble and how, but given the mix of rather radical students there will surely be as many as my year or Saffina’s. It has been four years since Miss N had a year to personally look after – Miss Windlesham has this year off as administrator, having tutored the class with Zara in. I can imagine she is feeling rather down about having been the tutor of the first year to fail a student.

We have heard about some of the stranger first-years; one shrew hails from Cranium Island, of all places. I hope folk never leave her in the engineering labs unguarded. And there is a

Spanish canine who has come via Rain Island; I had to ask Maria on details of what “Bakuninite Anarchists” do. She told me in great detail, and explained why her Uncle maintains a shoot-on-sight policy.

(Later) Molly returned from the downstairs office waving two envelopes, addressed to us. They had Spontoan local postmarks, and for a second I wondered if Mr. Sapohatan had wanted to see us. On the other paw, he is hardly likely to write to Molly and not Helen.

Our Tutors are going to be going round with their tails fluffed out when we tell them about this. They never did like us attending Madame Maxine’s, and we have been offered six evening’s lessons and treatments. It is still a mystery as to who is paying for this if our Tutors are not – I assumed Mr. Sapohatan has a paw in it. Molly says Lars would tell her if he was sponsoring us that way. Anyway, she has been of great service to him with a Tommy-gun and bandoliers of ammunition, not the dyed fur and party shoes that Madame Maxine gets us accustomed to wearing.

There is no time like the present; spotting Miss Devinski down in the middle of the compound I grabbed Molly and we decided to brazen it out and ask her to her snout. After all, they did let us go last time, and an Adventuress does not spend all her time in muddy boots and safari jackets (except possibly Kansas Smith, who is no good example.) Even the famed Laura Shieling wore a respectable society dress when required, which was handy to conceal all the tools and munitions.

Oh dear. If Miss Devinski was a feline her claws would have popped out and her tail bottling out like a sweep’s brush as soon as I respectfully informed her of our good luck. As it was, her muzzle wrinkled and her ears went right back – she snapped that we were obviously keen on undoing all the good work they had been trying to do for us. I wonder what she means? Madame Maxine is perfectly respectable, and very useful too – I have her to thank for giving me a second face as Kim-Anh Soosay, without whom I would probably not have got my pilot’s license.

Anyway, she looked me straight in the eyes and asked if I thought this was really a good idea, and if it is right for us. I recalled that fine party before the start of term when I had dressed in yet a third fur pattern and managed to keep both Kim-Anh’s and my own reputation unstained despite everything. When I said I thought it would be very useful, our dear Tutor threw her hands up in frustration and told us to go right ahead, provided it was in our own free time.

All rather odd, really.

Sunday October 16th, 1936

A rare event today – we strolled into Haio Beach as ever, but Saimmi is not to be found. The rest of the family assure us she is doing something that only she can do, now. No doubt we will hear about it next week. Still, she has left us homework to be getting on with – we tended one of the shrines off in the jungle, in fact the very one I recall sheltering Helen and me from the rain nearly two years ago, in our first Songmark holiday.

It was a great pity, as Eva Schiller had asked to come along and I will definitely have to ask Saimmi about that. Considering what her Uncle does in the religious artefact collections business, bringing Eva to the local shrines might be like inviting a wild fox to critique one’s hen houses.

Moeli was there and we had a busy time helping the household preparing luncheon for twelve. Mrs Hoele’toemi had a great feast of those strange bunches of parsnip-like tubers they call Chinese Keys, that are said to have such an effect. They are very tasty anyway. It was rather a good excuse to retire with Jirry to the guest long-house later and see if it actually made a difference – unlike most scientific enquiries I can say that though results were hardly conclusive (as far as the Chinese Keys go), they were highly satisfactory.

One thing I can certainly vouch for – a raw tamarind is an excellent styptic on over-enthusiastically bitten ears and scruffs of necks. My fur seems to positively like the exercise; it has changed rather conspicuously there in the past two years, and is growing very luxuriantly.

Moeli says that I can expect my fur to change quite a bit in these islands, becoming more like that of our wild ancestors as I expose more of it to sun and air. I am not quite sure about this idea, but the process seems to have started and certainly I have had no complaints so far. Her own figure is definitely starting to alter if one looks carefully.

The only thing that had my ears drooping was that Jirry is all packed to leave again – by Tuesday morning he and his father will be sailing on the tide, to pick up various industrial

supplies. There are only guesses as to when they will return – it may be weeks. When one carries tonnes of steel around the Pacific, shipping by air is hardly an option and they may trans-ship and go by roundabout routes to disguise their destination.

A fond farewell, then back to Songmark! When we arrived at our rooms Molly's ears went right up in enthusiasm at the sound of rolling dice. Unfortunately for her the dorm was not doubling as a Casino; it was Susan de Ruiz playing dice with Adele, who seemed to be losing severely while Susan noted the scores with a puzzled expression. I know Beryl has had the idea of bankrolling Adele to play next to her at a Casino and attract all the bad luck away from Beryl's own play, but if one mentions Casinos to our lepine friend she almost jumps a yard in the air.

That is not the only thing to have the effect, it seems. Helen was mentioning Moeli's good news that there should be an unexpected new arrival in the family, when Adele's whiskers drooped and she rapidly excused herself and left. She certainly has a lot on her mind.

Maria arrived just as the gates were closing, with a rather strange expression on her face. It is the one we generally see on Prudence after she has had a fine day out with her friends in the swimming club, or on Molly after a religious experience sacrificing a hundred rounds on the firing range. Helen just looked at her and grinned, and asked if she had met anyone interesting.

It is rather uncommon to see Maria embarrassed. She admitted that she ran into that sailor bull we have seen before, generally in what would look like rather unequal combat with the gnarled and skinny pipe-smoking captain who tends to win. This time the fellow, Plutarch or some similar name, was more at leisure and on shore leave to be exact. He seems to have rather odd table manners if Maria's description of him crushing walnuts in one hand was accurate – but I believed that she made an impression on him by showing she can crush a coconut between her knees (her party trick.)

Of course, we know Maria's problem. She is the local poster-child for her Uncle's Empire, and can no more go about dating sailors (however bull-necked and impressive) than an Italian Ambassador could. At least, when there's anybody watching.

Monday October 17th, 1936

Dear Diary: it had to happen. Today we had our first run-in with Father Dominic's flying school. I was not there, but I heard about it from Jasbir (who is reliable) and Beryl (enough said) who surprisingly had the same story. There was one of those random surges of commercial traffic arriving on the airfield, and with the usual rules trainee aircrew are not allowed up less than half an hour before a scheduled arrival. Some folk say it is to give the airport staff time to scrape a failed trainee off the runway, though happily that has never been put to the test.

Anyway, what with available daylight and bad weather, the number of "slots" between arrivals was fewer than usual, with a worsening weather report promising to ground all afternoon single-seat flights. It was a second-year class who were tasked with getting flight clearance, and not even Red Dorm as I might have expected – it was Florence Farmington and her three admiring room-mates who ran snout to snout with a half-squadron of the "Ave Argentum" as the newcomers are called.

