

## Back Into Daylight

(Being the twenty-sixth part of Amelia's Diary. There seems to be a gap of 6 weeks since Krupmark Island where her attempt to get kidnapped to Kuo Han searching for the missing Pennington girls seems to have been all too successful. Presumably there was much of it Amelia did not want to pass down to posterity.)

Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

Back to Spontoon! My first sight of the islands in far too long was Mount Kiribatori rising out of the cloud seas at dawn – Helen was at the controls of the DC2 we had “borrowed” from some furs who were not going to be chasing us via Interpol. Flying at fifteen thousand feet was chilly indeed and about the limit without oxygen but it was the best fuel altitude and we were down to our last twenty gallons by the time Kiribatori appeared. I must say, my heart raced at the sight.

It was certainly something to wake the rest for. The sleeping accommodation was basic, just the rice-straw mats we had grabbed off the airstrip at Tanglon, but at least we had got rid of those hateful cages and such that the original owners had put in the back – “for transporting domestic livestock” as the aircraft's documentation blithely put it. If nothing else, the aircraft was far better without the extra weight. In the back Maria and the rest were sleeping – I rather winced at the prospect of explaining them to Customs. I had set out with Molly to rescue Blanche and Cindy Pennington. One might say the mission was successful, depending on how one defines it. A photograph would apparently show Molly, Blanche and Cindy here – but it is really Miss Cabot, Chestnut and Silk who we have brought back. Not actually the same people.

Chestnut and Silk are disturbing enough if one knew them before; they are quiet, attentive and mildly interested in anything, which is not such a bad thing in itself. What their sisters will say is another matter. Miss Cabot is the big change – I recall those last days on Krupmark with her running wild with the flamethrower, laughing delightedly at the noise and flames. She still knows how to do that – nobody has lost any memories, but Miss Cabot says it is like being able to read them in a book someone else wrote, not her. The Dark Priestess skunk I battled at the end had considerably refined what was done to Henrietta, which was very wasteful of knowledge and talent. It is an improvement over Henrietta's condition, but I hope the Priestess's surviving mouse apprentice had not been taught that technique or the world is liable to be a rather more shadowy place as powerful furs pay whatever is asked put the method to their own uses. One would not have to be as ruthlessly pragmatic as (say) Joseph Starling to imagine the uses it could have.

Helen had radioed in to Spontoon air control by the time we could see the main lagoon, and after some surprised exchanges and a half overheard telephone call they cleared us straight into land. It was definitely a relief to head in and see the familiar sights below us, with the Songmark compound still standing (one had visions of a final devastating strike instigated by the departing Ave Argentum who have nothing left to lose) and the white tiled art deco dot of Mahanish's standing out amongst the drab workshops and hard standings at the Eastern end. Helen swore she could almost scent the chilli.

Getting onto the runway in the DC2 was an education in itself, as with fuel tanks nearly empty and a tenth of the designed passenger load (no seats, even) despite Helen's best judgement the very streamlined aircraft “floated” in ground effect along a quarter of the runway when even Songmark's Junkers 86 would have touched down two hundred yards further up the concrete. Dive brakes such as the Junkers possesses would be handy; everyone sneers at putting them on a dedicated postal aircraft and claims it is an obvious giveaway to it being covertly made for dive bombing, but today we could have certainly put them to good use.

Hearing the wheels kiss the runway was music to my ears! We did not taxi back to the international air terminal and Customs house like the regular commercial flights, but as instructed by the tower switched off and sat on a hard standing out on the Easternmost end, with sand from the dunes blowing in the prop wash as we taxied in. It was suddenly very quiet as Maria opened the cargo hatch and main passenger door and we sat there, our snouts and ears drinking in the sensations of Eastern Island on a fine sunny day in tourist season. In the Westerly wind we really could smell the chilli at Mahanish's. I could see Songmark's Junkers 86D sitting outside its hanger four hundred yards away, and was sorely tempted to run over and meet the distant figures working on it. Our year are still meant to be here, next week being the final week of settling affairs before we scatter forever across the planet. Helen has again missed the solstice where she should have been Tailfast to Marti on Sacred Island – and we both missed our time there when hopefully we would have graduated as Spontoon priestesses. Rather a cut-price and “war emergency issue” type, but priestesses nevertheless.

Looking around the inside of the aircraft, I winced somewhat as I rehearsed what I was going to tell Saimmi and probably Mr. Sapohatan. We could not have saved Chestnut and Silk (they had been permanently altered before we ever arrived on Kuo Han, let alone tracked them down) but Molly was ... jolly unlucky. As Miss Devinski reminded the more enthusiastic of us so many times, a military unit expects to take casualties and still call it a victory but an Adventuress working with her friends does not. Ironically, it was probably Molly she said it to most often. The worst of it is, I even agreed with her going to that temple, not having all the facts. It is true enough that she ended up as far happier with her situation, but not in the way anyone would have wanted. Had she followed my notion of trying one's best to enjoy what of the situation could be enjoyed and handle everything else in a spirit of enquiry, this would probably not have happened. Still, I had volunteered for that

side of the mission and she had not – discovering we were actually legally bought was an awful shock. On the other paw, then I would not have encountered the skunk Priestess who would be alive and making more Silks and Chestnuts for anyone who would pay her.

Helen and Maria were still in the cockpit checking the aircraft when we noticed the airfield ambulance driving up in a leisurely way without using its flashing lights or siren, and our rescues were still sitting contentedly in the back. I blushed somewhat realising that in the open doorway I was sitting midway between the two groups – midway in more ways than one, having not come away entirely unscathed myself or at least unaltered. One must look on the bright side of things – at least no longer being in Songmark excuses me from the embarrassment of Mrs Oelabe's medical musings, and indeed she would have rather a lot to say.

We were not amazed to see Mr. Sapohatan stepping out of the back of the ambulance. After all, although our chase to Kuo Han was not his official business as no Spontoonies were involved, my dorm have been useful assets to him and he is gratifyingly pleased to see us all back. We were pleased to see him as well, Silk and Chestnut not having passports. A brief explanation of what had happened to half the party rather removed the smile from his muzzle. Molly might not be someone he formally requests missions of, but he has found use for her talents before. She is presumably just as skilled a shot as she ever was, but less likely to jump into close combat with both a grin and saw-backed bayonet fixed.

I had been so preoccupied with getting back to Spontoon that I confess I had not thought of what to do or where to go next. We are no longer Songmark students, so that is out. Hopefully the Hoele'toemi family will be pleased to see us, though. Actually Albert had another idea for us; having given orders about putting the DC2 away in a hangar, he invited us to take a ride in the ambulance. One water taxi ride later we were on Moon Island at the hospital there, effectively quarantined. The Tourist season is now definitely in full flood with liners from across the Pacific filling every compatible berth on Casino Island; I noticed one named the "Chichibu Maru" registered in Osaka and another named "Suwa Maru" from Nagasaki. Possibly anyone brought up on rice and millet mash considers poi an exotic delicacy rather than a misapplication of wallpaper paste.

It was useful after our exploits to be looked over by the medical staff there, who in a couple of hours passed us all as physically healthy – Helen and Maria were certainly suffering strain and nervous exhaustion, but a week's escaping across the central mountain chain of Kuo Han is nothing a Songmark girl has much trouble with. There was a familiar snout, Doctor Munrohabe from the main Casino Island hospital, who has examined us before. She was the one who also examined Henrietta and Megan, and was both relieved and horrified at what has happened to three of us. Relieved in that Miss Cabot was what one could say mentally well-adjusted (re-adjusted might be a better word) even if she is no longer the same person. She agreed that if knowledge of this process gets out it will be an exceedingly hot property worldwide – and although she is sworn as a doctor not to harm anyone she was grimly satisfied when I told her of the Dark Priestess's fate. One might say at my paws, although strictly speaking I never touched her. Regardless, I discovered that using the more extreme of the Warrior Priestess talents may be ... messy.

On Spontoon the local doctors have been brought up with the native religious traditions and have rather non-standard ideas of where they draw the line between medical and spiritual healing. She agreed Saimmi is Miss Cabot's best bet, rather than anything the hospitals of Casino Island can offer. With that she left us.

Considering it was not a mission he sent us on, Mr. Sapohatan was very keen to find out about our expedition. It was well into the evening when he nodded and left us carrying four notebooks of information that I expect will be the cause of ruin and desolation to some business-furs in Kuo Han and elsewhere. We are the first party ever to make it out of the "pipeline" still able to tell their story, he tells us. One load off our mind was his offering accommodation here on Meeting Island till we leave – and one of the interns brought in a satchel of mail that had been accumulating at Songmark for us. It is a relief to know Miss Devinski will not have to be writing "return to sender" on it.

Having our debriefings and health checks finished, we were free to go! Actually I was worn out, as were Maria and Helen after the chase across Kuo Han in the rainy season and then the pursuit across the Pacific. I am sure Saimmi will know we are back, as will the Songmark staff by now.

Our rooms are in the inner crater of the hospital where Megan was staying before she got restless and went over the fence awhile ago. There is plenty of space here, for a sad reason - the inner hospital was laid out ten years ago to house the survivors of the Gunboat Wars such as Jirry's Aunt Milini and they are going year by year being mostly frail by reasons of their age and injuries. The Papeete Influenza cost the veterans here over a dozen of their number; at Songmark though we are as strong and healthy as anyone three-quarters of us were knocked flat on our tails for a week but at least we all got up again. Still, having cast a thought to the previous inhabitant of the freshly repainted and aired room I relaxed and appreciated having a room to myself with a pile of correspondence; an experience I have not had in awhile.

Molly rarely received letters, but she had two issues of Criminal World awaiting that I thought I had better take charge of as Miss Cabot did not seem interested and it is not the kind of thing one wants to leave lying around. Had the Ave Argentum proved that magazine delivered to at least three Songmark subscribers, it would have been far better ammunition than anything they did manage to find against us. It is intriguing to read as ever, especially the very well-written comics pages starring "Rick Traceless" that very handsome and square-muzzled international master criminal who could serve as a textbook illustration for the word "amoral." He frequently shakes his head over senseless violence, commenting that furs should find a way to get paid for their

efforts. This issue he is demonstrating how to rob a safe-deposit vault and is up against a pair of typically grotesque lawmen guarding it, "Badge-face" and the modern New England puritan Inspector Marblehead. Actually the strip has as much practical advice as more conventional trade magazines. I do not need warning that leaving one's enemies to supposedly perish in over-elaborate death traps involving melting ice blocks or magnifying glasses igniting powder trains with the rising sun, is a bad move that rarely works as intended.

The articles were disturbingly fascinating, with detailed discussions of "The Ponzi scheme updated" and "Style and finesse in working the Long Fraud". Actually it is quite a useful textbook in spotting what to avoid, rather like our first aid manuals are full of pictures of things one really does not want to see happen to oneself or one's friends.

Still – the magazine as a whole is in surprisingly standard format despite its subject matter. On the way through the public part of the hospital there was a waiting room well stocked with other pulp magazines such as "Three-fisted Mutant Detective tales!" and "Exciting but tragically short stories of Volcano exploration". There really are pulp magazines for everything these days, and if anyone thinks of a gap in the market however obscure it is rapidly filled as fast as the community of hack writers can scribble and the presses roll. Who would have thought "Aviation leak and Spicy technology" would find so many readers? I glanced through it and the tale of the crashed air freighter on a hill above and upwind of an unsuspecting city with six tonnes of highly unstable 1918-surplus weaponised Vindaloo paste gradually eating its way out of its lead-lined containment flasks was truly frightening.

I was getting ready for an early night, the first time in weeks we have been able to sleep in safety, when Maria knocked and entered. She was holding a freshly decoded telegram from her Uncle, which fortunately has just arrived yesterday rather than six weeks ago as it might have done. He wants her back in Italy as soon as she has finished in Songmark – and he means immediately, "prontissimo" being the word he used. In fact from the way he phrased it, Maria says she can either head straight for Europe or start looking for a husband and a longhouse on Spontoon as her Uncle has funded her for three years and wants to start getting some return on his investment; his patience is not unlimited and he absolutely demands her back.

Maria says the decoded message mentions the sudden urgency is because Il Puce's young geologists have found something extremely important out in his Libyan colonies following her advice to search the hinterlands via airships and autogiros. The Italians have held that territory for thirty years but never properly surveyed it before. There could be anything out there; the locals would recognise the classical metals but even nowadays I doubt wandering camel-riders would recognise radium or tungsten ores.

So – just when we arrived, at least one of us will have to vanish! Fortunately we have a week or so grace before our Songmark timetable was due to finish. I think I will have to head towards Europe along with Maria, needing to resolve my unwanted inheritance as Lady Allworthy. I think at least my Kuo Han experiences may have given me an idea about that. It is an ill wind that blows no good.

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

A decidedly busy day. What furs say about hospital food is quite untrue here; the kitchens provide a very adequate and tasty Polynesian cuisine that might not impress anyone used to dining first class at the Marleybone, but after three years at Songmark and six weeks of rather mixed fortunes more recently, we had no complaints. The staff are cheery and pleased to see us filling our plates – naturally staying here we are their only young and fit "patients" and eat about three times as much as the generally elderly veterans this part of the hospital normally looks after. There is a nice smell of toast about the place.

I had a long talk with Jirry's Aunt Milini, whose half burned face never will recover from her injuries in the Gunboat Wars. She tells me Jirry is off again for two weeks with his father on official Spontoon business – but that Marti and the rest of the family are there. I told her something of our trip, and she says Jirry is not likely to think any the less of me for it. There are abandoned small islands and villages across the Nimitz Sea whose communities never recovered from raids by slavers, and as a willing volunteer in that battle Jirry knows I am only too likely to become a casualty of some kind. Fortunately only walking wounded, one might say.

Helen has heard about Maria's deadline and has promised to join us on the European trip provided she has a return ticket. First, like all of us she has unfinished business here – she has a wedding to plan at short notice, and is not leaving Spontoon till she is safely established as Mrs. Helen Hoele'toemi! We all congratulated her, and Aunt Milini approves greatly. She is getting very frail now, and says she looks forward to seeing Helen contribute stripes to the range of family fur patterns. Helen assures her she will try hard to not make her wait too long.

I confess my ears went down somewhat considering my own prospects. I could not marry Jirry right now even was he available and had we been Tailfast the required times; by now I am sure I have acquired rather more than the Lady Allworthy problem. Still, my original plan can stand for awhile; I have till the Winter Solstice to resolve everything, as he will not be expecting me back till then. At last Helen is getting the good fortune she deserves.

We had rather a debate about turning up at Songmark and seeing what reception we get. True, Miss Devinski told me my education there was finished – but she did not throw me out in the way the regulations very clearly describe, only telling me to "return with my shield or on it" as the ancient Spartans put it. That she

mentioned my returning at all is a hopeful sign. It would be embarrassing to be barred at the gate by one of our own year (though no doubt Red Dorm would fight each other for that privilege) but more so to discover we had Songmark graduation certificates awaiting and arrived too late to collect them! As a compromise we sent her a letter – Molly's signature at least has not changed.

It was rather a puzzle working out what to do with Silk and Chestnut. We decided to break the news of their condition to Lucy and Emily first (Mr. Sapohatan says they are well and living on South Island with friends of Judge Poynter looking after them) rather than just present them to their sisters the way they are now. They will come to no harm with a day of rest in the hospital grounds.

As we are already on Meeting Island none of us had far to go today; Maria had to telegraph her Uncle to say she is indeed alive and well and heading home, and Helen has a marriage license to arrange! She managed to get through to Marti on the village telephone last night to accept his standing proposal and name the big day – until we leave Songmark officially (and we have not been formally expelled) we are still effectively Spontoonie citizens, and it is much easier to organise if Helen weds before then. Fortunately we know the furs working at the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, who have such a range of surprising services. Helen at least will not need a back-dated marriage certificate unlike some of the returning tourists who arrived this Spring. I wonder if Moeli's child has arrived yet, and if they really keep records of such births? That is another thing Helen will not have to worry about, everything being perfectly in order.