Florence is a Puritan by upbringing, and not one of the "turn the other cheek" types; her ancestry is more the hellfire and steam press Cotton Mather and Worsted Williams line. Still, she did not disgrace Songmark by using our self-defence lessons in ways our Tutors would disapprove. In fact she handed the message to one of her adoring pals and blocked the corridor while the second girl went up the outside of the building to the control tower with the message in her pocket. We got our flight slot, and the others got to explain to Father Dominic why they had not.

All would be well enough, but it has been declared a matter of Honour and we hear this mostly Latin bunch take such things very seriously. To us it was just an initiative test and they lost fair and square without a blow struck. This should be interesting.

One of the aircraft that did get through the squalls to land had come rather far to turn for home; a Vostok armoured dirigible, one of the "Balalaikas" we found out about last Xmas! We had noticed a small delegation of Rain Island military types at the airstrip; according to Jasbir the airship touched down gently for a second, dropped three of those light tankettes which roared along the runway to pull up in front of the spectators, and the Balalaika took up covering position before peaceably heading over to the mooring masts.

It sounded like quite a demonstration, and I was sorry to miss it. It is an alarming prospect though; a squadron of 12 could show up on a deserted road or beach out of anti-aircraft

cannon range, drop off more than 30 of the fast vehicles and then fly them covering support with their rockets or recoilless cannon. Beach and coast defences would be bypassed completely and as the tankettes can leap a 12-foot ditch or a 4-foot wall, they would be rather hard to stop and they carry converted aircraft 20 millimetre cannon or twin machine-guns. It makes one wonder just what really is “Impassable” tank country these days.

(Later) Having telephoned earlier to confirm things, after teatime Molly and I put our oilskins on again and crossed over to Casino Island to see what Madame Maxine has for us. The place was as discreet as ever, with the large high-walled compound having only one visible gate and that guarded by the largest tigress I have seen on these islands.

Madame Maxine was at the gate to greet us personally; she explained that we had done well in terms of disguise skills and appearances, but we needed to develop other talents. She brought us both in and sat us down, and started to chat quite normally.

About five minutes later she stood up and asked us to check our belongings. In the course of the conversation we had lent her our waterproofs, our overnight bags and all our ready cash, without her actually asking for it. These she returned, and with a smile explained just how she had done it.

Dear Diary: I have seen Beryl doing this, but never worked out exactly what she does. Madame Maxine spent the evening showing us how to persuade people to do what we want them to. The first part of it is pure observation, then slowly one moves to mimic them in non-obvious ways. People like people like themselves, is the idea – and once you move “in sync” you can gradually start to “lead” them where you want to.

There were various other customers having fur treatments and such that we were invited to practice on, and for the next three hours learned how to silently persuade folk to do what we want. I never realised the word “because” had such a power; the reason given may be trivial or nonsensical but it makes the request far more powerful.

I can hardly think Lars would have paid for this; it looks far more the sort of thing Mr. Sapohatan would find to make us more useful to him. And I hardly see what our Tutors could object to; it is a very useful skill for an Adventuress to have. Molly was still practicing, muttering “these are not the furs you have been looking for” in a persuasively confident tone when we were on the water-taxi back to Songmark. With her background, being able to fast-talk Police and Customs folk would be an asset if she can get away with it.

We arrived back to find the second-years grimly suiting up against the rain, three dorms of them heading out to find an erring first-year who has hopped the fence. It turns out to be Rosa the Bakuninite Anarchist, who one might expect to have problems with official regulations (again, one wonders just WHAT our Tutors are thinking these days.)

Interestingly, we have not had to intervene in more than a couple of Red Dorm fights this term – they seem to be shaping up and pulling together although this might not be good news for the rest of the world. As they went past glowering at us, Tatiana started quoting a Bolshevik slogan that Liberty Morgenstern joined in at the finish – “*On the first day of the Revolution the Anarchists must be won over – on the twenty-first they must be liquidated!*”

Hardly a wonderful expression of solidarity with one’s junior years, I would have thought. But then, I may be biased.

Wednesday October 19th, 1936

Two days of glowering cloud at about a hundred foot have quite closed down the land-plane routes; it is a jolly good thing this is not tourist season. Only the flying-boats are still running anything like schedule; they can fly above the cloud till their directional aerials spot Radio LONO almost beneath them, then cautiously spiral down and taxi a few miles in using the shipping buoys to dodge the coral reefs. With cloud levels hardly as high as half way up LONO hill, it would be a very lucky or foolhardy pilot who risked trying to find our runway. One reads reports of radio based “blind landing” systems, but that assumes all the different national airlines agree on using the same system, want to pay for the equipment and have crew willing to trust their lives and those of their passengers to a delicate box full of short-lived vacuum tubes.

Having most aircraft grounded means our Tutors can tell us to concentrate on maintenance and we can demonstrate to the first-years that we are not exempt from getting engine oil in our fur. Stripping down and rebuilding the JUMO diesel engines of the Junkers 86 was two days of back-breaking work, with a mechanic from Superior Engineering dropping in at the end to check on the quality of our work. Unlike in the comic papers, a Songmark girl does not reassemble an engine and puzzle about where the bits left over came from.

Still, it all goes towards our passes at the end of the course. We have not seen many aircraft diesels (the heavy, slow-turning marine ones are a very different proposition) and there is much to learn.

When we returned, an hour after evening tea Beryl was knocking on our door. She had an unusual proposition for us that had my fur standing on end. Beryl has received a very brief telegram – “SLGM CECILYMORAN BELTANES” followed by a map reference.

Beryl explained that it was a distress signal from one of her old school chums at Saint T’s, the first word being “Send Lawyers Guns and Money” and the last one a personal code authenticating the message. Cecily Moran is from an old and famous family connected with her own for generations, Beryl says, and there is sure to be something in it for us if we can help with a rescue mission.

The first step was to get the charts out – I had half expected the location to be Cranium Island or Krupmark, and I have sworn never to go there again. Actually it is Mildendo, which is more reasonable and I could only come up with fifty reasons rather than a hundred as to why we cannot go there in the middle of term.

Having encountered other girls from Saint T’s, I had no illusions that this was any innocent damsel needing rescue from crooks or savages. The last “innocent damsel” we looked for on Mildendo over a year ago was nothing of the sort, and we eventually found her thoroughly enjoying life on The Beach at Krupmark, in the lavender house with her Red Indian friend. If there are any crooks or savages threatening Miss Moran, my bet would be it was because she double-crossed them in a smuggling deal. The chances are about evens that she needs somewhere without an extradition treaty, or she would not have mentioned lawyers.

From what Beryl says, and having worked and lived with her so long, I can see it would take a lot to make a survivor of Saint T’s yell for help. This Miss Moran apparently won the first-year prize for bare-knuckle ladies’ boxing, going nineteen rounds with the Right Honourable Daisy “Crusher” de Vere. After the first year, Beryl says, things only get tougher.

I was very surprised when Maria announced she was going to ask permission from our Tutors. Her motto is “Fortune favours the brave” but heading downstairs to ask Miss Devinski approval for one of Beryl’s suggestions was a fur-raising proposition for anyone. People get medals for less.

By the time she had been gone five minutes I was rather worried, and was wondering how many languages Miss Devinski had to say “NO” in to persuade Maria. It was fifteen minutes later that Maria returned, looking rather chastened but defiant. My jaw dropped in amazement when she said we had been cleared to take the Sea Osprey, on condition we had a plan within twenty-four hours that passed our tutors’ approval.

Of course, there was one glaring fact about using the Sea Osprey. It only seats four with full fuel tanks, and assuming we pick up Miss Moran on Mildendo, that means only three of us can go. One of them will have to be Beryl.

Bed-time, to sleep and no doubt to dream logistic nightmares!

Thursday, October 20th

The weather has cleared completely, and in the morning we were back in the familiar cockpits of the Tiger Moths for aerobatic practice. The first-years were looking on enviously; this is listed in the Songmark prospectus and every new arrival imagines doing it in their first term. I know I did. It is hard to award exact marks, but our Tutors are hawk-eyed for even the smallest flaw and almost compete with each other as to how many style points they can knock off us all. Adele Beasley won with an absolutely polished performance; you would think her aircraft was running on rails with the smoothness of that performance.

After tea and finishing our class work (we are not excused prep) we sat down in one of the classes with maps and slide-rules to work out a flight plan. That was the easy bit; it is a three hundred mile round trip but with the Sea Osprey and the prevailing winds that is little more than an hour to fly out there and an hour and a quarter back. The real unknowns start when we land, and have to find this Cecily Moran. Knowing if she is being hunted by gangsters or the Police would be useful. Only Helen and I have been to Mildendo, so that rather puts our names forward to escort Beryl on the trip; I am not exactly looking forward to it.

Helen did quietly ask me what we were really expected to achieve. I could imagine the most favourable headlines “Songmark girls in rescue mission against the odds” with us coming home covered in glory and not something smellier. True, a third-year girl is expected to be able to do this sort of thing, and if we pull it off it should reflect well on Songmark. I have few

illusions that any graduate of Saint T's is going to be a deserving rescuee, and only hope we do not get her back to Spontoon just for Interpol to snatch her with an extradition warrant. Still, nobody has managed to grab Molly that way although the G-men have been bending every rule they can to get at her; it is written in very small print in the Songmark acceptance papers that we are honorary Citizens here until we graduate and our native lands have no legal claim on us.

With Miss Devinski's approval we signed out equipment and rations for a week; one never knows just how long such things will take, and we drew up alternative routes for various situations. As our Tutors have frequently drummed into us, "If you haven't got a Plan B, you haven't got a plan." In our case, when we explain to them our Plans up to Z they suddenly come up with a believable catastrophe that none of ours covers.

It is a hopeful sign that Molly has not tried to have us haul the T-Gew and sixty rounds along. We are allowed our pistols, and have all our licenses up-to-date so we can stroll through Customs without a qualm. Molly is not even taking along her family souvenir; last week she recovered her Thompson from Customs after nearly two years! It is a good thing they did not charge her shelf rental; that would have been definitely adding insult to injury.

The flight to Mildendo should be about as straightforward as these things get; due North, straight at the Pole Star if our compasses all give up the ghost and the radio catches that annoying complaint the books are calling Transceiver Ire. What happens when we get there – well, it will be up to Helen and me. Having Beryl along should prove interesting; she is extremely competent at thinking on her paws, and has wits you could trim fur with.

Friday October 21st, 1936

Just when we had everything worked out, everything came radically unstuck! Instead of Molly and Maria waving us good luck at the docks, we waved them off with Beryl in the back seat – three furs who have never been to Mildendo Island before, definitely being thrown in at the deep end. I just hope Maria can keep Molly from doing something too insane.

The reason was both simple and mysterious, and caught us all by surprise. When we came in from swimming practice there was a note to me from Saimmi of all people (the first time she has ever actually written to us) requesting me, Helen and Saffina to join her on South Island this weekend. There has never been anything before that could not wait till Sunday.

Well, we are not going to turn down Saimmi, whatever happens. I showed Miss Devinski the note, which somehow did not surprise her – she nodded and remarked that plans change, and sometimes we have to get by without the most qualified people just when we come to rely on them. It seemed a strange sort of thing to say. I wonder what she means. She noted that our anti-hypnosis training would have to wait till next week, though she feels we are in urgent need of it.

Handing over the mission to Molly and Maria felt rather strange, and as we watched them fade into the Autumn skies Helen and I looked at each other. Helen confessed she had been thinking that inside a year they will probably be doing that permanently.

(Later) Our week's Songmark work has all been done, our Tutors approval gained and we are heading out after supper to South Island, and meeting Saffina over there (her class has been practicing landing improvised vessels through coral reef and heavy surf.) We shall see what this is all about!

Sunday October 23rd, 1936 (back-dating)

It has been quite a weekend. On Friday we arrived at the Hoele'toemi compound just as it was getting dark, to find Saffina there with the rest of the family, except Saimmi. Mrs. H looked rather sombre, which is rare for her. I asked if Saimmi was all right, at which she smiled briefly and told us we would see for ourselves tomorrow. She did volunteer the fact that in some ways Saimmi is leaving the family – which I thought was impossible. Even when folk get married they retain their clan identity on Spontoon, and I had never heard of Saimmi planning to wed.

Despite us only having a weekend, Mrs H asked if we would oil our fur and remove every other item, except in Helen's case her Tailfast necklace which is perfectly acceptable. I very happily complied, and over the next hour we were oiled and fur-combed into markings as accurate as we have ever worn. Mrs. H did not tell us why, and even the usually very chatty Moeli was not talking.

I was just finishing off my tail-fur when the comb brushed on that hidden bead that was put there last time on Krupmark. It was quite a dilemma. Nobody but me on South Island knows I wear it, but Mrs H did make very clear that we had to take ALL items off except Spontoonie

ones, and I doubt Krupmark counts. Saffina even took out her earrings, which are of Ubangi-Shari make and decidedly not “Euro” except as the very strange Spontoon use of the word has it.

After a few minutes, I decided it should not be beyond my engineering skills to replace one fine gold wire, and picked up the claw-trimmers. I was congratulating myself on having done the right thing and heading out for supper when I realised I had put the trimmers away without using them. Very odd. I ended up asking Saffina to do it, which she did without comment, though she looked at the totally plain golden bead most curiously as if there was something she could see written on it.

An early night followed, as we were advised that we were going to be up very early. It was still totally dark when Moeli shook us awake; the Hoele'toemi household has no alarm clock but she whispered that everyone was almost ready to go.

The last time we left here in pitch darkness before dawn it was to the Summer solstice on Sacred Island – and although Saturday is no special date in the calendar it was there we went again. Being October, at least we had rather more sleep first. Most of the inhabitants of Haio Beach were there, including some very ancient furs who had to be almost carried along to the Eastern coast but proved to remember very well how to paddle a canoe as we headed out across unseasonably calm waters.

Sacred Island was a dark shadow against the first glow of dawn as we landed there, past the deep rock-cut harbour that leads out to the abyssal waters beyond the reefs. Moeli excused herself when we were approaching the surf line and slipped overboard as lithe as an eel; I was not too surprised to see other heads break the surface heading in from the open ocean. Whatever this was, the Natives of No Island were certainly coming to watch. Very odd – we were on South Island this date last year, and there was nothing particular going on that we were told about.