While Maria and Helen headed out with Miss Cabot to the Italian embassy I took the chance that court was not in session and headed across to see Judge Poynter. I wore the items I had recently acquired, naturally with a high collared blouse. It is tourist season now and the Spontoonies are used to all sorts of costume but I would hate to embarrass the other Songmark girls should they see me.

When I arrived Harold was working on his manuscript of the history of the Gunboat Wars, which he is almost uniquely qualified to write having been here all that time and knowing more about the prior international situation than most Islanders did. Unlike Mr. Sapohatan he had not been told of my arrival and it was a shock, a relief and a shock again to him in that order as I explained how things had turned out. He is very relieved that we all came back, though strictly speaking Molly, Missy Blanche and Missy Cindy have not. I have never directly mentioned Mr. Sapohatan to him, but I did say I had passed all the information to the Spontoon Authorities who would be sure to put it to good use.

I must say, a week ago I hardly dared to think I would ever get back here. I think Harold's house has probably hardly changed its interior decor in my lifetime; there is solid Victorian furniture of insect-resistant teak and mahogany as was shipped out as standard to Overseas Civil Service everywhere in the tropics from the West Indies to Burma. An hour of discussing my plans in such civilised settings helped unburden me, and despite his long stay away from England Harold keeps in touch with the newspapers and many correspondents there so has much up-to-date advice for me.

I caught up with what has been happening with Lucy and Emily Pennington. Harold's housekeeper has a cousin a few years older than them named Nairoba who works in a South Island hotel and has been showing them around. It is just as well someone has been looking out for them, as even on Spontoon they are still vulnerable. While we were still on Krupmark and they were staying in Mahanish's they were "befriended" by a rat lady named Pebbles, who is from Kuo Han. This was not a coincidence. Naturally Missy Lucy and Emily had a lot of questions to ask Pebbles, who it turned out was well qualified to tell them exactly what their sisters had in store. Which would have been disturbing but perhaps fair enough had Pebbles not been quietly keen on the positive aspects, claiming to be stranded on Spontoon after her "beloved mistress" was arrested and deported by the Authorities. I have to admit it was a ploy well calculated to strike sympathy with the Penningtons; fortunately Nairoba and her friends spotted the situation and chased Pebbles off before any permanent harm was done. It would have been simply too galling to return to Spontoon after all this and find the other Pennington girls had willingly followed their sisters. I would have gone back after them but I think Helen and Maria would have thrown in the towel and left them to their fate. The phrase "throwing good money after bad" would probably have been relevant.

I took the chance to ask Harold some rather arcane points about ancient English laws, which even he had to go and look up. I doubt there is anyone else in the Pacific area with the law library and the experience I discover I need for my plan to succeed! As I remembered, even the most (supposedly) inapplicable laws stay in place forever until specifically repealed, and at the end of an hour's research Harold nodded and agreed I had found a loophole that nobody has even thought of before. Of course, he warns that any obscure loophole in the law is only like a sketched-in deep water channel on a sailing chart – it shows a possibility but without a good lawyer or captain one can easily go off course and be wrecked.

Actually Harold was surprised and impressed of what I had chosen to make of my situation, but three years at Songmark certainly train a girl to seize whatever advantage can be seized however unpromising it may be at first sight. "When life hands you lemons, open a lemonade stall" is a phrase I have heard – and when there is less savoury stuff to cope with than lemons, that too can be turned to good use with the right attitude. The two composting power stations on Spontoon are a shining, or perhaps one should say steaming, example. Professor Kurt can enthuse over what is picked up off Pebble Beach by the beach sweepers as "a rich source of phosphates and bio-active humic materials" after all.

I could see there were questions Harold had been bursting to ask about my experiences had he not been so polite. Checking the curtains were drawn, I very happily showed him my various souvenirs and why I was wearing a high-buttoned blouse. Technically speaking I am now Jade rather than Amelia, and as well as it being obvious to anyone who reads Cantonese and sees me I have Kuo Han legal papers to prove it in the original bamboo container (Molly's papers I returned to Lin Chung of course, along with full payment in some of the gold we "repatriated").

I expect it must have been something most furs in law enforcement have thought about, however briefly and privately. There can be few opportunities for anyone so strictly on the side of the law to see just what furs in Kou Han spend such fortunes to obtain by whatever means necessary. Certainly Harold was most ... appreciative of my new style as well as those charms he has enjoyed before. I fear my visits must be rather dear on his cushions and antimacassars, as they tend to get shredded! A most enjoyable afternoon was had by all.

I fear Harold's ears blushed somewhat afterwards as we turned round and noticed a still-warm plate of buttered scones and fresh pot of tea on the occasional table by the side of the sofa. Harold's housekeeper is away at weekends when I usually visit, but not today – and she had very discreetly gone about her business unnoticed while we were otherwise engaged. Still, she is a Spontoonie and not likely to be shocked by such goings-on.

It is a good thing that the Ave Argentum are no longer hunting for things to discredit Songmark, I must say. Sitting on Harold's well-polished sofa in my bare fur (some parts of it rather barer than others, and now permanently so) sipping tea would have made a rather incongruous picture for the Spontoon Mirror, I expect. It was a very warm day for vigorous exercise. Quite relaxing indeed; unlike my previous visits here there is no longer any need to worry about taking precautions.

It was rather a pity to have to dress and go, but by teatime I took my leave of Harold and in ten minutes was back at the hospital. Helen and the rest had not returned, so I spent some time chatting with Chestnut and Silk. I mentioned their sisters would be pleased to see them – they know they have sisters, but for them it is more as if someone told them rather than part of their own lives. The rescued Pennington girls still have all their poise and social training, and seem happy enough. Had they not got sisters waiting for them, I thought once about leaving them on Kuo Han as they no longer wished to escape. I do wonder just how much we can do for them. It will be tricky enough taking Miss Cabot around Europe, but having four Penningtons in tow as well will be a challenge. Given that I hope to drop the Allworthy title I can hardly leave them on the estates as I might not own them much longer! The cottage I decided to Alpha and Nancy Rote is secure for them, having been permanently gifted as payment for Alpha's work on the torpedo breaker project.

Helen, Maria and Miss Cabot turned up in time for the evening meal, Helen looking happier than I have seen her in ages. Marti had come over from South Island and they have a signed and witnessed marriage license – all that is needed is the ceremony which Marti has gone home to arrange. It all seems to be happening very fast, but of course she is making up for lost time and should have been Tailfast at the solstice two weeks ago.

Maria has telegraphed and been replied to by her Uncle, and also has a date for her diary. Her Embassy is arranging transport back to Europe with spare seats for us, and unlike Helen she might not return here. Many of the embassy staff would be glad to see the back of her, she says - but not everyone. Before we left for Kuo Han she took Helen there to investigate one of them. There is a cellar under the embassy that one of the staff fitted out just for her, and this Mr. Pettachi has some remarkable ideas. It is just as well she is leaving the area, all told.

Well! One of us leaving, one of us joining (in wedlock) – things are definitely progressing. My ears drooped as I realise I might not see Jirry again before I leave for Europe, but until various things are ... resolved, possibly it is just as well.

Helen is very keen to get Miss Cabot over to Saimmi tomorrow as soon as possible. Miss Cabot is developing a personality, but it is not Molly. As a test, at the registry Helen showed her details of a marriage license that would have had Molly hitting the roof; last week on Casino Island the famous German poodle Countess Anna Geschwitz wed her slender black-haired feline fiancée, the film starlet Lulu Pabst (it would NOT be approved of back in Germany but they are not planning to return there at least while the thousand-year Reich endures.) Miss Cabot was mildly interested, rather than snarling at the wedding photographs.

A very fine evening for a stroll after teatime; we all went out with Silk and Chestnut. Until tomorrow it is rather hard to know what to do for them – their sisters looked up to Missy Blanche, but she is no longer here. Silk and Chestnut enjoyed the fresh air and the beach, though indeed Meeting Island is not famous for its beaches. We can see the bright lights of Casino Island, or at least the cruise boats moored at the docks as the main hotel strip faces the other direction and the Northern coast is less spectacular.

We will have to make the most of our final days on Spontoon, as it really is a matter of days. I hope Miss Devinski and the tutors get back to us soon!

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

A bright day for a trip! All of us headed out on a water-taxi to South Island, waving at the parties of brilliantly shirted tourists launching from Casino Island. It was very good to be back, though seeing the beach by the Topotabo Hotel packed with deck-chairs and picnic baskets was rather a shock having had it almost to ourselves all Spring.

Haio Beach was similarly thronged with a thriving business at the hot dog, ice cream and cooled drinks stalls swapping calories for cowries (and indeed shells). The Hoelētoemi longhouse was a haven of quiet, and Mrs. H was very glad to see us. Every now and then a tourist pokes his snout and camera in through the open window of a Native hut and snaps away happily as if they were looking at a rock pool rather than someone's home. One could get annoyed at this by August and contemplate growing Hawaiian nettles and wait-awhile thorns in a window box to catch the unwary rubber-neckers, but the Tourist board would not appreciate it.

Everything was in full swing preparing for the wedding, which is set for Monday! Truly Helen does not want to waste any more time, and with the Spontoonie traditions there is no delay in organising bridal costume, baking cakes, hiring reception halls or other Euro conventional duties. There is a pork pig ordered from Albert Island for the wedding feast fire-pit (apart from chicken, hardly any meat is ranches here even on Main Island) and almost everything else is available in the village or can be put together very speedily. Mrs. H brought out the wedding costume she had made years ago for Saimmi, before her eldest daughter became overwhelmingly involved with the Spontoonie religion. There are minor Priestesses who have married, and indeed it is nowhere written down that any rank is forbidden to – but they are meant to look after the People full-time and rarely have the time and energy for family life.

It is a definite honour for Helen to wear the costume meant for the Great Mother – especially as Saimmi herself will be officiating! Still, we are both Warrior Priestesses and have come through our first mission with our tails intact having put the skills Saimmi taught us to good use. My tail drooped slightly – I will be the equivalent of the bridesmaid at least, and would not miss out on Helen's big day for anything. Still. In Kuo Han I had hoped to break out and return in time for the Summer Solstice, one dream being to bale out of an overflying aircraft along with Helen at the last possible minute on the Solstice dawn over the surf line of Sacred Island and us wading ashore into the arms of Marti and Jirry respectively. However well this Monday turns out, it will not be a double wedding of Warrior Priestesses.

It was wonderful to relax in the breezy warmth of the longhouse, and catch up with the news. Mrs. H is delighted to have another grand-kitten, a grandson this time born three weeks ago. Moeli is very well and out at sea with that side of the family, but they will be back for the wedding. So will her youngest sister Oiaroani who we have not met in nearly two years – she has been travelling throughout the islands on Saimmi's business rather than Mr. Sapohatan's.

At lunchtime Saimmi herself turned up, somehow "avoiding" all the tourist cameras though she would have made a wonderful souvenir snapshot for anyone's scrapbook. Then, with her abilities I think she could walk in the breeziest of Spontoonie costume through the middle of London in rush-hour and nobody would consciously notice her even though they looked her direction. She took lunch with us, and told us nobody was happier to see us back than she was. Marti and hopefully Jirry might disagree but in truth there is no shortage of pretty Spontoonie girls for them, but Saimmi and Oiaroani searched the Nimitz Sea area for suitable Warrior Priestesses amongst the native population and otherwise and to date we are it. One wonders just what qualities besides the ones mentioned in the prospectus our Songmark tutors really select candidates for.

As expected, while Maria helped wash up the dishes with Silk and Chestnut, Saimmi invited Helen out to the shrine at the jungle edge with me and Miss Cabot. A gruelling afternoon followed – we were "de-briefed" on our trip much as Mr. Sapohatan did earlier, though naturally from a different viewpoint. Saimmi was extremely interested on anything we could recall about our encounter with the dark Priestess and her murine apprentice – especially as she has Miss Cabot as an example of her finished work.

I was somewhat worried as I described my final encounter in the temple, having got there about five minutes too late for Molly. Having seen and perceived just what had been done, I lost my temper more than somewhat and effectively hit with everything I had. I doubt that even most Spontoonies who are brought up with their religion really think what it can do. We know more details than many of them about the Great Ritual that left the islands uninhabitable for centuries and of rather rearranged geography, and it is not just the Germans who have ideas about what that can be done with directed Will (Vrill, in their case). Even Mr. Sapohatan had asked if I was sure the skunkette priestess was dead as I had never physically touched her – I explained that the sight of her brains running out of her ears convinced me, and he silently agreed.

At the end of it Saimmi nodded once, and gave me her blessing. Warrior Priestesses are trained to be able to do such things, but she says the difficulty in selecting us from possible candidates is finding furs who know exactly when (and more importantly when not) to use their abilities – being able to walk up unnoticed to within yards of a world leader and do that despite him being surrounded by alert bodyguards and watched by cameras would be such a saleable talent. Molly Procyk would not have been considered, even if she had the latent ability. Dark Priestesses do not serve the people but themselves or those who hire them. Certainly, I disliked what I had to do but that is just as well. Being keen on the notion and wanting an excuse to do it again would not be a good thing.

Much as had been done at the hospital, we had a full "check-up" to be sure we had not brought any taint of that darkness back with us. This took the rest of the afternoon, while Miss Cabot joined the rest working in the garden. Saimmi shook her head over Miss Cabot's condition – it is the work of higher (or more accurately more ancient) powers and would need something equivalent to restore her. Something that I had thought of but Helen had not – although Henrietta and Megan were effectively wiped clean, Molly has been ... replanted, one might say, with Miss Cabot as a different person like a different but perfectly healthy plant in the same pot.

Naturally the new Miss Cabot is putting down roots. Not only will this make it more difficult to change as time goes by, but ... one has to think about what would happen to the new Miss Cabot herself.

By the time we had finished, thanks to Mrs. H and Maria there was one task done I had been dreading. The Penningtons are now reunited, as far as that seems ever likely to happen. Emily and Lucy were most upset – we did our best, but it must have been like giving them two convincing-looking actresses made up to resemble their sisters, not the sisters themselves. They thanked us for doing what we did – which was gratifying especially as we took casualties, one might say.

I met Nairobi who has been keeping an eye on Lucy and Emily, and she gladly took on the rest of their family for the time being. It is too soon to ask them their plans – whatever Emily and Lucy might have thought of is rather changed now. Getting passports for Silk and Chestnut will be a problem, and without them they will have difficulty getting off Spontoon – or rather, getting them into anywhere else. Maria says her Uncle has a scheme where furs of Italian stock remain Italians no matter what Citizenship paperwork they have “unto the seventh generation.” If he thinks he can conscript and drag back successful Gnu York plumbers and restaurant owners on the basis of where their great-grandfathers came from, he needs to think again. Anyway, there would have had to be a surviving Confederate government-in-exile for any such a scheme to help the Penningtons.

By the time Saimmi had finished with us it was past four o'clock. I made my mind up, and we all agreed – we were going back to Songmark, and let Miss Devinski lock the gate on us if she wishes. She might have written to us today care of the hospital but there is no time to go back there and check. It is the last day of our third year's full course, and I wanted to be there to see it even if it is just looking in through the fence. So we jogged straight back across South Island onto a water taxi, and at five minutes to five we were at the compound, steeling ourselves for a disappointment. But it was a chance that had to be taken; we did not get this far for our nerves to let us down now.

After all this time, it did not amaze me to see Miss Devinski walking towards the open gate with her stop-watch in paw, evidently expecting us. How she does it I still have no idea despite all Saimmi has taught us. Of course one might have a string of neighbours looking out all the way from the ferry dock primed to pick up the telephone and report us heading this way, but I doubt it is anything so prosaic. We all saluted and announced we had returned – in my case with my shield (strictly speaking one might say Molly carried on it rather than me) with everyone we planned to rescue.