We made the canoes fast to the shore, except for some of the lighter ones without outriggers that were used as bath-chairs by half a dozen each of the aquatic folk. It was an almost silent occasion and very dark under the trees; for some reason there were no torches lit as I lent a paw carrying the laden canoe up the long avenue of ancient Tikis that led up to the hilltop.

Dear Diary. I had thought of all sorts of possibilities but never expected this. On the high carved block under the starlight there were two figures awaiting us. One was Huakava, the black pantheress wearing her full painted and combed markings as High Priestess of the Spontoon Islands, lying on the stones apparently asleep. Beside her stood Saimmi, clad in only her fur. In fact she was absolutely bare, shockingly so – bare of all fur combings, even her family markings.

Saffina gave a gasp, staring at Huakava and then she bowed her head respectfully. As the other Priestesses came out of the shadows carrying flowers to lay on her I realised the ancient feline was not sleeping. Saimmi stood silent, till the high Priestess was covered except for her head with the jungle blooms.

There as the dawn light grew I watched as Saimmi became the High Priestess – she is very young for the job, but Moeli whispered that Huakava had chosen her. I understood why Mrs H had been rather distant; she no longer has Saimmi as a daughter in the same way, as Saimmi now belongs to all of Spontoon. The finale came when the sun just cleared the ocean and the treetops were pulled back to let the light flood into the clearing while one of the Wild Priests spoke the words and Saimmi gave the responses that bound her to the Islands.

For a minute Saimmi stood on the stone that carried Huakava's body, facing in turns North, South, East and West, her arms held out as if to embrace the islands as the early sunshine fell on her. Somehow it looked as if she was enfolded in the dawn light. Then the trees were released to cover the hilltop once more, and the other priestesses came forward to pay their respects.

The Natives of No Island were carried down the hill back to the sea in the canoes, and I expected to be joining the general departure. But Saimmi beckoned Helen, Saffina and me to stay, after the last of the regular priestesses had carried Huakava's body off on a bier into the deep jungle. I did not see where the Wild Priest went to.

Saimmi seemed somehow very different, although a tourist would probably not spot any real difference in the fur markings. Some of them are personal markings anyway – but seeing Saimmi without her family patterns was somewhat disturbing. She invited us to sit, and explained that Huakava had left some suggestions regarding us, that she has agreed with.

Oh my. We have heard often enough about how Spontoon's customs are a mix of the various Polynesian cultures along with aspects borrowed from elsewhere as it seemed appropriate. Rather like a nation at war freely using all the previously Patented designs and techniques if it needed them to get its aircraft and ships up to standard, in fact. She has mentioned before that centuries ago there were styles and specific types of Priestess that no

longer exist in these islands. She very simply asked us if we wished to train towards being Warrior Priestesses, defenders of the islands in ways that the Naval Syndicate and even Mr. Sapohatan cannot manage.

This is not something one goes away and thinks about, carefully weighing up the advantages and disadvantages as if it was a business deal. All three of us agreed on the spot. I took a deep breath and told myself my chances of seeing Barseshire again were suddenly much slimmer – having seen the ritual that bound Saimmi to the islands here, she can now hardly leave the area again while she is High Priestess.

Saimmi sat with the three of us for half an hour and explained matters – her first act in her new role, which must be quite an honour for us. Training as Warrior Priestesses is not the same as for regular ones. I remember back on Cranium Island she had told us that drawing blood would disturb her focus for a long time, but presumably it would not affect what she has in mind for us. I suppose it is like my Father described in the last year of the War, with storm-troopers trained from scratch for that particular job missing out a lot of the broader aspects of regular peacetime soldiering (they were terrors when it came to clearing a trench but made a very poor show on the parade ground. Then again, being smart on parade was not the idea in 1918).

She tells us there are another three Native trainees who might join us, but they are much younger and still years away from our level. Saffina in particular is already experienced in similar things back in Africa.

Well! Saimmi gave us a lot to think about and we paddled back to South Island in silence with the remaining Hoele'toemi family. Huakava was High Priestess in fairly peaceful times (though she was here for the Gunboat Wars) and has chosen a much younger and stronger successor whose first act is to start recruiting the equivalent of war emergency troops. It may be a coincidence that Father Dominicus has arrived on the islands, Jesuits being what Maria has called "*The shock troops of the counter-reformation.*" The difference is, as far as we know there ARE no Warrior Priestesses around to study from, at least in the Spontoonie tradition, and exactly how one goes about it Saimmi confesses she is less than sure of. Apparently much knowledge was lost in the Event that took place five centuries ago, and in the awful casualty rate amongst Priestesses who made the islands safe again to inhabit a century ago.

Back to Haio beach, to celebrate! That is, Mrs H has now gone through the ritual mourning of her clan having lost Saimmi as a daughter, and of course she is extremely proud of her "promotion". Hugging Helen and me, she joked that there is now more space in the family longhouse that needs filling.

Moeli and half a dozen cousins from the various islands were there, even including Namoea from Orpington. We took the chance to refresh ourselves on details of the Orpington Island dances, and picked up some very handy style tips that will go towards our challenge against the S.I.T.H.S. In fact, Helen and I demonstrated what we had worked out so far, which proved to be quite a crowd-puller. Everyone who watched promised not to leak the secrets to our rivals; folk take their hula dances very seriously around here and fair play is certainly encouraged amongst the teams.

It seems that Namoea is more than we thought; she is progressing in the chicken-spirit cult, and we received her blessing for the planned dance. Orpington Island definitely lives in the shadow of its more famous neighbour, having no bright lights and tourist attractions, and even a lack of really postcard-worthy scenery. No shortage of avians, though. Namoea comes over here to shop and meet her (many) relatives about once a season and attend worship; certainly the whole Hoele'toemi clan seem to be well connected with the local religions.

Sunday was rather more of a relaxing day, with Saimmi appearing before lunch and instructing us. I took the chance to ask if we could bring Eva along, as she is very interested in local traditions and religions, of which her Uncle seems to have told her a lot.

Saimmi sat thinking for awhile. She agreed – but we are not to show Eva any of the shrines, and in fact next weekend we are to meet on the little island off the delta coming from Sacred Lake, bringing Eva if she is interested. We have been there briefly on Songmark trips, but hardly explored it in detail. Saimmi had more to say; that as Euros go, Eva's folk are the only ones working in the "Warrior Priest" direction, having developed something that is not quite a new Church but something rather deeper and more primal. She added that very few Euros know what they are really aiming for; it is not something you can show on a map, unlike in the Great War. I remember what those three wolves Gunter, Udo and Uwë were like on Cranium Island – and how Saimmi had said they were "Knights of the Great Worm" who are "forged like steel is

forged.” They could certainly do some surprising things. Possibly a Warrior Priest(ess) is like that, though if so I expect we will be approaching it from quite a different direction.

So: we are to make sure we find out from Eva more than she discovers about us, and hopefully get a few tips as to just what her folk are developing. Whatever it is, a Spontoonie version is bound to be rather different!

On our return we spotted the Sea Osprey back at its moorings with three or four folk working on it; Madeleine X’s dorm rather than Molly and Maria. Helen shouted over to ask if there were any bullet holes in it, but Susan de Ruiz claims there are none and she is a very thorough worker. Very encouraging for any trip with both Molly and Beryl on board. We hurried into Songmark to look for our friends, who were being “de-briefed” by our Tutors when we arrived.

An hour or so later our fur was de-oiled and our markings removed (including the new one marking us as being in sacred training, which is similar to a Priestess symbol) just in time for Molly, Maria and Beryl to reappear. They had a rough but successful trip and retrieved Cecily Moran, who is currently staying in rented rooms at Mahanish’s while the local police ask her various questions. It is as I thought; Cecily had fallen out with some business partners, and though the local police could not prove anything against her, she could not have gone to them for assistance even had she been inclined to.

So much for rescuing graduates of Saint T’s! The trip proved worthwhile; Molly says Cecily more than paid for the costs and risks in negotiable currency, and the experience was useful. Adventuresses can only learn so much from classes and exercises; what they need is small to medium-sized genuine Adventures to practice with. Beryl has the bonus of having saved a family friend, though she admits she was more interested in the money.

Maria promises she will be writing up their trip in detail, firstly for our Tutors (who expect it) and for her Reporting course. I certainly look forward to it. Maria has always kept a comprehensive diary of her own, though not reading Italian I am not sure just what is in it. As it is not in code I doubt it is anything she is too worried about Mr. Sapohatan reading; whatever she sends off to her Uncle lives securely under her horns until she gets her code pad out. She has lots of little pads covered with random numbers and after she uses one, burns it. Very odd.

Monday October 24th, 1936

A bright Autumn day, which our Tutors took advantage of to get us some mixed formation flying. This is the first time Songmark has put up all nine aircraft together, the six Tiger Moths, the Sea Osprey, the Junkers and even my own Sand Flea. Of course, having such radically different aircraft together is rather a challenge – my Sand Flea has a top speed that is uncomfortably close to the stalling speed of the JU86; it is a good thing we did not borrow that Tillamook-built Schneider Trophy racer, whose flight envelope would hardly overlap with me at all!

With two students in the Junkers, that was a large enough formation for my year to fly in two shifts with one ready to act as ground crew. We refuelled, looked over and turned the landed aircraft round at good speed, managing four “sorties” before we broke for lunch and handed the Tiger Moths over to the second-years. They are not getting any flights in the Junkers, and except for our friend Saffina they have to keep their paws off my Sand Flea. I share it freely enough with my year, and quite a few of the second-years have aircraft at home they could bring.

Our Tutors have explained that anyone who brings an aircraft or boat over is welcome to do so in their own time and at their own expense, but if they want to share Songmark hangars and fuel, it must be available for teaching. Which is only fair; certainly I could hardly afford to fly the Sand Flea on my allowance. I recall Father’s stories of the first days of the Royal Flying Corps back in 1912, when several of the pilots brought their own aircraft along, in the same way that it was the done thing in the old cavalry regiments to provide one’s own mount. Father being a military engineer, he was tasked with building hangars and airship mooring masts while the R.F.C. trained its own support staff.

After lunch – climbing again, though not on the rocks of Eastern Island for a change. We were ferried across to Main Island, where just south of the Oriental village the old Plantation railway crossed a deep stream gorge. In some islands they would have just put a log trestle over it and replaced it every five years (untreated timber does not last well in this climate) but this is a very nicely engineered stone arch bridge some forty foot high, from when British companies were busy on the islands. Thinking about it, although the bridge is the tallest stone structure on Main

Island, it is totally invisible in the narrow wooded ravine until one almost bumps ones snout on it. It is certainly the only structure anyone would let us climb on with these techniques.

I was reminded again of the climbing skills of Professor Schiller and G-U-U as we faced the sheer wall of basalt blocks. There is scarcely a paw-hold to be seen, so we were issued with slater's hammers and rock pegs to make the climb in "dangle and whack" style. I noticed it is an awfully noisy way of doing things, especially with the echoes bouncing off the arch above us – certainly we are not going to sneak up on any railway guards like T.E. Loris of Arabia.

As I would have guessed, Li Han and Jasbir Sind did best on this, with most of Prudence's dorm a close second. Missy K and Irma Bundt had to proceed very slowly, having the same pegs as everyone else and a lot more weight to put on them. But we all reached the top and swung round the corner to the natural rocks on the side, looking up at the cast-iron plate on the arch proudly signing it as "Lionel Plantation Line No. 3, Chief Engineer Mr. Hornby Doublo 1890". Poor Mr. Doublo's hard work was not destined to see a lot of use; by the time of the Gunboat Wars the railways had stopped running. It was no trouble for plantations originally funded from England to send out second-hand rolling stock and spare parts, but being by then the Spontoon Islands Independencies they probably found it harder to spare the hard currency. Considering most of the island Plantations failed commercially and there were few other exports and no tourists as yet, the start of the century must have been rather a lean time for the Spontoonies.

Just to limber us up after hours of stretching and straining on the vertical face, Miss Blande had us jog the mile back down to the beach. Actually it was more than a jog; she consulted her watch and announced cheerfully that we had eight minutes before the water-taxi left, and anyone left behind was on their own.

I have to say, Songmark tutors "lead from the front" and though she is surely twice our age Miss Blande has quite a turn of speed when she needs it. We all made it down to the beach on time, though the last hundred yards Adele Beasley was carried by her dorm after a falling six-pound breadfruit bounced off her head. Definitely that girl has no luck with these things. At least in her new dorm she gets some help; Missy K would have ignored her and Beryl started bets on how long she would take to struggle back to Eastern Island, and how severely our Tutors would react to her being late.

By the time we got back for supper we were all ravenous, and happily it was mostly sweet potatoes rather than poi. Prudence has a theory about why the Songmark meals are so uninspiring (apart from the cost of filling us every meal with imported roast beef and potatoes) in that when we finish our courses and (probably) have less hectic lives we will not go on eating sprees of the same sized meals and spoil our figures. It is certainly true that nobody gorges on Poi unless they are really hungry, or native-born Polynesians. At least fish and vegetables are a diet few furs have a problem with their religion or their digestions; on the few occasions we get served a proper "flight breakfast" Ada Cronstein and Hannah Meier pass on the sausage and bacon and just double up on the fried eggs and tomatoes.

Molly and I went out again to Casino Island, where Madame Maxine had some more useful and fascinating lessons for us. Having learned last week how to persuade people, we first practiced on that, then moved on to how to put them at their ease. Once someone is relaxed they are far easier to pump for information and suchlike. There are professional secrets known to waitresses, receptionists and other furs who deal closely with the public, that we practiced all evening. Madame Maxine tells us that in most places Trade Secrets are not up for sale, but our sponsor thinks these are likely to be useful.