Miss Devinski looked us up and down for a good minute, while the hands of the clock in the guard room ticked towards five and the last seconds of three years at Songmark. With ten seconds to go she nodded and said we had cut it close this time – and invited us in. With one second to go our tails were inside Songmark!

Whether Mr. Sapohatan tells our Tutors about us or however it happens, she knew just what had happened on our mission and with one of her rare smiles announced she would not be expecting a report from us. Further she announced that we had ten minutes to shower and get into our Songmark uniforms for the last time, as the rest of our year has been waiting for us.

I suppose it is rather like swimming or learning to ride a bicycle; whatever happens one never forgets. Miss Cabot was as fast as any of us getting into our third-year dorm, bouncing into shower thoroughly but without wasting a second or a drop of hot water and out again to dress in two minutes still adept at the quick-change technique that nobody properly learns inside a year. Our best outfit and blazers were laid out on our beds waiting for us, which cut vital seconds off our time. One last mutual checking and grooming then we were down the stairs and into the dining hall – total time elapsed six minutes eleven seconds. Our third best time, but we are a little out of practice.

Considering I only decided to come here an hour earlier, Miss Devinski predicted it exactly – my ears drooped imagining if I had decided not to. Our year would have waited for us in vain till the clock ticked past six, and sadly gone on without us. As it happened, we made it to our own graduation. Everyone else was there and pleased to see us - it was wonderful to see them, even Beryl.

Well! Our Tutors worked on us three years and we worked hard enough after all it seems, though to hear Miss Devinski one would never have guessed it. There has not been a single day we could have rested on our laurels – no laurels awarded at Songmark, more like a bed of thorn branches and Hawaiian nettles. But we got here.

Our Tutors had one final joke on us. The graduation meal was brought in by grinning cooks – ears and tails drooped as we discovered it was three-finger poi in a very meagre ration so that even Missy K grumbled at the portion if not the menu. We all sat down with steely determination to eat it, and everyone cleaned their plates much as Beryl says prisoners do with their porridge on the last day of their sentence. I had no trouble doing that, and in fact it tasted rather fine. But better was in store – as the second and far larger course was wheeled in, roast chicken! There must have been a few cowries left in the Songmark budget after all – still, my dorm has not been eating here for six weeks. Looking around our year, there was a definite lump in my throat realising that tomorrow we might start scattering across the globe like leaves blowing off a tree in Autumn, never to return.

It was quite an evening. We could have all headed out to Mahanish's or elsewhere, but by unspoken agreement everyone wanted to stay in for one last evening, catching up on events. We were even in bed by lights-out, reflecting that there are harder beds to sleep on but they are mostly in Kuo Han.

Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

A scorching day, but just enough breeze came off the central waters to make it bearable outside. It was something I never expected to do again, to wake up in our dorm. We can do this for another week should we wish to – but Helen at least has far better places to be and things to do.

Like the rest of our dorm, we got our steamer chests down from the attic and started packing for home. Not for the first time in my case – my ears blushed as I recalled my Songmark career almost finished in the Papeete Influenza when Molly had her first brush with Kuo Han “collection agents”. Actually we will not be taking much with us to Europe, the clothes we arrived in being out of style and hardly fitting us now. My Lunar Topee hat never got much use; I am used to doing without it here and will not need it in England. So there was a considerable charity pile of clothes and equipment in the corridor with eighteen of us doing much the same. \*

Actually, we are taking so little back that even my steamer chest is decidedly surplus. Helen can use some of my airtight tin clothes-boxes as she says she will not be spending all her time bare-pawed and full of kittens in Haio Beach and needs “respectable” Euro clothes which do not hold up well unprotected in a humid Spontoon summer. Most things for our Europe trip we can buy on Casino Island this week, after which we will be travelling light and air freight on a trunk that weighs thirty pounds empty would be more than it is worth!

It is good to see the first and second years hard at work still; looking around our rapidly emptying dorm rooms it is hard to believe that after all this time there are no more reports to write or exercises to do – nobody is going to be chivvying us around the beaches with packs full of wet sand any more. We even came down five minutes late to breakfast, which apart from the Papeete Influenza outbreak and our shattered return from the Aleutians, is unheard-of. Somehow it seems wrong. Then, it is the first time I have really said goodbye like this, having finished at Saint Winifred’s a year earlier than expected. Did Father really like his glass-house (a mutual casualty with dear Flying Flea #8) so much?

Looking through the projects the first and second-years are handing in is a strange sensation. In the first year Alpha Rote and her dorm have handed in something that should score them high marks – the first publicly available geological survey of Cranium Island! It fits with what we could observe last year, though we had no time to collect and analyse rock samples. Nobody would believe it who had not been there; all the Nimitz Sea islands between Hawaii and the Aleutians are volcanic with coral reefs. Cranium Island is radically different with gneiss, porphyry, greenstone belts and komatite volcanic minerals that should belong in the heart of Greenland, Australia or another one of the most ancient continents. Mrs. Rote speculates it is the last tiny fragment of a continent otherwise unknown to geography and lost to Time. I well recall the two very different parts of the island, with the conventional volcanic side and that impossibly ancient smooth, worn landscape of hard greasy-looking stone that had such an unpleasant mental feel to it all. One was somehow reminded of an exhumed corpse long buried and never meant to see daylight again.

Our junior years are all looking forward to sewing that extra bar on their Songmark “note” badges, no doubt. I hope they all pass! It would be an alarming idea, someone like Alpha Rote being dismissed and returning to Cranium Island in a bad temper. It is one of the stories one hears, of how every young pup and kitten there builds a doomsday device or two as a perfectly normal and socially accepted part of their education. Alpha did not deny it, merely pointing out that an experiment that could not be recorded was useless, and any youngster contemplating pulling the big lever would know the difficulties of being able to record and get peer review on a successful test. One hopes they do not leave the devices primed in a cellar somewhere with the operating manuals lying around next to the big red button labelled “Do not touch.”

The second-years have just returned from a long field trip and have put together a detailed report on what went wrong with their supplies – plus that standard part of any Songmark report, their ideas of how to do better next time. Beryl was looking over their revised food list with a critical eye and noted some of it might have unintended effects. According to her, pinhead oatmeal gets its name from its effects; it is eaten by show business families desirous of their children being born qualified for secure careers as circus pinheads. Definitely the same old Beryl! She is the one who started that ludicrous scare story about asbestos being bad for you – her religion still insists she tell one convincing lie and one disbelieved fact every day.

When I left she was putting together another pitch for another bogus charity, collecting blown tins and tainted meat for distribution to the deserving poor. It depends on what you think they deserve, she says. Adele Beasley was objecting strongly (she has had more than one brush with severe food poisoning when she had her bad-luck curse) though Beryl stressed the charity would be fussy about who it chose to “assist”. She already has a registered charity raising funds for the appreciative rich – as she has said before, “would you rather have a peasant or a millionaire grateful to you?”

We had just finished packing when Miss Devinski sent word to meet her in her office. This was a request rather than an order but coming from her the two are the same with us, and I think they always will be. Certainly we were hardly a second off our best time getting down there.

I confess my ears dipped slightly; about the only time we had ever been summoned to our Tutors’ offices was to be told off, much as a military recruit gets many lumps and little praise from their Sergeant-Major no matter how well they do. Sure enough, Miss Devinski did not look particularly happy. All started well as she handed a graduation certificate to Maria, and to Helen as a wedding present along with her congratulations. Looking at me and Miss Cabot, she told us the Tutors have a problem. Apart from the obvious marks earned in tests and exercises, at the foundation of Songmark the Tutors had a very clear vision of the sort of girl they

would sign off as a graduate. She looked me in the eye and said that with my current willing legal status, they would not even consider it. Amelia Bourne-Phipps or Lady Allworthy would qualify – but Jade the property of Lin Chung never would.

I took a deep breath and explained I did not actually like the idea as such, then for the next five minutes laid out my plan – which I had thought of as a possibility even before leaving for Kuo Han. By the end of it Miss Devinski raised an eyebrow, nodded curtly and conceded that it was both well-prepared and completely insane enough to stand a chance of working, should I really want to throw away the Allworthy inheritance that much. She added that her decision would stand but my certificate will stay unsigned in her desk for possible later use. When Lin Chung gets his money and papers back I can collect my own papers, so to speak. That is better than I expected; Lady Allworthy can manage without a certificate but I will need one should I manage to drop the title.

Miss Cabot was another problem entirely, as I had feared. It would have been less of a problem had she become a casualty in a more physical way – had she come back minus an arm or a leg she would definitely have received her certificate though it would spoil an Adventuring career. I pointed out that one thing Songmark famously never judges on is character (I hear Beryl, Madeleine and Missy K passed after all, and Red Dorm are reputedly as criminal as ever) so the fact that she is a different character should not count at all. I am sure Miss Cabot can fly, calculate and shoot just as well as Molly ever did, and is probably much safer to have around. Our Tutor complemented me on good use of logic but said Molly Procyk was the one who was chosen to attend Songmark and Molly is the only one who will get the certificate.

So – she shook paws with us all and confessed she was amazed to see us all still alive and no more damaged than we were. Our rooms, she confirmed, are ours till five o'clock on Friday. One thing I had quite forgotten though three years ago it would have been my main interest – she asked what I would be doing with my Flying Flea! After all, with a maximum range of thirty miles on a cold day I am hardly going to fly it back to Europe nor is there room to pack it even in the admittedly capacious hold of a Caproni Ca60. The Russians famously have fighter aircraft strapped under their giant bombers, but a Ca60 is aerodynamically complex enough as it is without my Sand Flea tacked on the outside.

It was rather a wrench. But after all, as Lady Allworthy I can afford a better aircraft in Europe and as the hopefully happy but possibly penniless Mrs. Amelia Hoele'toemi I doubt I could afford hangar space for an aircraft that is hard to earn money with considering it can carry neither freight nor a single passenger. It had its limitations even as a single-seater last summer surveying for Professor Schiller's ascent of the main face of Mount Kiribatori, as we all remember. I asked if Miss Devinski would accept it as a training aircraft for Songmark. With about one heartbeat's hesitation she accepted – though for the past year and more her opinion has been that it is an outstanding example of how not to design an aircraft. I suppose that too will be educational for the junior years in its way. She said if I would call back tomorrow she would have the registration transfer papers ready.

Well! I have lost Flying Fleas before but not like this; I have let three go as I parachuted away from them or their airborne pieces, but never signed a working one away before. Still, there are greater things than that I will be giving away.

Back to our packing, Helen and Maria looking with pride at their coveted certificates before stowing them in the safest places they can find (Helen plans to seal hers hermetically between glass sheets, against the local climate especially in a longhouse). Considering there are only seventeen in the world being issued with this year's graduation dates on them, they are decidedly rarer than diamonds. At most there will be two more of them.

A strange experience indeed, packing and sorting through three years of souvenirs – not that we ever could store much in our dorm given the one drawer apiece allowed for personal items. I blushed somewhat recalling Miss Devinski finding that souvenir Lars gave me, and indeed Molly had the matching antler as he sheds them every Spring. At least I returned it to him on Krupmark that last time. And now I know what happened to that Tailfast locket I lost at Lars' party nearly two years ago just before our Vostok trip! It seems Beryl is not the only one who worships a trickster deity, and with appropriate alterations as to whose fur was braided with mine, Lars certainly got a lot of use out of it. And me. I suppose I ought to be furious about it, but – recalling my various encounters influenced by that charm, I cannot honestly say I disliked any of them. Then again, apart from my first week on Kuo Han where I encountered those same furs whose photographs I had seen on Lars' desk on Krupmark (the rhino and the bat were most distinctive) it is hard to be certain exactly which those were. My encountering Lord Leon Allworthy was not actually one of Lars' manipulations at all, and I enjoyed (most of) that at the time too.

Just about everyone was finished by lunchtime, and none of us felt very like seeing if it was poi on the menu again. It was certainly not roast chicken, we would have scented that. Jasbir's dorm had the fine idea of heading out to Mahanish's and we very happily tagged along eager to catch up on the news. Quite a lot happened, as might be expected in the last six weeks of a Songmark third year! The Ave Argentum have already packed their bags and gone, though not before one final rather subtle and vicious campaign against us. Interestingly, Beryl was one of those who led Songmark's counterattack as indeed if anyone is professionally qualified in dirty tricks she is the one to ask. The fatal runway crash of one of their Potez fighters last month was not her work and not even in her style as Miss Devinski concedes – pushing one's students the way they did was an accident waiting to happen.

Jasbir tells us our mischievous mouse has been having plenty of fun, making the most of her final weeks. She completely devastated one of Red Dorm last week using a copy of New Haven's own much-publicised political Manifesto. Using only quotes from that and a progression of nine logically impeccable deductions, all of them innocuous in themselves, she logically proved that in New Haven both using the toilet and indeed eating were crimes against the State punishable by death. A certain half-breed coyote has been going around with her tail and ears right down muttering to herself ever since trying to find holes in the argument. It just goes to show, there is good in everyone – even Beryl. There may be some good in Miss Morgenstern, too. There may also be a diamond the size of a cricket ball buried on Eastern Island, but nobody has found that yet either or been too inspired to look.

Mahanish's was jolly full, with a tourist season's worth of airline pilots and hungry ground crew tucking into one of the best value "Euro" menus around. It is well-known in the Nimitz Sea that any pilot bringing in a cool hay box of bacon, Portobello mushrooms or similar locally scarce foodstuffs eats free as do his or her crew. They certainly serve a lot more than their famous chilli dishes! I gave that a miss myself, being lunchtime and not in the mood for something that almost sets one's snout alight (and elsewhere, the morning after.) Huge omelettes for most of us, with Irma Bundt opting for the stir-fried palm heart with coconut milk.

Jasbir is heading out with an archaeological team in a few weeks time; she has managed to persuade her father to let her stay away a little longer. She is not next in line to the family title after all, and says with luck she can stretch trips away till folk get used to the idea. She hinted she would be heading out with her sister Meera to visit their Native friends on Gull Island. She says back at Easter they were much taken by Meera, and visa versa. One definitely hopes they have hundred percent effective Precautions, as with a family of their rank and religion any "accidents" would be awfully embarrassing! I recall back at Saint Winifred's a senior year girl commenting that she was not keen on ruining the family name even if it was only Jones.

While the rest looked around our familiar haunts, I took Miss Cabot with me to Casino Island where I had booked some consultations at Madame Maxine's. Definitely that is a place that does not depend on passing trade, the door being as discreet as it can be. They have no need to advertise except by word of mouth; nowhere else does professional quality fur dyeing and the like. I well recall Kim-Anh was "created" here by Madame Maxine, a Siamese herself and a definitely pedigree one with the distinctive snout and the blue eyes that the half-breed Kim-Anh lacks.

Thinking of markings and alterations, I did ask about the possibility of removing the ones Miss Cabot and I returned from Kuo Han with. In my case this would have to wait till various other matters are resolved. After all, they are one feature that cannot be discarded on a whim. Madame Maxine noted that it would be possible to an extent, but considering their position where our fur will never re-grow (no more than Aunt Millini's will in places though for a very different reason) it would always be obvious that some marking had been there. Still, there is no hurry about it.

Madame Maxine is quite as thorough as Songmark's Mrs. Oelabe when requested – and at least here we are spared the sarcastic comments. I recall what Mrs. Oelabe told Jasbir when she returned from her first adventurous Gull Island holiday. All is well with Miss Cabot, and after my own checkup I paid our bills and declined any further treatment. All is well with Jade, one might say. I think it might take a lot to surprise Madame Maxine, though she can read my "calligraphy" and most furs would doubtless want it removed as soon and thoroughly as possible. Miss Cabot has far less, but she was less favoured by Lin Chung.