Wednesday October 23rd, 1936

It is interesting how many people are actually keeping diaries in Songmark! Of my dorm, only Molly is not; Beryl has suggested it would get dull writing "*Got up, did something insanely violent, had tea, went to bed*" every day. Molly replied Beryl's own would be much the same with the day's labours reading "*did something profitably criminal.*" Both are great exaggerations, and rather wish-fulfilment as far as those two are concerned. From what I have gathered, Beryl keeps a ledger rather than a diary proper, as she measures everything she ever does in terms of profit and loss, not necessarily involving money. She has mentioned something about Piet and her "keep things interesting" by billing each other, but she was probably joking. More than once she has earnestly claimed to greatly value the truth, and as with currency if there is too much of it around inflation devalues it. Eva has mentioned the state of Germany in 1923 when furs were carrying their wages home in wheelbarrows, and going on strike twice a day for wages to keep up

with the inflation. Certainly my brother's stamp collection has a fifty milliard (50,000,000,000) mark stamp from then. * And that's just a stamp to put on a letter.

The past two days have been solid, steady work with nothing much to write about. Our logbooks are filling up; third-years get the lion's share of the flying time here (Saffina is not the only second-year who is jealous, and most do not have her good manners about it) and we are flying rain and shine, with increasingly difficult exercises. Today we were taking turns flying the Sea Flea with one engine or the other out; it can just about hold altitude that way with only two crew and no cargo, but it is a very tricky thing to fly with the rudder hard over to one side or the other.

Some things stay the same. Liberty Morgenstern is in trouble again for fighting; not with any of Red Dorm again (pity) but with Rumiko. We thought Liberty had mellowed after a year at Songmark – in fact she has, to an extent. Maria has an Italian proverb about how you can't polish pig manure. I am pleased to report that Rumiko gave as good as she got, even though both are now under the care of Mrs. Oelabe. In separate rooms of course.

- Editor's note: The Editor's own stamp collection has one of those!

Thursday October 24th, 1936

Maria had a lot to write home about today, with not one but two Vostok "Balalaikas" parked at the end of the runway like giant silver-grey turtles. Watching them land was quite an education; they must have arrived empty and lighter-than-air, so getting them down in a hurry full of hot hydrogen was quite an exercise. Of course, a regular airship would have vented gas but that is wasteful; the Balalaika is meant to take off and land with little ground support and replenishing. Instead, they swooped in over the mooring mast and swivelled the engines and stub wings ninety degrees, actually pushing the craft into the ground! It is a very different experience flying a buoyant craft; one thinks of gravity ("Sir Isaac" as the pilots call it) very differently. We never have to worry about forcing our aircraft into the ground, quite the reverse.

There seems to be quite a lot more Spontoonie official traffic with Vostok these days; I noticed today when we went for our self-defence drills that the instructor had a Vostok issue self-loading rifle I recognised from our trip there last Christmas. Molly looked on it with awe, whispering it was an updated "Fedorov Avtomat" that they built after the Great War when re-starting wartime projects after things collapsed in Russia. Only a few hundred were built and made it to the front, given the chaotic state of Russia in 1916. She says one of her Father's business associates, a Mr. "Popgun" Polawski, had one he brought back to Chicago from the Poland/Russian War, and had awful trouble getting any of the ammunition for it. The rifle was Tsarist Russian but the cartridges it took were Japanese, oddly enough. Since the 1905 war the two countries have not exactly been on speaking terms, and the Vostok government seem no keener on Japan than the Reds are.

I must ask Svetlana about this; having a Vostok girl in Songmark is another strange departure. Mind you, as a ballerina she is also the only Songmark girl who wears a tutu (not on our exercises or in the street of course, but she brought it with her. I suppose it might be hard to find one on Spontoon.)

Thinking of cold climates, we have been given our timetable for the rest of the term, and next week we start on the cold-weather side of our course. This will finish in the Aleutian trips – I remember when we were first-years our friend Nootka was from there, and proudly claimed they have the most extreme weather in the world. Not the coldest, but with violent unpredictability that makes the English weather seem as timetabled as a monsoon. I remember well on North Vostok how things could go in two minutes from sunshine to a screaming gale one could hardly stand up in, and the Aleutians are reputedly worse than that.

Some of us are more worried than others about this; Li Han and Jasbir have never even been in snow before. Jasbir says you can see it on the far Himalayan peaks from foothills near her home state of Utterly Pradesh, but it might as well be on the moon for all people think of going there. The sensation of one's tail going numb joint by joint will be a new one to them.

Our alpine skiing star Maria seems perfectly happy with the idea, and Molly is fairly resigned to it. After all, we have heard a lot about Chicago winters from her. The difference is, she says, that nobody tries to camp out in a Chicago winter. She has mentioned quite casually how the Police go around parks and alleyways in the mornings marking out frozen bodies of tramps and derelicts who have put their faith in cardboard "cabins" against twenty degrees of frost.

We might have had a relaxing evening sitting by the radio, but the time is running out for our dance challenge to the S.I.T.H.S. and Molly and Maria needed to get up to speed with the new authentic Orpington Island moves we worked out with Namoaeta's help at the weekend. So for an hour and a half we went downstairs to a solid floor and practiced full tilt, drawing an interested crowd of admirers.

Eva was there with the rest of her dorm; she was scratching her head-fur wondering if the gramophone record of swing hula counted as "Degenerate Music" which she is opposed to on principle. It seems back in her homeland there is quite a musical revolution going on; the Government approve of modern electrical instruments such as the Theremin and the Trautonium, and her school has a Trautonium band that plays on national celebrations, political rallies and such. Possibly they want a new sound to emphasise their new outlook, that is as far from the jazz saxophones typical of the Weimaraner Republic as possible.

Beryl was trying to interest some of the first-years in a mining prospectus that smelled suspiciously of very fresh ink. She claims there is a syndicate who have found a lode of very rich Trautonium ore on Cranium Island, and only need funds to develop it. Given European brass bands have instruments made with brass and Caribbean steel bands have theirs of steel, it would make a twisted kind of sense. Furthermore, one could send expedition after expedition into Cranium Island and none of them would return to blow the whistle on Beryl's dubious ore body.

Fortunately Songmark girls are generally chosen for their common sense, and after Beryl's prank at the start of term with the so-called "Spontoonie National Anthem" none of them believed a word of it. Beryl is never discouraged by such things – by all accounts she does very well at the smaller casinos not just by playing but persuading winners at five in the morning to invest some of their winnings in her schemes. * They have more chance on making money throwing it on the most crooked roulette wheel on Krupmark.

* Editor's note: in plain text in the diary margin there is what may be part of some sort of crossword puzzle. It merely says "Clue: ... Fool ... Money ... Parted, 4 across."

Friday October 25th, 1936

Quite a nautical day for me! I am the only one of my dorm taking a seafaring option this year – obviously Helen is not, and Molly and Maria are busy elsewhere. In fact only Sophie D'artagnan, Ada Cronstein and Madeleine X are following me towards the Day Skipper qualification, all having enjoyed messing around in boats back home.

We were up early to catch the eight o'clock tide, and soon sweeping out in one of the tourist yachts that their owners are very glad to find customers for this time of year. Mind you, the Captain had pointed out that by September a third of his boats were laid up for repair. Wooden keeled boats are not amusement-park dodgem cars, though many tourist customers have not grasped this idea.