Then – duties done, we were free on Casino Island on a fine Saturday on tourist season! Shopping was definitely in order – not so much for Helen's wedding as Casino Island shops do not sell such clothing (only parodies for the tourists to buy) but some more formal clothing for our European trip. The Casino Island dressmakers learn the latest fashions from Paris or Milan about five minutes after London does, and have everything we could want. What with the gold we removed in Tanglon from criminal paws (several of whom had no further use for such) we are not having to watch our cowries and shells as much as I had feared. In theory Miss Cabot could afford Songmark all over again, which given Miss Devinski's decision is about the only way she will get her certificate unless we find a way of getting Molly back.

The differences between the two does is getting rather striking. Miss Cabot had been studying the various furs dressed in Euro style with a keen interest, and at Chan's dressmakers she had herself fitted for some rather nice up-to-the-minute fashion, in very tasteful pearl grey rayon with frills. Molly Procyk was always happiest in something tougher and less flammable. Chan's have a dozen or so oriental mice who can take a fur's fairly accurate measurements by eye, but scurry everywhere with measuring tapes. Miss Cabot did not flinch by a hair, despite Molly's (jolly unfair) dislike of oriental murines getting anywhere near her.

In fact if anyone blushed it was me as I recalled Lin Chung. I had never seen a Mongolian Jerboa before, and thought him rather exotic with his long brush-tufted tail. Some other features turned out to be more compatible than exotic. Very compatible with felines, as I found out. Nature has some jolly fascinating tricks that are too good to give to just one species, it seems.

In two hours at Chan's we had recycled some of the gold recovered from criminal Celestials, returning it to honest hard-working descendants of such. Our outfits will be ready by Wednesday, they promise. We will not be needing them for Helen's wedding, having more suitable Spontoonie costumes to wear to Sacred Island. I had wondered how the Penningtons stayed in an approximation of (very conservative) modern style; given their family history one could imagine them as the last wearers of lace and crinolines outside a film set. The answer

was of course mail-order catalogues sent care of Dutch Harbour, from which they chose the most respectable-looking outfits available. I imagine the 1920's styles must have been a shock to the family.

Back to Eastern Island and Songmark, for almost the last time! Madeleine X is leaving tomorrow, there being a French military flight heading East that she has got a seat on. She is returning with profuse thanks to a French-speaking world; first real stop their great naval base on Clipperton Island off the Mixtecan coast, then Martinique, Senegal and Morocco on her way home. She wants to look at the new French "Ecole d'Adventure Aerienne" on their Atlantic coast near La Rochelle, a place she dearly wishes had been open three years ago and the less charitable of us loudly agree.

Someone we will miss rather more is Adele Beasley. She is heading back to join her parents who are still treasure-hunting, though one might have thought they had learned their lesson after that curse hit Adele after they looted that burial mound. Adele is an excellent mechanic who can fix most other things – I recall one of the airport maintenance furs' admiring comment "she could fix the break of day." It sounds better in Spontoonie.

Everyone else already has tickets out; ironically enough my dorm (well, me and Helen) are almost the only ones planning to stay around Spontoon and even we are leaving for Europe first! Prudence's dorm are going to be Adventuring across the Pacific for a living but I am not sure where they will be based. Eastern Island is expensive but well-off for contacting potential customers and getting aircraft maintenance done locally. Finding a longhouse and beach slipway in the Kanims would be far cheaper on the rent but tricky to get fuel and spare parts in a hurry.

A very fine evening. Prudence was teasing Helen somewhat about her being a "blushing bride" – unlike in the Euro tradition she has nothing to wonder about how her wedding night will be. On the one paw some folk might think that a bad idea, not having that discovery to look forward to – but on the other, Spontoonie brides have no shocks or disappointments in store. Prudence is marrying Tahni next weekend over on Main Island, having unlike us managed to renew her Tailfast ring this past solstice. We are all invited, but I fear we will be on our travels by then. Ironically, the first stop will be Alaska and not so far from the Penningtons' lost plantation.

Helen is saying farewell to her Songmark bed – they are most charitably described as firm, not that I had been used to luxury at Saint Winifred's beforehand. We never got as much time in them as we really wanted, even so. How many times have we been walking along the fence on guard at half past three in the morning wishing we were back in them? At least with such austere beds field trips sleeping on the bare ground were less of a shock to the system, which might have been the idea.

- Editor's note: Amelia has said on various occasions there are 19 in her year rather than the theoretical class size of 20. Presumably Missy K as a Spontoonie had no need to store anything at Songmark when her family home on Main Island was only half an hour away.

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

A damp day, but at least one where we awoke indoors looking out at the rain rather than looking up at it and feeling it running through our fur. Our room still looks very home-like considering everything is packed away and we only have our overnight packs with us. Maria has already sent ahead most of her possessions, except a few changes of clothes and that shoehorn she found to her amazement in the native part of Macao (the shoehorn with teeth, which everyone told her did not exist.) Even before breakfast everyone was queuing to use the small darkroom downstairs, developing all the graduation and farewell photographs taken in the past few days. Helen got her camera out; it is our last chance to capture Madeleine X's expression when she is faced with a bowl of breadfruit mash for breakfast! She says she looks forward to wonderful breakfasts of "poulaine" back home, which sounds actually rather similar – but French.

Beryl dropped in to say farewell, as she heads out to Europe with Piet tomorrow. They will be going to visit his relatives in Hamsterdam, then to the criminal quarter of Marseilles, then Monte Carlo for the Summer by her account. Hmm. Her visit takes in famous places for diamond merchants, a prime spot for fencing stolen goods, then high-stakes gambling and in that order. Interpol may be in for a busy summer.

She has some news that will dampen the spirits of Crusader Dorm – her sisters Coral and Pearl are coming here in September! They have passed their exams at Saint T's and have advanced enough funds for the first year. Presumably they are on what Molly used to call a "Smith and Weston Scholarship" but as long as they have no actual legal charges pending she says our Tutors have let them in for their considerable talents. Beryl says they are awfully naughty, mischievous girls compared to the rest of her respectable family. Considering her Father is still known as The Biplane Bandit (strictly speaking he might now be better titled the Monoplane Marauder, but Beryl says that name is already taken) I hardly like to contemplate the idea.

Miss Devinski did mention another English student whose approval has been confirmed for September, a lepine lass from West Yorkshire. Hopefully this Christiana is a more respectable English rose, and not one with curare-dipped thorns as Beryl says is all the rage at Saint T's. What with Beryl and her predecessor Sopy Forsythe as ambassadors, I fear we are hardly showing the British flag in a wonderful light! I may be passing Yorkshire on the way from Barsetshire to Barrow-in-Furryness and look her up. Forewarned is forearmed as they say. Mind you, had any of us known the sort of adventures awaiting us we might have been terrified out of our fur! Not even counting the sort of adventures that finished with Molly and me losing some fur permanently.

If one stuck to the trips our dear Tutors arranged there is more than enough adventure on the timetable. On the other paw, a Songmark girl by definition is likely to make her own arrangements and her own adventures.

Saffina joined us for our trip to South Island, by which time the rain had mostly stopped and the tourist stalls were being set up by the Topotabo Hotel where several Guides were looking hopefully across at the water-taxi slips of Casino Island for signs of incoming customers. They know us; we have trained with them on many occasions and have traded a lot of medium-hard knocks. Certainly they know not to ask if we need any help in exploring the islands by now. Sophie D'Artagnan and Susan de Ruiz have been known to vanish into the woods with a handsome Guide apiece, but that is more social than geographical exploration.

At the Hoele'toemi compound the place was busy with the neighbours round to help for tomorrow is Helen's big day, as Friday sees us depart for Europe via Boston! For Spontoones the idea of a honeymoon is less crucial as the happy couple already know each other perfectly well and have all their lives together to look forward to – but Helen wants three days and she shall have them. We threw ourselves into the preparations with a will, not that there was much left for us to do. Helen's head-dress was made years ago for Saimmi, and it is mostly our own outfits we had to work on.

Still, Saimmi had first claim on us as this is our last Sunday "services" and she is less than happy about losing her Warrior Priestesses for months. She acknowledges she managed before without us, and Saffina will be staying here taking instruction but we are not unlike the fire brigade for her; when wanted we are needed suddenly and urgently. She tells us Kansas Smith has been spotted in the Nimitz Sea area recently, although she is "much altered." I never did find out who was backing her; she sold that Fragment to the Germans but they buy anything like that from anybody. Ada Cronstein says you could sell them beach pebbles if you engraved them "*Made in Shamballah City, Kingdom of Agharti, enchantment expiry date Walpurgisnacht 1,600 B.C.*" but she is not exactly unbiased.

A definitely tiring session with Saimmi, who while we are gone will be training up Saffina as the only other suitable candidate for a Warrior Priestess she has found after a lot of searching. I would expect missionaries hate the idea, but now Saimmi has trained us in what to look out for, I will be looking for recruits whilst on my travels. There might be dozens of suitable girls of good family currently unaware of what they can do – though just now and then they get a "lucky shot" at hockey or lacrosse that the ordinary laws of physics would be baffled by. Sad to say, without training in controlling such energies many end up in places such as Saint T's, or one of the half dozen genteel but secure academies founded for the Gifted Insane.

Then – farewell to Helen! By tradition a bride stays overnight at the temple at which dwells the priestess she will be married by and the groom only arrives on the wedding day. So Helen left with Saimmi for Sacred Island, where she will also qualify as a Warrior Priestess. Definitely catching up on lost time! What with everything she had to do on Kuo Han she has passed the "practicals" as well as me, but Saimmi can only qualify one at a time.

The rest of us had a most fine evening preparing Helen's wedding feast; the fire-pit was made ready and the initial fire started in it as a cheery bonfire with spit-roast fish and such for our own meal. A full-scale fire-pit has to heat up for hours, and the pig to be roast in it only goes in around midnight well wrapped with leaves and clay. All in all – quite something to look forward to.

Helen was not the only one saying farewell, and indeed we will see her tomorrow. Just at sunset a Lacoetre flying boat in French military markings caught the last of the sunlight as it turned and headed East with Madeleine X onboard. She never did like these islands, which is a shame. Every month she received a food parcel from her home to help against the "disgusting Native muck they feed us", and her watch for three years has remained set to Parisian time which at least kept up her mental arithmetic skills, as did her Napoleonic era geography based on the meridian going through Paris rather than London. She is the first to depart, and we will be almost the last. I wonder if anyone is staying in their rooms till five o'clock on Friday? That would be a sad thing, watching the clock as the last of Songmark's protections and privileges runs out and one heads out into the rain. Still – even Zara who failed to qualify last year found herself a place, and still sends in occasional postcards from the Albanian South Indies.

Monday 12<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

A day many of us have been awaiting for a long time. Everyone was up at dawn, dressed in their finest, with Marti in pride of place. Apart from it being traditional (we were in the canoes as soon as Morning Song was finished) it helped that no tourists were around. They rarely get down to Haio beach much before ten o'clock.

It was a splendid day for paddling across, with a fresh breeze and calm waters – a good omen, as Mrs. Hoele'toemi said. In twenty minutes we were there, Marti in his wedding head-dress paddling in the bows of the lead canoe. I felt a definite pang looking at him; he resembles his brother and we had talked about having a double wedding with Jirry and me.

Helen and Saimmi were on the beach, Helen with her fur oiled and the markings combed in that every Spontoone girl dreams of just as Euro girls think of white dresses and church bells. Helen is doubly blessed today, having passed her night on Sacred Island and is now my superior, as far as Warrior Priestess qualifications go. Saimmi has said it is not remembered if there was any restriction on Warrior Priestesses marrying; if so that was for the original tradition and we are rather different from the last ones on Spontoon

centuries ago. Certainly if this was done in Euro style I am sure nobody would raise any objections at the ceremony. Annoying a Warrior Priestess on her wedding day would be an unwise thing to do, let alone Saimmi!

There were fifty people attending, five ten-fur canoes pulled up on the beach out of sight of any casual tourists with big binoculars. From Songmark all Prudence's dorm attended, Prudence naturally with Tahni. They will be wed on Main Island, where Tahni's family live near "Vikingstown". Saffina was there representing the Junior years although strictly speaking she can sew her third bar on now and our Tutors will not object. She looks most striking; a full-grown lioness in tabby fur.

The wedding ceremony is simple but very moving. Helen and Marti took off their Tailfast rings and cast them on the waves, signifying shed fur does not last forever but their love will. They wore flower leis freshly woven at sunrise today, and exchanged them while Saimmi completed the fur markings that label them as a married couple. The audience cheered, rather more like a Kilikiti match than a church wedding, and bore witness to the happy couple. Mrs. Helen Hoele'toemi and her husband Marti walked down to the beach where a freshly built canoe for two was ready for their first voyage together.

Then – following in their wake, a fast and cheerful paddle back to Haio Beach, still before the tourists arrived! I had thought we might celebrate it on some remoter part of the island, but tradition has it the wedding feast is held at the brides' new home and Helen is quite resigned to having some of her big day contribute to the tourist experience. She is a Spontoonie now, and will smile and wave for the cameras if it brings her village and her nation foreign exchange.

The feast was excellent, the fire-pit having been well tended and the village shared in marvellously tender pork having been slow-cooked for twelve hours – and roast taro with spices for the exclusively vegetarian furs. Although it was not a Euro wedding, Helen had a bridal bouquet made up that she threw to the crowd to be caught by Prudence. Three years at Songmark gives a girl well-honed reflexes and a keen eye for a catch, Prudence beating to it some furs who have played at Kilikiti since they were big enough to swing the bat. In this case the tradition looks quite true that the one catching the bouquet will be next to wed. Certainly if any of the village girls had beaten Prudence to it, they would have to hurry to marry before her!

It was splendid to see Helen and Marti heading out together on their honeymoon to one of the remoter Kanim Islands. Still, when I had helped wave them off my ears somewhat drooped and I took a solitary walk along the beach. There is a popular American song we have heard played on Radio LONO a few times, "*Those wedding bells are breaking up, that old gang of mine.*" I hardly need to hear church bells to get that feeling. Though Helen volunteered to join us on the Europe trip and she will doubtless be of enormous help, it still hardly feels right to drag a new bride from her husband's arms and take her half way around the world very likely into danger. Then, she is both a Songmark qualified Adventuress and a Warrior Priestess now and plenty of furs married on five-day home leaves in the middle of the Great War which was a close equivalent.

Maria joined me, and we stood silent for a few minutes listening to the distant happy sounds of the wedding feast as the neighbours brought out their drums, slack-key Hawaiian guitars and suchlike much to the delight of the first batch of tourists appearing on the trail. Helen will at least be coming back here and I plan to myself; Maria might not. She seemed rather out of sorts, commenting that all her sisters are married already. She rarely talks about her three sisters and two brothers, except to note they live respectable, industrious lives that she finds stiflingly dull. Then, if Maria is to fly Schneider Trophy aircraft a whole host of furs have to labour to build them and get them ready for her without having much of the thrill.

I had rather a shock at her next idea – I knew she had been dissatisfied with all the gentlemen she had been with since Cranium Island last year. There was that rather nice-looking Chinese ox in Macao who provided as fine a "room service" as she says could be wanted, but proved less fun than he should have been. Her notion of getting herself caught by Mr. Pettachi for a few days sounds like an awfully bad idea! I was willingly captured by Kuo Han true enough, but that was a sacrifice made for the Penningtons and not to discover if I liked such things (which I do not, decidedly not. But now at least I know, and will not be wondering about it.)

I tried to dissuade Maria, and we compromised – if we can time this properly, Helen and I can rescue her after perhaps 48 hours, as we will be fairly sure where she will be – that cellar under the Embassy that few people know exists. I cannot but help thinking this is a really bad idea – but Maria has her graduation certificate now and our Tutors will not be taking any more marks off us.

Back to the party, where we found Miss Cabot thoroughly enjoying herself shaking a grass skirt in fine style along with the rest of the hula dancers. As the afternoon went on, more of the neighbours had to leave and set up their tourist booths and such on the beach; by four everyone had gone and we were helping the Hoele'toemis with the tidying up. Even the bones get thoroughly used here, with meat being so scarce. They are cracked then thoroughly boiled for stock and after that dried and burned before adding to the compost heap. On a true coral atoll of coral sand there are few soil nutrients and none to waste – the Polynesians have learned to make the most of every washed-up dead fish and piece of seaweed. Certainly Professor Kurt's idea for his composting power station fell on fertile ground on Spontoon, one might say.

A surprise visitor was Major Hawkins – I had not seen him since before Easter, though I know from Mr. Sapohatan he has kept his interest in my career. He congratulated me on finishing Songmark and on my recent rescue trip – even though strictly speaking we failed to bring back the furs we wanted to rescue. Getting back at all was a major achievement, he reassured me.

Not surprisingly, Major Hawkins was interested in my plans to return to Europe. I had told him before that I plan to drop the Allworthy title as soon as possible and by all means possible – though I did not tell him my plans about that. He may be obligated to report such things to London, and I could find my loophole in the law patched before I get there. I am planning to return to Spontoon and marry Jerry, once various other things are out of the way.

Major Hawkins seemed impressed at my determination – swapping a fortune and a seat in the House of Lords for a sleeping-mat in a longhouse and a Native husband to share it. Still, folk will give up anything for love, he mused. Our own King Edward was prepared to abdicate the throne if he could not marry the then Mrs. Simpson, after all. Despite a lot of public sympathy there were powerful factions at court and in the Colonies who were absolutely opposed to the match. Fortunately Archbishop Crowley lent his support to his King and “jumped on them hard” – rather like the German howitzers did to the Belgian frontier forts in 1914.

Major Hawkins asked if I was following Maria to Italy, which I probably will. Italy is definitely pulling together a lot of middle Europe under its banner – just last month Il Duce signed treaties with the similarly inclined governments of Austria, Hungary and Roumania to form “The Arch of Steel”. Apparently Herr Hitler is furious, not having been invited to join. He had wanted something called a Berlin-Rome Axis, but there seems little chance of that happening now despite Austria and North Italy being full of German-speaking furs he has spoken much about reuniting. Italy has acquired other allies that can supply just what she was short of – the ironworks of Austria, the oil of Hungary and Roumania and a lot of general talent and resources plus military assistance and trade pacts. As the Central Powers found out in the East in 1917, getting territories by conquest does not mean getting usable resources just like that – mines and farms need to be in working order complete with willing staff and not just seized as squares on the map. Swallowing territory is not the same thing as digesting it, after all. The good Major has the opinion that if snowy Austria is ever in strategic need of dust and sand for gritting their icy roads, Il Duce now controls much of the world’s stockpile in Libya, Somalia and Ethiopia and will be only too happy to sell them all they want. To date there has not been much else found in Il Duce’s colonies to pay for their upkeep.

I guessed what the Major was angling at – whether I would be reporting back to him, Mr. Sapohatan or both. I could reassure him that I was not planning to sit in the House of Lords while drafting secret reports for Meeting Island – though whatever I find in Europe might be a different matter. Maria certainly plans to keep sending in articles to the Daily Elele as a roving correspondent. After all, she says nobody really believes what Government sponsored newspapers in Italy say, but the Elele is a major favourite with “clipping services” worldwide as a neutral and well-informed source and information printed there can rapidly end up in the most unlikely places.

I must say, I was not considering a career as a Secret Agent. Of course, three years ago I would not have contemplated signing a Hunting License or studying to be a Warrior Priestess either. An Adventuress may do a lot of things, guided by her conscience (or in Beryl’s case her bank balance. I hope the merchants in Hamsterdam have good security this summer). Major Hawkins mused that the Vostokites might actually be onto something with their updated knight-errants, the “Akula” who the Government do not issue specific orders to or take responsibility for their actions, but support as long as they are generally doing the right thing. One reads tales of Secret Agents who keep being given a hard time by their bosses; in Vostok they just choose the right people with the right opinions then let them off the leash entirely.

I did ask if he knew anything about those espionage charges that had supposedly been quashed when I became Lady Allworthy – as in, the chances of them ever getting re-activated. He noted the possibility, but mentioned Miss Forsythe has been moved to Second Assistant Cultural attaché for the South Sandwich Islands and is far from the corridors of Whitehall these days. Besides, he says anyone trying to infiltrate as a foreign-paid Agent would jump at the chance to control the strategically valuable Allworthy estates and sit in the heart of Government, not want rid of the title.

I wonder what “Soppy” has done to get her sent down there? The islands are the nearest equivalent the British Empire has to the Aleutians, the only native inhabitants being non-anthrop penguins. Perhaps it may be a vital listening post on Neue Suden Thule’s activities; nothing much else is down that end of the globe except the Norwegian super-fortress of Bouvet Island. One of the South Sandwich Islands is actually called South Thule, and was long before the Germans put their colony in Antarctica.

Major Hawkins bowed and wished us a smooth trip back. Unless he gets recalled to London as well, he is another snout I might not see till I return here. I was not planning on sending Spontoon’s Post Box Nine any detailed reports, but the occasional postcard would help keep in touch and in Mr. Sapohatan’s good graces. After all, if I marry Jerry I will be a Spontoonie and they will have my full loyalty.

It was somewhat disheartening to see everyone leaving, but we always knew this day would come. Even Maria will be vanishing for (hopefully) a brief experimentation, and every day more of my class depart perhaps never to be seen again. The world is awfully wide even in these days of air travel, and Adventuresses tend to vanish into the remoter parts of it. Sophie D’Artagnan and Susan de Ruiz sent their apologies for missing Helen’s wedding but they departed for the airport early this morning and may have already gone; this time of year there is a fairly constant stream of traffic, sometimes several flights an hour.

A fine evening! After the excitement of the day, it was most welcome to head down to Haio Beach with Maria and Miss Cabot in our grass skirts. The traditional Spontoonie bathing costume is bare fur, and two of us

are permanently ... marked in a way that might attract unwanted attention from folk who do not know its significance and worse still from anyone who does. Just relaxing and looking at the waves rolling in through the gaps in the reef at low tide is something we will miss. Maria at least has holidayed in sunny conditions on the Mediterranean shores but if we get to England bathing is rather a chilly business even in Summer. Although we have some nice sand beaches, Brighton on our South Coast is the place "going to the beach" was invented as an idea – I have been there, it has chilly waters, no sand and a steep shelf of egg-sized pebbles that are rather hard on tender paws. Overseas visitors often believe the whole place is an inscrutably English practical joke.

Naturally, three unattached and apparently Spontoonie ladies in grass skirts and flower leis draw some tourist attention – I think we must have made the film manufacturers very happy with the feet of film exposed prompted by fur exposed. At least we can warmly discuss our opinions of them in Spontoonie – and it is a good thing tourists never learn that language!

While Maria stayed on the beach I crossed back to the Topotabo with Miss Cabot, for a nice glass of Nootnops Blue. In Native dress we hardly fit with the interior décor but the terrace is another matter, and any South Island hotel gives discounts to suitably dressed Spontoonies who after all act as free advertising. Very nice to watch the sun setting on the inner waters, feeling warm winds on one's exposed fur. I well remember English summer days of grey skies and pounding rain; our last days here are ones to make the most of.

Back to help the family polish off the left-overs for supper. There was no Euro styled bridal cake as such, but Helen had no complaints – and on her big day, that is definitely all that matters. Just as we thought everything had been settled, there was a note from the Miss Penningtons, I had to drop everything and trot over to try and keep them out of more trouble. Most annoying.

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

Another scorching day, much to the delight of the hotels and any stalls selling tall drinks with ice in them. Everyone was up at dawn when it is (a) coolest and (b) we have several hours free before the first tourists come waddling over from the North Bay water-taxis with their tongues hanging out in the heat, fanning themselves with new straw hats that quite possibly say "I AM A MONG" in carefully untranslated Spontoonie.

We said farewell to Moeli and her family, who are heading out to less populated waters. Her new kitten is already swimming like a fish, and indeed the children of the Natives of No Island are born able to hold their breath. Unlike other mixes, one side of the family is wholly dominant which might be just as well considering the aquatic lives they lead. It was quite a sight to see half a dozen of them in the shallows off the far end of South Fluke where there is easily two hundred yards of open ground and no chance of anyone sneaking up with a camera. Still, while they are only exposed head and shoulders above water they would attract no attention as Spontoonies all spend a lot of time keeping cool this time of year. Moeli knows we will not be meeting again in quite awhile, and told me something that quite staggered me – the true facts about the strange seaplane fighter aircraft I saw two years ago, in the lava-tube base in Main Island. She says it is something I deserve to know.

I remember those aircraft well, as it is only in rather stressed situations I ever encountered them. One had taxied into the dock but I never saw where the pilot went to. I saw others at a great distance flying aerobatics that were the nearest thing to square corners in the sky I have ever imagined. They must have been radically unstable, impossibly so by any usual standards – and now I know how and why.

These aircraft are designed for the Natives of No Island to fly, and only they can fly them! The pilot in the secret base had simply slipped out over the far cockpit side into the water, making hardly a sound. I had noticed these folks' unbelievable reflexes before; if you try to play any ball game with them (the cubs have floating toys) you will lose; it is the sort of thing Nature is generous with when one's survival depends on being able to snatch a fish out of a wheeling shoal in the open water. With reflexes three times that of most furs and probably twice as fast as a shrew, they can fly an aircraft that otherwise would try to fall out of the skies in all directions at once, but which would snap into fairly impossible manoeuvres for anyone who could master it. The Wright brothers' first models were longitudinally unstable, but the avian brothers flew slowly and had far better reflexes than most furs. Despite predictions in the newspapers for 1908 of fifty-seat versions twenty years on, nobody flies aircraft of Wright Flyer layout any more.

Well. That is something Mr. Sapohatan has not told us – though indeed we have no need to know. Even if a prototype was stolen from the factory or crashed and was recovered at sea, no other nation has a suitable pilot. They would probably be quite puzzled at the details of the pilot's seat and controls, especially the rudder bar. In fact, it would be a flying death-trap for any test pilot, not that any outside perhaps Starling's Russia would step into one having looked at the stability. That infamous floppy-winged American fighter the "Christmas Bullet" they built several hundred of in the Great War would be a placid primary trainer by comparison, and the Gee Bee an airliner.

We waved farewell to Moeli, her husband and two children who probably do not appear in the family photograph album, not that photographs hold up well in the Spontoonie climate. Yet another departure. We really are getting thin on the ground, with Irma Bundt scheduled to be heading out this morning on a Lufthansa flight. We have her address in Switzerland, and may go that way en route to Italy this Summer, especially if I can meet my old school chum Mabel there as well. Still, everything is very tentative and it is no use making detailed plans. Madeleine X often boasted the French mobilisation plans for the Great War even listed troops

scheduled to be stopping off “10 minutes at Rouen station for a cup of coffee” on the way to the Front. Those plans did not take into account anything the enemy might unsportingly decide to do. Planning general capabilities and liabilities is more the Songmark way, such as not putting one’s fighting troops in bright red trousers and the officers in conspicuous white gloves.

Back to the Hoele’toemi compound for the regular routine of cleaning, working on the garden plots and generally living as Polynesians do across the Pacific whether or not they have Casino Island next door. Maria was off all morning taking care of some business at her embassy, and generally laying bait to see if the fish (Mr. Pettachi) are biting. The fact that she is the bait and has no real idea of how much she will get bitten, is something I have been telling her, and though she cheerfully acknowledges it she is going ahead regardless. There is generally nothing wrong with Maria’s common-sense, but once she gets an idea into her head “bullish” hardly begins to describe her. Very much her Uncle’s niece, and very unlike how she describes her sisters. Then, they had no interest in applying to Songmark.

It is ironic that just when I am leaving, I am enjoying the local poi again. I thought this was likely to happen, recalling last year. Poi is certainly a healthy food (as anyone could see by looking at the physique of the Spontoonies, even the species that do not eat fresh-caught fish) and one I am making the most of. A canned version would be possible but probably not sell too well; most Polynesians live in climates where the taro grows well enough to make it fresh daily, and nobody else would be interested except as a practical joke. Mind you, I know a shop on Casino Island that sells the Swedish fermented fish “Surstromming” and opening one of those tins would be a booby-trap in its own right. Tins are generally not meant to bulge.

I hope I have found someone to provide the sort of shock the Penningtons seem to need before I leave. Nuala Rachorska knows more about the insides of any fur’s mind than anyone I know except Saimmi, as indeed her profession requires it. After all, Kim-Anh is now a “huntress” and has the papers to prove it, so I should be able to call on Nuala for some professional advice even if it is not for myself.

I changed out of Native costume and went out to Casino Island with Miss Cabot, calling in at Countess Rachorska’s to drop off my note to Nuala (she naturally works late, and other furs’ luncheon is her breakfast time.) I picked up the rather nice dress I had commissioned last week; certainly the Countess has the finest seamstresses in the Pacific area. Even film stars on location in Hawaii send out for her designs.

I had time for tea and a long talk with the Countess herself, a most gracious lady. Everyone knows her story; it is her tragedy that although she managed to escape from the Reds in 1917, she fell into the paws of pirates when trying to reach Vostok from China (the Eastern end of the trans-Siberian railway and the border crossing was held by loyal White Russian forces till the middle of 1918). Though her mother naturally never talks about it, Nuala must be a pirate’s daughter; certainly civet cats are a Chinese rather than a European Russian species. Had the Countess been anything but a Countess she might have married anyway to perhaps a Spontoonie if not another exile, but she could hardly wed beneath her station and after her ... experiences the rather proud aristocracy on Vostok would rather look down on her. This may be why she stayed on Spontoon.

Certainly, if all the Russian aristocracy had been as efficient as Countess Rachorska in organising their nation’s industry and businesses I doubt Russia would have fallen flat in the Great War (or more accurately bled to death for want of bandages and first-aid skills). She employs a dozen Spontoonies full-time, and has the best reputation of any in the high fashion trade. One of her seamstresses is actually out in Hawaii right now measuring up a film starlet for a new outfit, as Rachorska designs refuse to accept anyone else’s measuring the customer. This is an expensive way to go about things, but the Countess assures me the return trip will be by ship rather than air, with the vital measurements telegraphed back here and the finished clothes delivered by air courier express by the time her seamstress gets back to Casino Island. Service like that is what makes a (high profile) business work, she believes.

Full holiday season on Casino Island is quite a sight. Every major dock has a tour boat tied up, generally busy with resupplying from the warehouses around the Western side of the island. Considering the boats might be at sea for a week doing the Spontoon run and back, the sheer quantities of food, fuel and general supplies an ocean liner needs are enormous. While their passengers are busy firing off miles of film at traditionally dressed Native girls and trying out the Crazy Golf and Barking Mad bowling greens, the crew hardly have much time to relax! Still, no doubt the trade is quiet enough in December.

As we were on Casino Island at luncheon, I treated Miss Cabot to coffee and cakes at Lingenthal’s, which is somewhere I have not been to in ages. It has a very pleasantly shaded garden and luxurious cakes the like of which Songmark girls dream about when faced with yet another bowl of unsweetened breadfruit mash for dessert. It still seems hard to believe that part of my life is over, and I can gorge myself on Black Forest Gateaux all I like. Mind you, we have learned moderation and staying in shape is certainly something to bear in mind now we are no longer jogging through the sand dunes with packs full of wet sand. One slice is a delightful treat once in a while, not a plate full every lunchtime.