Although late October may not be great weather for lying around on the beaches, it is perfect for sailing with a stiff South-Westerly breeze and with all sails set we set a cracking pace, straight downwind to the North end of Eastern Island, spotting the junior years struggling up the rock faces. Even at high tide we had Sophie taking soundings; less than two fathoms of water under our keel as we slipped over the shifting sandbanks. The whirlpool is invisible at high and low tide but we kept well clear of its position on the R.I.N.S. chart. They update the chart every year for these sandbanks, and still advise all shipping to take soundings. One big storm can change everything overnight.

Getting back into the central waters was a lot trickier; I recall hearing folk tell of that Captain Gary being looked on with amazement as he sailed in from the North-East. We took the usual long way round, tacking and beating East of Eastern Island (seeing a very fine Lufthansa Junkers G38 swooping over on landing approach, passengers in the wing cabins waving down at us). Then some tricky work keeping clear of the reefs around Sacred Island and South Island, hard to starboard and straight down the wind to Casino Island, three hours after we started.

Sailing is decidedly hard work, and by luncheon we were all in. Two years ago we would not have stood a chance at this – certainly we have developed a lot more than our minds studying here. A refreshing luncheon of roast fish and sweet potato with a custard apple apiece put us to rights, and we were back in Songmark just in time to dive on a fight!

We could have seen that one coming. Though Red Dorm have calmed down a lot recently and Tatiana greatly so, having her along with Svetlana from Vostok was always going to be trouble. For a ballerina, Svetlana certainly knows some spectacular moves, and it was

anyone's guess who would have actually won this one. They would both have been severely injured, regardless.

Maria held Svetlana in a Triple Nelson while I tried to get to the cause of the trouble. Red Dorm had actually won the year's gramophone fairly on points, and Tatiana had been loudly playing some Russian military songs out of the window, when Svetlana lost her temper entirely.

Having seen the remains of the smashed record, it is hard to know who to believe. It is an album of poetry set to music apparently; some Russian poet called Ilya Ehrenberg. He is Officially Approved by Joseph Starling it seems – from what Svetlana tells us he exhorts his listeners to “wade tail-deep in the blood of the capitalist monsters”, “hang the Aristos in burning nets of barbed wire” and “smash the fascist beast with a spiked fist of socialist steel.” Not exactly a romantic ballad, I would guess. I can see why someone from Vostok would not have it in her hit parade, and move on to “hits” of a more solid kind.

Of course Tatiana interprets things differently, and claims her Embassy sent it to her as some sort of political care package, and we will have take her word for it as the shellac record was broken over her head. She was looking quite smug until Helen appeared from the second-year dorms waving another one in the collection by the same poet; we shall see how Miss Devinski likes it. Or not.

Not a bad day; I get to sail round the islands and put one of Red Dorm into a quadruple hammerlock, and all before supper!

Saturday October 26th, 1936

We were woken by a definitely alarming noise this morning – a sort of thundering roar like a blowtorch. This is not the sort of thing one wants going off unexpectedly in a wooden Songmark hut, so in about twenty seconds all of us were outside (Prudence's dorm heading out of the windows on an unexpected wire ladder. Their room is furthest from the stairs, after all.)

As it happened, there was nothing to worry about. We found a very pleased Jasbir Sind and dorm on the ground floor looking at the boiler for our one real bath. A five gallon fuel tank was rigged up to feed what looked like a vacuum cleaner which was putting out a lot of noise and I think twenty kilowatts of heat.

It is getting chilly enough to make deep baths an inviting idea, and we all have agreed that scavenging old orange crates and other scrap wood is a lot of trouble to keep the old boiler fed. Jasbir has been sniffing around for any fuel going cheap, and found some so troublesome to use that Superior is giving it away. It seems they work on a lot of ships and have to drain fuel tanks of the heavy oil big marine engines use – the sumps are generally contaminated with water, paint chips and rust flakes that nobody really wants to risk getting into their engines.

Of course, getting this to burn cleanly is a major engineering problem; getting it to burn at all is tricky enough. In the marine engines it is heated, reduced to a fine spray and squeezed to about a hundred atmospheres before igniting, a match dropped into a bucket of the stuff would just go out. She has scavenged an electric air compressor and rigged a rather natty fuel pre-heater she starts off with a cup of regular petrol – the overall effect is a sort of marriage between a giant blowtorch and a camping primus stove. Loud, but impressive and useful. I could see Miss Devinski looking on with interest and taking notes. If Jasbir's dorm does not win the gramophone this month I will be surprised.

We are back on Songmark rations, which is an improvement. Two weeks of having the second-years feeding us has been better than expected, with nobody down with food poisoning, accidental or otherwise. Last year we managed to feed our seniors without resorting to poi, though. To be honest, with the budget we could manage without the stuff entirely, so one assumes our Tutors like the stuff.

Saffina is relaxing now, she says, after having been in charge of the budget for our dainty fare (for which read huge bowls of rice or mashed sweet potato with taro leaf and fish stew on top). The second-years know by now just how much we have to eat on this course, and now take pride in not making us eat Maconochie emergency rations having run out of shopping money by the end of the fortnight. We might be more critical of the menu if we had not made the same tricky shopping choices last year.

We needed to clean our plates today, as the showdown with the S.I.T.H.S has arrived. Three dorms of first-years came over with us and Jasbir, who has seen us practicing but not the whole dance routine.

On Main Island there was quite a crowd gathered, with Missy Aha and her trusty notebook ready to record the contest for the Daily Elele. It seems our reputation has spread, that or the papers are stuck for off-season sporting news this weekend. Anyway, she has a rival reporter from the Mirror; a weasel girl who Maria says has been thrown out by three newspapers for giving tabloid journalism a bad name. She seems quite at home at The Mirror, Maria added.

It was quite an epic. The S.I.T.H.S. team went first, a development of their previous Oriental influenced dance. I am still not sure where they are getting it from; Jasbir says it does not look Indian or anywhere nearby, and she knows most styles as far as the Dutch East Indies. It is very graceful to be sure, and they have practiced a lot since we last shook skirts at each other. Trying to chase them down that route would be a bad move; they have too much of a lead and we agreed to go with our Orpington number.

Helen had made arrangements with the band beforehand, as our dance number was rather outside the usual routines. One of the first-years, a shrew girl, looked as if she was trying to dance along to it, started resonating and eventually fell over twitching (nothing unusual for her, her dorm say; they added that this Alpha plays most 78 records at 110 rpm for some reason. It may be a Cranium Island custom.)

Anyway, none of us fell over. It was close, but we stayed upright for the most gruelling dance we have ever done – about as tiring as running up Mount Tomboabo with a pack on. I could hear the judges spotting the Orpington Island style, but we up-engined it like a Tiger Moth with one of Mr. Mitchell's R-5 racing engines! Like a Schneider Trophy racer we were worn out after one race, and almost collapsed by the end of it. The crowd were pleased, and the judges went out for ten minutes before deciding. It was rather like comparing apples and oranges next to the S.I.T.H.S effort but – we won!