Somebody I was not amazed to see there was Professor Schiller, who we have not met in months. He is as ever the soul of courtesy, and introduced me to a pair of his colleagues, Max and Moritz. I had an awful shock when I sat down – just as happened in Neue Suden Thule, with the skills Saimmi taught me I noticed they were both “detecting” flat out – I felt like a submarine being “pinged” by a pair of warships! Still, they were quite friendly and nice-looking canines, about a dozen years older than me and Miss Cabot and it hardly felt like a threat. It is interesting to know what sort of talents Professor Schiller has with him on Spontoon, and the other

places he goes when the Ahnenerbe get a scent of something worth chasing. Presumably they have not fallen for Beryl's "innocent" suggestion that the reason the Schillers have not found King Solomon's Mines are they have not looked in the obvious place, the Solomon Islands. It is no sillier an idea than the one I have heard that King Solomon was "naturally" of a Germanic tribe – as were most folk in the bible except presumably Herod, Pilate and Judas. Good Germans "could not possibly have" spent so many centuries worshipping anyone of Hebrew descent, so by deduction they did not. Hmm.

When I mentioned my travel plans, Professor Schiller very kindly invited me to visit him in Germany – he is heading back next week, along with his niece Eva for the summer. Considering the kind of invitation Antarctica turned out to be, I hesitated somewhat but decided Adventuresses need Adventure. Although I cannot give any dates, I happily made notes of his contact details.

The Professor noted wryly that his team are getting a lot more work these days. I suppose as their Chancellor looks as if he will not get the conventional resources he wanted for redecorating and expanding the "living room" or parlour of his Reich (it is no secret he dreamed of "unifying" Austria and had designs on Czechoslovakia to acquire more Germans and the land they stand on) he is looking to stranger forces to further his ambitions. This is definitely something a Warrior Priestess should be taking a look at. Having folk report to him on what was found under Antarctica would only encourage that; the fact that what was found below the ice was totally uncontrollable might point furs' thoughts towards there being similar powers available that can be used. Ioseph Starling would never know what hit him, having removed his pool of traditional guardians when he banned all forms of religion. Still, I would not bet tuppence on anyone defeating what we found under the ice with the traditional bell, book and candle approach. The archaeologists had the right sort of idea with those old (in fact pre-War) electric pentacles, but they proved wholly insufficient against what was unleashed there.

I recall my old school atlas having a world map with various symbols showing valuable resources; the tin of Cornwall and Malaya, the gold of Australia and South Africa and other such things. One imagines the new school editions (in Germany at least) having a new symbol for arcane and unnerving resources, probably looking squid-like on the map. Jane Ferris is from New England where they still understand such things and has mentioned that lone voice in the American parliament, Senator Lovecraft of Rhode Island who keeps trying to warn the world about such things and he may be proved quite right only when it is far too late.

Whether or not the Reich ever gets any useful capabilities from investigating such things, I fear they will lose a lot of rare talented furs in trying. Poking around in forbidden lands and cursed areas looking for ancient things locked away behind arcane seals for millions of years for very good reason is not a healthy activity, as Professor Schiller ruefully admits. Some of his former colleagues who physically survived their experiences are in early retirement in padded cells.

Back to Songmark for one last look around! We will have a lot to do on Friday and this is our last leisurely afternoon. It does feel strange. Luckily it was Saffina on the gate along with Kate, one of the girls in Florence's dorm and the year's only Australian. We were the only third-years around, which in a way was good. I imagined Zara last year sitting in her room for want of anywhere else to go – whether she actually did that I am not sure, but she was certainly on Spontoon after (not) graduating till she arranged our Albanian South Indies trip,

The rest of the second years are either off on exercises or getting in flying hours, presumably glad we are finally out of the way and Songmark's aircraft are free for them to use including my Sand Flea. I hope they take good care of it. Miss Cabot went with me on a tour of our old rooms, from the first and second years as we are quite entitled to. There I found rather a shock. Not just that the first-years now have bunk beds that we could really have used; getting dressed with four single beds taking three-quarters of the floor space required a lot of coordination even though none of my dorm have huge tails that tend to sweep tables bare in such cramped quarters.

In what was our room last year, although everything was as neat as Songmark rules insist, furs had the allowed personal items on their bedside tables. My attention was drawn to a neatly framed autographed picture and my tail bottled out as suddenly I recognised the subject – the wolfhound I had seen watching out on Meeting Island when those three Fenians tried to assassinate Judge Poynter! On the other table I noticed a very distinctive alarm clock; although Madeleine X famously kept her clock set on Parisian time, at least hers had only a standard dial and not a New Haven hundred-hour one. It hardly needed amazing sleuthing powers to deduce this room was where Red Dorm lay their heads at nights to scheme and dream of profitable crimes and bloody revolutions.

By the scent of the neighbouring bed the photograph goes with a canine admirer which in that dorm means Miss Mulvaney given the stray red fur shed on the pillow; Miss Morgenstern's fur is a rather dingy slate grey. Besides, I doubt the New Haven secret police are in the habit of giving away signed photographs, and Liberty has often denounced the "cult of personality" with the exception of her People's Hero Leon Trotsky. Now I have a name to go on, or at least a nom de guerre – the photograph was signed "Doctor Phil", which is not a name one can exactly look up in the telephone directory. Still, it is more information than I had before. Definitely Post Box Nine will want to hear about this!

There was nothing else incriminating in the room, and indeed I hardly expected there to be – anything obvious would probably be a booby-trap or red herring set out for Crusader Dorm to fall foul of. I will have to leave those two opposing dorms to their own devices, and hope none of the devices Alpha Rote builds are too

extreme. Spontoon had its geography radically altered once already in the Great Ritual that left the islands uninhabitable for centuries; once is quite enough.

I suppose it was too much to hope for to have an uneventful last look at Songmark; it is just a place where things happen. Generally to me. Still, I could hardly leave without a final look around. I have always regretted that at Saint Winifred's, although at the time I had no idea I would not be returning for the final terms. Having investigated the first-year rooms I can say they may have put new space-saving beds in but kept the mattress – decidedly adding insult to injury. Another generation of Songmark girls will arrive in September and lose all their enthusiasm for long lie-ins even if they were allowed the time for them. As our Saint Winifred's Domestic Sciences mistress used to say of food rather than sleep, "eat to live not live to eat" and certainly it takes an exhausted fur to enjoy the sleeping arrangements here. Maria always grumbled that the one good thing is if one falls out of bed onto the floor, it will not make much difference. I recall in our second year Carmen smuggling a thin air mattress into her room to be inflated after lights-out and deflated at first daylight, and she got away with it for several nights. Probably more as a reward for initiative than Miss Devinski genuinely not knowing what was happening. What Miss Devinski does not know about goings-on here could be written on the biggest speck of dirt in the Songmark kitchens.

So – farewell to Songmark! I confess to having rather a lump in my throat as we walked out of the gate for the last time. I suppose finding that photograph was one final bonus – what you don't know is very liable to hurt you. I recall Mr. Sapohatan musing that despite what various Ripping Yarns may say, being a secret agent has very little to do with skills concerning escape from locked rooms or taking on three larger furs with only a sharpened pencil – if things get that desperate something has gone awfully wrong. A good memory for names, voices and faces is a far better skill to have and one that may keep one out of trouble in the first place. Not that I have any ambition to be a Secret Agent, despite what Tatiana thinks. It was embarrassing when she asked if she could join my espionage cell as I have not got one, yet by definition I could not admit it if I had! It was like that classic trap line "have you given up cheating on your husband?" where neither yes nor no is a satisfactory answer for a wholly faithful wife.

I wonder if Major Hawkins had me in mind when he spoke of Vostok's "Akula" being a workable idea? No Government sent us to Macao, Antarctica or Kuo Han either, but we certainly reported back on what we found and we have received support from various unexpected directions. I could well believe some Akula do not even think of themselves as such. They do what they know is right and find training and other support somehow coming their way from an appreciative Government that does not like to show its paw too openly. Certainly it is something to think on.

Back to South Island for a relaxing afternoon working off the gateaux as we hoe and weed the garden patch! Mrs. H. says that although it is still high tourist season, the Althing is already drawing up plans for the coming Autumn when the waiters and bell-hops will be back home and needing another job. South Island has had its request for one of Professor Kurt's "Bio-reaktors" turned down as semi-industrial buildings with daily cart traffic hardly fit the image this island works hard to keep up, but Main Island is getting two of them, one on the plantations by the South-Western hook and the other near the delta of Sacred River. No more spectacular fires burning off the sugar plantation wastes after the harvest; all that will be dried and stored ready for the first hungry Bio-reaktor to start digesting. It is amazing what one learns on a Songmark course; last year we talked much with Professor Kurt whose obsession with the correct carbon-nitrogen ratio of his feedstock \* was probably no stranger than the aeronautical data we have learned by heart. Electrical power is needed these days to keep the lights of Casino Island shining and the radios playing, and more smoky coal-burning power station chimneys are decidedly not the way forward – especially as the nearest coal mine is on Tillamook.

\* Editor's note: C-N ratio of seaweed approximately 19:1, sugar cane residues 80:1 against the ideal composting mix of 30:1. Which may be useful to know one day, in a somewhat bizarre set of circumstances...

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

Decidedly damp, and not a day for gardening although the plants will appreciate the rain. I hope Helen and Marti have a snug hut in the Kanims, though indeed it is generally drier there away from the rain-inspiring Spontoon highlands. Mount Kiribatori and the rest of the ridge definitely generate a lot of their own weather.

The tourists on Casino Island can relax with their newspapers and listen to the hotel orchestra on damp days, but in a longhouse with the rain streaming off the thatch there is rather less to do. Depending on the company, of course. With Mrs. H there is always to learn about the islands, and about how to keep a longhouse tidy and well-run. She is very pleased at having gained Helen for a daughter, as technically she lost one when Saimmi became High Priestess and Moeli's kittens are not going to grow up in a longhouse. That leaves only Oiaroani of her actual daughters, and she has not lived at home for a long time. She says she misses having kittens in the place, and it is up to Helen and me not to disappoint her.

It was rather a wrench having to get back into Euro costume and trot over through the dripping forests to take the Penningtons over to meet Nuala on Casino Island where she has a plan arranged that might hopefully sort them out. These are things I could do jolly well without in my last days on Spontoon, especially a soaking wet one. The Songmark uniform is comfortable, sturdy and practical but nobody ever called it glamorous; most

furs tailored theirs more or less to try and improve its looks but as Helen says “you can’t polish a brick.” Missy K never bothered but with a figure like a Samoan wrestler she was proud of her filling out the costume.

I left them to it and met up with Maria – she has been told there are “important dispatches” arrived at her embassy and a personal new code book she has to sign for. Into the lion’s den, indeed as this looks very likely to be a ploy to get her captured. We both had a good luncheon in a restaurant by Ferry Square Market, not a tourist place but rather the sort of place the ship’s engineers and other respectable professional furs dine at. There is a definite lack of ornamental Tikis and “authentic” ceremonial masks on the wall, but the cost saved on décor is reflected in the menu price. In Maria’s case it might be her last decent meal in awhile. I tried one last time to talk her out of it, but it was no use.

Back to South Island, packing my bags for Friday! There is little to be pack, to be honest, and we have been accustomed to travelling light – as Mr. Phinneas Fog declared on completing his record-breaking round-the-world trip fifty years ago, “a well-used minimum suffices”. It is also a lot cheaper on air freight. I was amazed to see Miss Cabot trying on the maid’s outfit she very gladly took off after our Macao trip saying she never wanted to see it again – or at least, Molly did. Miss Cabot says a Lady should have at least one maid, and she was trained for the job at Madame Maxine’s. Which may be so, but is definitely nothing I ever expected to hear. Having got used to self-sufficiency at Songmark I do not need a maid as such, but on the other paw Lady Allworthy would be expected to have one and if we immediately start off across Europe I can hardly drag an untrained stranger with us fresh from the Hiring Fair. Modern high fashion is much easier to get into than the hook-and-eye back fastenings plus corsets previous generations had to cope with, but still needs looking after rather than just being thrown in the laundry basket as we have become accustomed to with our rugged Songmark outfits.

It was the last chance I will have in awhile to talk to Miss Cabot on her own; tomorrow night Helen will be back from honeymoon and then we will get ready to retrieve Maria. She is very keen on travelling and seeing the world – and she does want to see her adopted parents, the Cabot family. There is hardly time to track down Captain Granite’s sister on Casino Island before we go, but she wants to and we will give it a try tomorrow.

An early night, with little to do after singing Sunset Song. Sleep! It is a luxury we have learned to appreciate in the past three years, and once on our travels who knows what will happen. We could have returned to Songmark one more night just for the sake of it, but a Spontoonie bed is so much more comfortable even with the traditional wooden head-rests rather than pillows. Maria has not returned – so although Helen is presumably having a fine honeymoon, Maria is presumably having – rather less so.

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

A definitely brighter day, as indeed the Summer rains do more of a hit-and-run on Spontoon rather than the sustained barrages of Winter. I had sent off a postcard yesterday to this Mrs. Karla Gillium (Neé Cabot) care of the shipping agent her family is associated with on Casino Island, and just after breakfast I was called to the village telephone. Naturally it would not do to have scenic traditional longhouses festooned with telephone poles and wires, and the necessary links across South Island to public telephones, police shacks and such have the cables discreetly buried underground. Six feet deep with large concrete slabs on top and with plenty of slack in the cable loops to absorb the ground deformation of a nearby shell or bomb, just as I recall the layout specified in Father’s military engineering manuals for signals installation.

Molly had told me a few months ago of her interview with Mrs. Gillium at Song Sodas, where she rather shocked and horrified the poor vixen who had gone there expecting to meet some kind of saint whose love had pointed her erring pirate sister back towards salvation, as the Sunday-school texts would put it. Not that I recall any Sunday-schools quite mentioning what Molly and Captain Granite were doing, let alone recommending it as any sort of salvation. Prudence and co would beg to differ, no doubt.

Anyway, Casino Island seemed the place to meet, and on such a day the Rainbow Bridge is a rendezvous that nobody can mistake. According to the films, it should be full of secret agents hiding “in plain sight” dressed as tourists and postcard-sellers. I suppose one should not get too twitchy and start imagining them all over the place – except we have reliable word that on Vostok a quarter of the population are spies of one persuasion or another if only to the extent that all churchgoers were expected to keep a sharp eye out for heretics and denounce them to the Inquisition. The key to recognising them supposedly is to drop a harmless piece of paper and see who jumps at it – except a park keeper, though secret agents can be disguised as them too.

We reached Casino Island without incident, and indeed we were somewhat early. Punctuality is another ingrained Songmark habit that will probably stick with us for life. I took the chance to relax on one of the benches and use one of the rituals Saimmi taught to focus on finding Maria. She is definitely alive, nearby and Helen and I could find her even if we did not have a good idea where she is being held.

Miss Cabot woke me from my trance to indicate the arrival of someone she recognised, and I recognised a vixen wearing respectable Euro dress from her description. Or nearly so: Mrs. Gillium was very large with cub when Molly met her awhile ago, and now she is happily pushing a perambulator.

It was a strange meeting; I explained more or less what had happened to Molly, and that she is not exactly the person either Mrs. Gillium or her sister met before. Miss Cabot remembers everything Molly did but thinks quite differently about it. Certainly she was recalling that Captain Granite took pity on her and arranged

the possibility of her escape – with a crew like the Three Moons had, any open show of weakness such as just letting her go was nothing even Captain Granite could afford to risk. Given an unlocked cell door and land a mile and a half away, a Songmark girl needs no more to make a breakout.

It was certainly an interesting morning. I rather got the impression that Mrs. Gillium thinks her adoptive cousin (Molly having oddly enough being adopted as Granite's daughter rather than wife despite what they did) is much improved since their first meeting, and was very keen to telegraph back to Boston for her mother to expect to see her. Molly's adopted grandmother? This IS getting confusing. She cautioned that the American police have been enquiring whether Miss Cabot and Molly Procyk were in fact the same doe – the claim has been denied, but getting through the main Customs shed in Boston might be difficult with a posse of determined G-men sniffing for gangster does. "Jumping ship" from the commercial CA60 when it refuels at Disko Island before strolling across the Baffin Bay territory and in towards Boston through the lax Canadian border might be possible but would take a great deal of time.

I must say the Gilliums are a thorough couple, though as they are in the shipping profession that is nothing too surprising. They had heard of Megan, Captain Granite's other "girlfriend" who lives in the bush on Main Island. More than that, they engaged a lady Guide who then spent two days searching till Megan was found so they could meet her. She is not much of a conversationalist but very friendly despite that, one might say. It was rather a shock to the Gilliums meeting her especially considering she is not the only one to have been left in that state – though possibly the only one still surviving.

Mrs. Gillium seemed a most respectable vixen indeed. It came as something of a shock when her cub woke up and she proudly showed it to us – to judge from appearances her husband is evidently a feline. She must have spotted my reaction, as she gently pointed out that was one of the reasons they had moved to Spontoon while the howls of anguish from high on Boston hilltops subsides a little. I suppose it is rather odd to think about it – the more traditional folk dislike her and her own husband having children, but had she selected a suitably handsome young Todd-fox to give her a pedigree cub nobody would raise an eyebrow. It would have been listed as her husband's on the pedigree and birth certificate and that would be that, as tradition dictates.

Actually, it is a fairly unusual family in that feline males tend to be perceived as ... incompatible with non-feline girls. A Todd-fox groom and a feline bride must be ten times commoner a combination; a feline girl is generally adaptable to most other types – for which I am grateful – but others find feline males too abrasive to ever get accustomed to, not referring to their personality.

I can imagine the new Miss Cabot getting along well with the rest of her adopted family; Captain Granite had no children (not surprisingly, given her tastes). I hardly liked to mention that if there is any way of getting Molly Procyk back I will do so. I have talked this over with Helen and Saimmi but not with Miss Cabot, who does not feel there is anything wrong with her. She has shown no signs of wanting to set anything on fire or use up any ration of unused ammunition she feels Songmark owes her, and did not turn a whisker when I told her I would be donating my T-Gewehr rifle to Songmark. It is technically mine after all, and not the sort of thing one wants to explain to Customs officials! Besides, finding the ammunition would be exceedingly difficult away from Rain Island whose engineers seem to be reverse-engineering it and indeed producing updated versions.

It was a pleasant two hours chat, and if at all possible we will visit the Cabot family in Boston in a week or two. I confess my ears dipped somewhat as a few possibilities crossed my mind – what if Miss Cabot wants to stay in Boston with her new family? I could hardly drag her away with me, and indeed she has nothing to return to in Spontoon. There are dangers wherever she goes and whatever she chooses. After tomorrow she will no longer be a Songmark girl and reverts to her previous citizenship; if J. Edgar Hoover wanted to snatch her off Casino Island there is little even Mr. Sapohatan could do; at least he would be hard pressed to legally prevent it. It may be just as well we will be a "moving target" for awhile.

Our last leisurely afternoon on Spontoon! Four tickets are all ready for us at the Shawnee Pacific Airpaths terminal, and we have our bags packed and ready to go. I even managed to wrap up one more loose end, having checked with Nuala that the Penningtons are suitably ... taken care of. I think after their experiences with Nuala and friends they will be staying well clear of the Kuo Han embassy. It is awfully embarrassing that folk come to me for solutions to such problems – it was bad enough with Florence Farmington who is staying on Spontoon this Summer working as a pilot for that severe mare Nikki.

Being respectably dressed in the Euro style Miss Cabot and I passed for tourists and some Spontoonies (more likely seasonal workers from the Kanims or somewhere, who do not know us) even offered to sell us souvenirs! I must be one of the very few folk who can actually read the inscription on the straw hats offered me – though my ears blushed when I saw the one selected. "*Hot tail - would set a grass skirt on fire*" is possibly a complement, certainly far more so than most of the inscriptions in stock, but I declined to buy. Probably the vendor had been following my gaze and reaction to the limbo dancers performing on the sea front to a shocked and delighted crowd. It is quite a sight, but not one that one would send accurate postcards of home – unless of course it was respectably labelled "ethnographic research" when anything goes. Rather in the way some jolly strange film plots can be presented as "classical" to get around the strictures of the Hayes Office, providing it was originally written in Latin or Greek. Cecil "Beady" Milne produced that rather infamous tale about a Roman equine who upsets the Gods and was transformed into a non-anthrop form, although it was not as severe a curse as it might have been; he remained what one could call a popular and handsome fur in whichever shape.

Although we turned down the straw hats, we did take in more of the tourist experience watching a matinee at the Coconut Shell. I recall back in September watching that extremely funny Whitehall farce where Jasbir danced in the chorus-line suitably disguised with fur-dye and a disposable identity to avoid the official veto our Tutors had put on her stage ambitions. After all, Songmark has a reputation to maintain and a provider of chorus-girls is not it. Today there was a similar revue show, titled "*They even stole the Detective!*" One assumes Crusader Dorm will not be watching it, except perhaps to take notes and criticise.

I must say, it was splendid to be able to relax and just let other furs entertain us. It is only beginning to dawn on me just how hard we have been working; comparing ourselves with the furs around us who have strolled off a tour-boat after a week's voyage sun-bathing in deck chairs and whose most critical decision of the day is which restaurant they will be dining at, I feel definitely foreign. Father often mentioned that returning troops in 1918 had grave difficulty adjusting to a peacetime life especially those who had joined up straight from school and had known no other life but the army. Now I can quite understand it - although I would be surprised if our next year will be particularly peaceful.

Some things have certainly stayed the same since our first year; on the way back to the ferry slip I saw again that Agnostic missionary preaching to an enthralled if puzzled-looking crowd. It must be a thankless mission, to go about the world spreading doubt and uncertainty to replace Faith in whatever furs believe in. Still, his argument that much of the world's main religious persecutions were caused by furs blindly believing in whatever they were told. Had the Conquistadores been more equivocal about who was in the right, there might be Aztec pyramids holding traditional style worship in many a European city to this day. Hmm.

A final leisurely Nootnops Blue for two at the Topotabo Hotel on the way back, then home to Haio Beach for supper. At least a few things got done today - though we are planning on an early night and plenty of sleep. Tomorrow should be - back to interesting times, as the Chinese call them.

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

Dear Diary - looking at the last thing I wrote last night, it seems I may be getting somewhat better at predictions. Then, considering we were due to rescue Maria anyway, it is hard to imagine it having been less than dramatic.

All started calmly enough with a few hours working the Hoele'toemi garden patch in the cool of the morning with no tourists to distract us. Helen and Marti arrived about ten, Helen looking suitably radiant. I felt a twinge in the pit of my stomach as I reminded myself that I am taking her from Marti to the far side of the world, even if she did volunteer. Seeing her happy and (she believed) with nothing worse to do today than pick up her pack and head over to the airport, I really hated to spoil her mood.

After about half an hour I braced myself and told her of Maria's decision, and that we were due to rescue her today. Helen gave a long-suffering look, sighed and remarked that we had better get to it. After our hunt for the Penningtons she says she is getting used to the idea, but hoped Maria had more sense after three years at Songmark. Some things one should not have to get used to, she says, and I can hardly disagree.

After some discussion we decided to take Miss Cabot with us. Molly would have relished the idea of kicking down doors and perhaps doing some wholesale demolition of unlicensed cellars. This one had been built by brought-in labourers from Italian Somaliland, who had (Maria discovered once she knew it existed) been paid with funds "diverted" from another budget and then returned straight back not even knowing where in the world they had been for three weeks, never having been allowed outside the Embassy grounds.

As grass skirts and flower leis are not the best outfits for such a mission, we slipped back into our Songmark fatigue outfits, unmarked heavy canvas with steel-lined boots that can resist having an engine-block fall on them. It felt jolly hot in them crossing back to the slips after wearing Spontoonie costumes since we finished term. Marti accompanied us - certainly as Helen's husband he has every right to, and he will be parting with his bride all too soon as it is. He rather joked that he had never seen Helen in action before, although she has told him everything we have done including putting our Warrior Priestess training to use.

Once on Meeting Island the first problem was getting into the Embassy. Most of the staff do not know Maria is in there, so we can hardly just ask to see her - the only ones who know she is there have excellent reason to deny it, and Embassies are sovereign territory so without risking a diplomatic incident the Althing itself would have trouble in getting us in there officially. There are occasions when Plan A is hardly worth bothering with. Three years at Songmark have taught us a lot about getting over walls quietly, and we had the help of a very comprehensive sketch map of the Embassy and grounds Maria made me before heading over that way. We also have a general idea of where this hidden cellar is; close enough for counter-mining (as Father would say) but exactly how one gets there is another matter. Getting Maria out safely would not be served by countermining and "searching" with a few hundred pounds of Lyddite.

Technically speaking we were breaking and entering, so it was prudent to put our flying goggles on as a basic disguise just in case anyone spots us, or against glass splinters in case we had to break through any windows. While Marti kept watch outside we found our way over the ten-foot wall at the back and soon were in the Embassy compound. Maria's map was accurate, and we found a spot behind the kitchen block where nobody would see us unless they came right round the corner. Then it was time for me and Helen to go to work.

With the rituals we had used in Kuo Han, we soon located Maria's trail - it was rather like seeing the moon behind thick cloud in that one cannot exactly spot it but the direction is clear enough. It was localised by a

twenty foot concrete paved area that the map says is used for taking the (small) parades of guards assigned to the Embassy. At first it was hard to spot any particular traces but then I found a trail leading to a blank area of concrete paving with slabs about a yard across.

Although Miss Cabot is not Molly, she is equally practical and perfectly adept at using the professional burglar's folding crowbar that Molly has put to so many uses over the years. Twenty seconds of probing for the catch and a determined heave had the trapdoor open, a rather well-engineered double hinge with counterweight that opened almost silently – and five seconds later we were all in.

Twenty minutes later we were out again and helping Maria back over the fence. Hmm. It was a good thing we had thought to bring spare clothes for her, and indeed a set of cotton overalls packs down into one of our pockets. The first-aid kit was little needed though indeed a paraffin burn dressing and various dabs of tincture of iodine over scrapes and chafing were the best we could do until we got her to a doctor.

Actually Mr. Pettachi was in need of far more medical aid than Maria, by the time we left him. I think the worst blow was to his pride – when we had unfastened Maria she looked at him critically and announced that if that had been the best he could do in two days, he should give up altogether. She followed that by a somewhat roundhouse kick that added injury to insult, in the appropriate place and had him keel over with agony while we left.

There is a handy compound of bungalows not too far off, the McGee “resort” that does rooms by the day and I had noted it as a possible place to repair to for ... repairs, assuming Maria had been a stretcher case. She was not walking too well, being very stiff from her confinement and her branded rump rather painful with clothing pressing on it. Helen had suggested we use the brand on its owner, as indeed it is his family crest. It is a good thing he had not done much more to Maria, as with two Warrior Priestesses extremely angry at him we could have left either his mind or body in screaming pieces. I would not have liked to do that, but I can all too easily imagine it being ... justified, after what we saw on Kuo Han. Warrior Priestesses do not have to fill in paperwork when they must act as judge and jury (or if needs be executioner, as with that Dark Priestess) but as long as Saimmi would have been happy with our actions, we have a fairly free paw.

An hour later we were set up in the McGee Resort, with Maria thoroughly washed and lying on her front. It was rather a relief – first that she was not more injured, and that she had crossed that experience off her list. One cannot say Mr. Pettachi was unimaginative, whatever else one might call him. I think the domestic cowbell Maria was wearing as her sole outfit was a rather amusing touch, and he would have had to send for that all the way from Europe. The unused dairy equipment was another piece of detailed advanced planning, and indeed there are herbs which could have had it put to use in a few weeks. Probably two days' feeding on them will be too little to show any effect.

One annoying thing was the doctor prescribed at least two day's bed rest. There goes our schedule! Obviously Maria will not be sitting down for awhile, not even in the luxurious wicker seats of the Caproni CA60 crossing the pole in the Midnight Sun. While Dr. Riverstone treated Maria I went out to cash in our tickets for a refund, and to tell Mrs. Hoele'toemi we would be around awhile longer.

We had just delivered our news and changed into Native dress when Povo'he, a South Islander we know from the Guide's school, arrived with a message for me. It never rains but it pours! He had a request for Maria and for Lady Allworthy, of an official Italian party just having arrived and with orders to see us. What Povo've added was what really had my ears going up – they arrived in a very nice new Cant 506 tri-motor floatplane with not just the expected Italian markings but something else on the fuselage – the Allworthy coat of arms!

Definitely this will need investigating, and the one advantage of Maria delaying us is we have some time. The place to meet is Song Sodas; I have reason to believe that anything that happens there will be known to certain people, and though I may not be a graduate I have no objection to Miss Devinski keeping up with developments. So Miss Cabot phoned to reserve us a room, while I quizzed Povo've about the Italians. Three wolves in Reggio Aeronautica uniforms, mid-ranking or junior ranking by his description. I doubt even Spontoon Guides memorise all European rank badges, but he can certainly describe them over the telephone to someone on Main Island who is flipping through the relevant reference books. Probably the library is secure under two yards of coral sand and a yard of concrete in a “typhoon shelter”, would be my guess.

Having made arrangements at the Eastern Island end we decided to take a look ourselves. Staying in Native dress was cool and saved time changing, plus the officers would presumably be expecting a Euro dressed Lady Allworthy, in Songmark dress or something more fashionable. Fifteen minutes later we were back over by North Bay and spotted the wolves in question relaxing on the terrace bar of the Topotabo Hotel as Povo've passed on our message. Then it was a matter of getting on the water taxi ahead of them, which proved no problem.

It might be true enough that the Italians were more relaxed in front of two apparent Native girls and would let slip things they would not have said in front of Lady Allworthy – unfortunately they spoke in Italian, so it was rather hard to be sure. I knew there had to be a flaw in the plan. We were first off the boat and vanished around the corner while they were still asking directions, so were in Song Sodas five minutes ahead of them. Rather a shock for three wolves, who by their tone and gaze had been admiring us rather volubly in our Native costume!

Oh my. It seems I have an embarrassment of riches. I had spotted the seaplane moored by the slipway, with the Allworthy markings on it – it turns out it is mine, as it was ordered by Lord Leon shortly before he was

arrested. There was delay in filling the order (The Italian Navy demanded all their order filled first) and then more delay while furs wrangled over whether to deliver it to me or just impound it as “undeliverable.” Three engines (radials, alas) and a very streamlined fuselage supported on elliptical wings, all in all rather resembling a DC-2 on floats. My paws were somewhat trembling as I signed the contract delivery note!

Of course, while very welcome this is yet more of a change in our plans. To get to Boston and Europe in a floatplane without going over the pole (the Cant has no skis to refuel at Byrd Field on the Magnetic pole unlike the Caproni CA60 we had booked on) will be tricky. We could go via the Abyssal Sea route and cross at Panama and up through the Caribbean and up the coast of the American South, but J. Edgar Hoover is waiting with G-Men in every port for Molly Procyk. The alternative route is presumably through Rain Island and Canada, where there are plenty of lakes but fewer with fuel and supplies and many wide areas of mountain and prairie we could not land on. Still, that is just a matter of the right maps and planning, something we are good at now.

Apparently the Italians are not just here to deliver an aircraft (they could have had it ferried to Barrow-in-Furriness to await me and still fulfilled their contract) but to deliver certain items and information to Maria. That should not be much of a problem; she is not sedated or anything, and is not going anywhere tonight. On her behalf we agreed a meeting for the evening and left - my heart skipping a beat when Captain Madaffari handed over the manuals (in English) and registration documents for the aircraft. I did ask how they were getting home having disposed of their transport, but the Captain assures me it is all planned.

My ears had been down when I signed away to Songmark my old Sand Flea. But this is something decidedly more useful! Definitely it would have been an offer I cannot refuse, and had they been a day later and Maria uninjured I would have missed it. I hardly know what would have happened then, but arranging everything via telegrams would have been jolly awkward. It would have been such a shame had I been unable to use it, and for the three officers to ferry it half-way around the world for me to just sell such an aircraft. It would have cost a lot to keep stored and maintained for however months until our return, and having seen Angelica Silfverlindh’s “Silver Angel” parked up on a beach for so long I would not want to do that to any aircraft of mine. Especially as the Cant’s airframe contains a lot more wood and canvas than Angelica’s shiny machine.