A fine celebration at the Missing Coconut had to be cut short by our having to get back in time for our gate guard duty. We left Jasbir and co. to shepherd the first-years back to Songmark after they had quite finished discovering copious quantities of coconut rum punch do not mix well with bumpy water-taxi rides home. Helen's ears went right down as she commented she had the same results on the boat and none of the pleasures first.

Actually, Helen was the only one who had a decent night's sleep. I expect a lot of Songmark graduates spend their final week after exams asleep ten hours a night. And just think, back at Saint Winifreds's we thought of staying up late as a great treat!

Molly and Maria were on the late shift. Molly has found an ancient "sword bayonet" nearly two feet long and made an adaptor to fix it to her T-Gew to make it more menacing. As if it needed it. Maria uses the late shifts to talk through her articles with Molly and the moon as audience. It is encouraging that Molly has quite left off griping about Maria's Uncle stamping hard on organised crime (Liberty Morgenstern has said he just dislikes the competition, which for once may have a grain of truth in it.) It looks like Il Puce will end up wiping out organised crime from Italy – and that is a legacy few people would take issue with. Nobody would be stupid enough to bring it back in, after all.

Our Tutors seem to have decided I will be good to pair up with Adele Beasley. Miss Devinski hinted that I could use my local knowledge to help her with her problems. I hardly think she means our dance classes. That is Adele's mystery; she is as skilled and knowledgeable as anyone, just things happen to her with a vengeance. Her left ear still has the scar where last year at home she was crossing a field stile that collapsed under her, throwing her onto the barbed wire. I am sure I could have examined that stile all day, jumped up and down on it to test it and given it a clean bill of health for it to snap under Adele just the same.

As we wandered around the perimeter looking out for non-existent burglars, I managed to find out that she has not always been so unlucky. She confessed that her parents are really treasure-hunters, not archaeologists as she has been telling us all this time. I had wondered how traditionally ill-funded academics managed to send their daughter to Songmark. There was a most profitable find in a burial mound of an extinct Alaskan tribe that they "investigated"; not quite in the Laura Shieling mode involving large quantities of dynamite, but close enough. She says her parents have had no particular trouble, but somehow trouble has followed her ever since.

Just to make the point, two of the guard dogs started to follow her around despite her attempts to shoo them off. This usually happens only to canine girls, not to rabbits. Adele sighed, and hinted that there are certain reasons that she would probably get thrown out for if our Tutors knew. Considering our Tutors know just about every move we make and are worried about having to fail Adele anyway, this is definitely not encouraging.

There is certainly something wrong with Adele, that is none of her fault. It reminded me rather of my friend Angelica, whose aircraft is decidedly cursed from what Saimmi has told us. Hmm. Digging up ancient Native burial grounds for profit is about the number one risk in the curse business, and the odd thing is she swears she was never actually involved in doing that. Then, we have heard curses resemble artillery in that it rarely lands exactly where and when it was intended. I resolved to try and help her, and to talk with Saimmi about the problem.

Two in the morning is quite late enough to get to bed, especially after our dance contest! The only real consolation is – we are at least in our beds, which are not luxurious but better than we will be managing for the next few weeks' cold-weather exercises as clean fur and warm paws become a cherished and fading memory. Getting Maria up is never easy at eight in the morning, let alone two.

Sunday October 27th, 1936

Dear Diary – if there is one thing Songmark teaches you (mainly by making you go without them) it is the value of the simple pleasures in life. Waking up in a warm, dry room while rain hammers on the windows outside rather than dripping through an improvised bivouac in the forest, was the first one I woke up to today. Again, although the breakfast of mashed breadfruit was the same as we have every Sunday, it was hot and filling and rather better than the chewy cold shellfish I recall living on when Maria escaped with me across Vostok last year.

Still, even on a Sunday there is no lounging around here. Helen and Saffina were ready the minute after breakfast, and as promised we took Eva Schiller with us. This proved to be an interesting experience. We almost expected her to change her mind when she saw the weather, but she is a Songmark girl after all and as much an ambassador for her nation as Maria is.

As we had Eva along, we varied our usual South Island route and headed on a longer water-taxi trip towards Main Island. There is a small isle just off the delta leading from Sacred Lake river, that we know little about. We met Saimmi there, and introduced her to Eva.

It was a strange meeting. Eva is of course a Euro, but deeply steeped in a tradition both ultra-modern and ancient in places. She has been telling us of her Uncle's department having successfully "borrowed" from the vaults of a ruined Sicilian castle the actual Last Book of Klingsor, some ancient scientist who had some rather strange ideas. It seems the Vatican had the book on its proscribed list for a thousand years, and is not the sort of paperback one could pick up in Woolworth's. Unlike most modern scientists, the Ahnenerbe not only believe such things work, but are actively researching how.

Maria has quoted an Italian proverb many times, "*keep your friends close to you and your enemies closer still*" – not that Eva seems to be anything but neutral, but I can well believe Saimmi wants to keep her in view. After all, her Uncle did head out with the Fragment I retrieved from Cranium Island, and the main one was not two miles away at the bottom of Sacred Lake. If anyone is to reassemble those pieces it should be Saimmi, though she has admitted she has no idea of how she could safely render them harmless yet. Unfortunately Saimmi does not have the option of simply forgetting about the problem; people such as Kansas Smith know about the power to be gained from the fragments, and there is the Krupmark one presumably there for the taking if anyone finds out where it is.

Not surprisingly, Saimmi said nothing about those artefacts. The unnamed island has enough to tell about; in the ancient times it was a place of punishment and possibly sacrifice. She invited us to feel for any vestige of that influence, while we sat in the rain grateful for our banana leaf parasols (Spontoon Main Island does grow bananas in the sunniest parts, though yields are not wonderful most years and harvest is the latest in the Pacific.) Oddly enough, none of us could find any stain on the spirit of the place; rather strange even after centuries if it has been put to the uses Saimmi described.

It seems that this island is serving as a test for cleansing rituals. She tells us it was the first one Priestesses landed on a century ago, where they could work undisturbed by the plantation companies and missionaries. Too small for a plantation of its own and with no decent harbour, the islet was of no commercial interest and has never even had a native village. She described how the last traces of taint have been removed – sufficient to say it is used by courting couples, and girls who have a "hunting license" that nominally only covers Casino Island, are encouraged to make use of the island if anyone wants Native scenery.

I must take Jerry here next time I see him. It is in a good cause, after all.

Back to Songmark, with Eva asking very shrewd questions all the way and scribbling in her waterproof notebook. As Maria says, you can learn a lot about people from the questions

they ask. Maria has been developing a lot of local contacts, mostly on Casino Island, and tells me about them “for distribution.” Although she has not spelled it out I think she means if Mr. Sapohatan asks I am to tell him right away. Maria has gained a shrewd idea of the sort of things Helen and I get tasked with, and while she is here she is being a fairly good Spontoonie Citizen.

An early night tonight after a deep, long bath apiece (paying Jasbir in IOUs for Song Sodas, to use her new heater) and an extra supper from our private larder. Tomorrow we say goodbye to that.

(And they did. As described in “Thrills and Chills.”)