The first stop was to the airstrip administration building where I filed the registration papers under Spontoon law, which might turn out to be very useful. Then with the keys and manual we went out to inspect the 506 – an impressive aircraft indeed! It has the unheard-of luxury of a shower and a large bed onboard, definitely sized to suit Lord Leon Allworthy and company. My ears blushed furiously thinking that the company specified in the customised design might have been me. The Italian air-furs who delivered it were wolves like him although he weighed about as much as any two of them, and had a long flight with plenty of time to speculate about that.

We could have spent all afternoon examining the 506 but had to get back to Meeting Island and tell Maria and Helen the news. They were suitably impressed, and Helen started sketching out routes on the spot. It will take a few days getting familiar with the aircraft before we can contemplate heading East, as only Maria of us has flown any tri-motor before let alone this model and she is the one who is least able to help right now.

Back into Euro costume for the “formal” interview in the evening. Miss Cabot seems happy with the role of maid and dressed appropriately. I cannot help but think that had it been Molly with us this morning Mr. Pettachi would have ended up entirely minus ears and tail, rather than just having it broken in four places. He may lose it anyway without expert medical help, but I will not be shedding any tears about that. Miss Cabot is as absolutely competent as Molly ever was, but does not seem to get excited by razor edged saw-backed bayonets. Most furs would think this an improvement.

It most have been a day of shocks for Captain Madaffari and his comrades – first they discovered the two “Native girls” they had been admiring were me and Miss Cabot, and then they get to see us more or less as we plan to appear in Europe, without the flower leis but wearing a lot more. Actually the total weight is probably less; a grass skirt strong enough to avoid “in-flight structural failure” while dancing a vigorous hula is rather heavier than a single layer silk Rachorska design. They had half an hour’s interview with Maria, with Miss Cabot as “Chaperone”. I was somewhat busy with Helen looking through the flight manuals and making rough calculations of range which will determine the route we can take.

It felt jolly odd, the idea of Maria needing a chaperone. Even in her present state I would bet money on her unarmed against any two of those wolves if it came to it although they are serving military officers. We will have to adjust back to Euro social standards if only to be able to take furs by surprise should we need to. I have been doing my best for three years to educate the rest of my dorm, though with Molly and Helen’s previous standard of schooling it was always going to be hard work. Just spelling simple sentences I recalled from my school books such as “Catalogues of sulphur-coloured aluminium ploughs” caused them all sorts of trouble.

Although Mr. Pettachi was left in no condition to do more than moan for help (we left the secret door open so someone will surely have noticed and investigated by now) there is always a chance he can order revenge. I recall Kuo Han where Molly and I fought off those three highly acrobatic masked oriental felines oddly dressed in black with unusual traditional weapons who were trying to assassinate Lin Chung. On Spontoon we cannot guarantee such things are unknown, so decided to stay with Maria. The McGee resort is the sort of place where the owner looks out for her guests and if there are any suspicious strangers “casing the joint” she will know what to do.

A rather guarded evening, with Helen initially in rather a foul mood. I can hardly blame her; if we are delayed she could have at least spent more time with her husband. In fact Miss Cabot pointed out there was no

reason not to, as an extra pair of sharp ears is always an asset. One telephone call to South Island, an extra room for the night and Marti rejoined us. Like all the Hoele'toemi family he served in the Guides, and needed very little explained as to the situation. So Helen at least should have a relaxing time of it – if relaxing is the word!

Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

A day that we have all inked in our diaries for a very long time – a week after our Songmark course officially ends, we lose our joint Spontoon citizenship (well, all of us except for Helen, and Prudence too. We have not seen Prudence this week; she is presumably off on honeymoon herself with Tahni). That final week was supposed to give us protection as we clear up loose ends and scatter across the planet heading home, possibly passing through debatable territories. Had we travelled back via somewhere suspicious and officious such as Vostok, officials who might have issues with our main nationalities would think twice about troubling a joint Spontoonie citizen if only for the quantity of paperwork involved. Indeed, on our original schedule right now we should be passing the North Pole at three thousand feet in a Caproni CA60 with the Nimitz Sea far behind us and the next stop Disko Island where the Natives perform such quaint folk dances under the flashing lights of the aurora in winter-time.

To our relief there were no hired assassins coming in through the windows or roof last night, and after a night's rest on mild medication Maria announced that fully armed she was quite capable of handling any that made the attempt. Marti volunteered to stay around in the morning, which left me with Helen and Miss Cabot free to make our plans. Tuesday was the day we decided on, which is rather minimal to get the feel of a new aircraft let alone to start off a round-the-world flight in it – but the sooner we become moving targets the better, especially since losing the last legal privileges and protections of Songmark. In fact, as soon as the offices opened we had to get three-week visas like any tour-boat tourist, at the end of which we are liable to be deported! That idea was rather a shock to the system, I must admit. One gets rather used to being a Spontoonie.

The formalities of getting seaplane slip space for the 506 completed (much helped by its Spontoonie registration which saved me a lot of money) we got busy on learning the aircraft from tail aerial to front propeller spinner. Lunch was a rapid affair at the seaplane snack bar, then by two we fired up the engines and began taxiing around the central waters getting the feel of the controls. By two we had our first flights, half an hour each around Main Island. I must say, even for such a large aircraft the 506 handles superbly! I could find no real “vices” in any normal flight, and indeed we are not likely to put it to aerobatic tests. Folk say that the Italians tend to build tri-motors since most of their commercial engines have poor weight performance, but the 506 seems perfectly lively.

By four o'clock we had added an hour's flight apiece in our logbooks including two takeoffs and landings. That was quite enough for the day; while Helen started ordering in fuel, maps and supplies at the airport servicing area I arranged to have the Italian registration on the wings and fuselage replaced by a Spontoon one for our trip. The Allworthy family crest is to go too – it is a pity, as some Italian artisans evidently worked hard on getting it just right. Still, Captain Madaffari had mentioned the reaction it got in New Penzance from folk who recognised it and the Allworthy reputation, and it would be about as welcome in some parts of the world as a Red star in Germany or a modern German runic registration in New South Zion! Spontoon registration will at least be a treat for any keen young pups aircraft-spotting on our trip, as there are not many seen outside the Nimitz Sea area. Even the airlines that fly through here tend to be registered by their head offices in Rain Island, America or Hawaii.

Helen has managed to get the relevant detailed navigation charts all the way across to Rain Island, and basic ones all across to Boston. The problem with the Cant is its lack of wheels to land on a runway, which rather cuts down our options especially over the great prairies. We could take a route far North across Canada where there are more lakes, but there are fewer fuelling depots there and we would be a very long way from help if things went wrong. In Europe there should be no problem; the latest issues of the air press have articles showing the new terminal at the converted gravel pits of Heathrow near London, with two thousand feet of sheltered water. In fact it is too sheltered some days, and furs are experimenting with wave machines at one end to help a heavily-laden passenger aircraft “unstuck.”

It is amazing what one sees presented as Pulp Magazines. Some of these are presumably bought by their target professions, such as “*Weird Tales of sheet-metal polishing*”, but others are not. I doubt there is enough of a native audience to support “*Sixty-foot apes and the women who love them*” \* even if it does boast articles describing “those physical marriage problems solved, with practical advice and tasteful line illustrations.” Then again, nobody would think of the career listed in “*Soldier of Misfortune*” as anything to aim for.

Back to Meeting Island, somewhat worried about having left Maria behind. Still, we are fairly sure nobody saw her arrive at the McGee resort and we have never used the place before so it is not one of our usual haunts. Marti is watching out, and Mrs. McGee is a definitely formidable bovine lady who would probably take suitable action against any hostile trespassers after her guests. I heard from Major Hawkins about the events with Tatiana and Millicent awhile ago where the Italian Embassy organised an assassin. That fur will not be troubling anyone further, but it shows they keep such folk on their books and are prepared to use them.

Happily, Maria was all right though rather chafing with inactivity and understandably annoyed at not getting her share of the flying today. Her mood improved as we handed her the charts and plans for the voyage, which is something she can work on.

Although she does not tell us everything, Maria had a lot to say about the information and instructions the Reggia Aeronautica officers had brought her. The good news is that she is not commanded straight into her Uncle's presence, though he wants her in Europe by the end of the month. We are mentioned as well – Maria has somewhat hinted to her Uncle that we have some abilities that are not mentioned in the Songmark Prospectus and if there is no conflict of interest with Spontoon, Il Puce would appreciate our opinions on “certain situations.” Possibly situations not unlike what we found in Antarctica. Although Maria has stopped thinking of us as “witches” she hints that the Church there would not take kindly if they knew what we do and how. They have even been saying unkind things about how Archbishop Crowley has reformed the Church of England, even though the Bible says in very clear detail exactly what sort of blood sacrifices and burned offerings are compulsory. The book of Leviticus, as I remember from Sunday school.

Maria mentions that the full technology exchange with Vostok is proving rather useful to both sides with Vostok benefiting from Italian design flair and Italy improving its efficiency. Vostok and Italy are no sort of territorial threat to each other (the closest Italian possession to Vostok is Italian Somaliland, and nobody much wants that by all accounts) but have similar outlooks and share many enemies. It is a complex world, Maria says, where countries such as Vostok and Japan are both in the anti-Comintern pact despite being close to a shooting war with each other – Italy and Germany are often on much the same footing no doubt much to Ioseph Starling's relief and amusement.

It was a pity that we missed our last chance to get to the Casino Island dance school, but Maria is not up to it right now and certainly we needed to start learning to fly the Cant 506. Definitely a busy day - and considering the most strenuous thing we did was an hour and a half apiece at the controls, distinctly tiring. Time to rig the usual traps around doors and windows and grab a good night's sleep while we can. The compound seems secure and short of someone knocking on the door with a howitzer, about as safe as we can make it. Tomorrow should be interesting.

\* (Editor's Note: the radically different 1936 re-make of “Proletariat Kong” with its surprise happy ending involving a Skull Island wedding scene seems to have inspired a good deal of... social experimentation.)

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

A fine warm day and one that we definitely used to the full. Maria is walking more comfortably than she sits down, so getting across on a water taxi to the Eastern Island seaplane slips was not much of a problem. Having fuelled the 506 we improvised a “bombardier's couch” with blankets for her to lie on her front, and so managed to kill two birds with one stone. There was no point in paying for water-taxis to South Island when we have a much faster way of getting to Haio Beach now, and need flight time. Of course that would hardly be much of a test flight, so we diverted via Bell's Pyramid, that seabird-covered rock fifty miles out that just sits on the edge of the local chart. The 506 flies very nicely, though in the cockpit it is a lot noisier than Songmark's Junkers 86 what with the third engine in the nose. A third engine at least gives us more safety margin if one fails in flight; half way across the Pacific it would be hard to keep flying on half power but more hopeful on two-thirds especially if we have burned a lot of fuel off. Of course, if there is an engine fire it is rather better to know it is back in the wings rather than a few inches away from our paws on the far side of a firewall we have not put to the test. Italian Schneider Trophy aircraft do seem to burn disconcertingly easily, but any lightweight magnesium airframe packed with the highest possible energy fuel and the minimum of heavy safety features would.

By ten we were touched down in the lagoon and drawing quite a crowd. The South coast of South Island has no official facilities for anything but canoes to beach, but we made good use of the sand anchors and by now we should certainly not get surprised by the tides around here. While Helen, Marti and I went up to the Hoele'toemi compound Miss Cabot put in some more hours flying with Maria navigating.

Saimmi had a surprise for me – she says the one good thing about our being held up with Maria is I now have time to spend my night on Sacred Island as Helen did before her wedding. Just to doubly shock me, it is tonight! I will need to be a fully paid-up Warrior Priestess considering the places she has seen me going in her fires, she says. Certainly I need all the qualifications I can get.

All other plans were suddenly off as I prepared the rituals, breaking only for a substantial luncheon with Mrs. H (I expect I will always think of her as such although now of course Helen is a Mrs. Hoele'toemi as well.) A Warrior Priestess has fewer traditions for her rituals than a regular one and although Saimmi freely admits she is making some of them up, at least the details are ones she feels right rather than having being passed down across the generations on conditions that were very different and might not really apply. After all, the previous generation of Warrior Priestesses gave their lives four hundred years ago protecting the survivors from what the catastrophically unsuccessful Great Ritual had unleashed, of which the changes to the landscape were far the less dangerous part.

It is definitely our last chance for many things – for the first time in ages I met that strange ex-Japanese priestess Oharu whom Saimmi had summoned from her remote spot on Main Island. I had heard that aside from Tatiana's wedding she had been forbidden by Saimmi to contact any of the Songmark girls – which had been much to Molly's approval. Now term is over that no longer applies. In fact she is getting a lot more contact

with one of us than I had thought – she and Belle are getting married! I congratulated her of course; I have not seen any of Prudence's dorm in awhile. That will make five Songmark girls who are married that way, considering Nancy and Alpha Rote are married to each other under Cranium Island rules (which may or may not mean a lot considering the "ruling elite" of that island are reputed to be absolutely screaming mad.) I am still convinced worldwide that the interest of such things is at most one in several hundred girls, but of course Songmark scarcely takes an average student.

What Saimmi had brought Oharu down specifically for was to take another look at Miss Cabot and see what might be done for her. She has taken Miss Cabot to Main Island previously, but says she has contemplated some ideas since then. Saimmi herself looked in detail as soon as we returned from Kuo Han and could not undo what happened to her there, but we have often heard that Oharu is from a very different arcane tradition and has some other directions to approach seemingly impossible problems from. Even Mount Kiribatori can be climbed easily enough from the right side by the right paths. She took Miss Cabot off for the evening to see if anything could be done – I hardly see how, we have only one doe and Miss Cabot is her. I had visions of them "hot-bunking" a body as sailors on different watches take turns with limited bed space. How one would change shifts might be a matter of some argument. It is tricky enough with my "being" Kim-Anh Soosay but at least that was my idea and I could drop that role should I ever wish to. Anyway, Saimmi says this is the last halfway good chance they may ever get. If Miss Cabot chooses to stay with the Cabot family and never return to Spontoon, let alone more unfortunate possibilities Saimmi will doubtless have seen in her fires, this really will be the last chance.

Then – it was a matter of my getting down to serious ritual preparation for tonight. Not something that can be easily written down, not even in Lexarc shorthand! I am to travel to Sacred Island alone and unaided; Helen happily loaned me the canoe made for her and Marti as a wedding present. Crossing the open waters alone is liable to be the very least of it.

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July, 1937

Dear Diary: I might not have "graduated" from Songmark but at least I have passed this exam – even though there is no certificate to go with it. What happens on a Priestess's night on Sacred Island is apparently different in detail for everyone – except that one is tested within an inch of one's life and soul. When I finished at sunrise after the longest night of my life, Saimmi revealed that although no Priestess sends any candidate here if she sees any flaw within her, still about one in thirty lose their lives or their sanity even nowadays. Saimmi says that has not happened since she became High Priestess, and having heard tales from Huakava she rather dreads the first time it will happen to someone she sends (and it will, sooner or later. Songmark has not yet had a fatal air crash either, but one day that is sure to happen. It did to the Ave Argentum this Summer but they never had a wonderful safety record even before coming here.) The new Priestess having to return unaided to the main Spontoon shores afterwards is something of a safety test, helping ensure nobody of fractured mind but possibly awakened powers gets back to trouble the population.

Actually, when I got home to the Hoel-toemi compound to find everyone waiting me with congratulations, all I really wanted to do was throw myself down in a darkened hut and sleep – I felt rather the way we did on our return from the Aleutians, though at least freezing fur was not involved this time. I was in something of a turmoil and badly needed the sleep to settle myself. Any wisecracking tourist opening the rattan blinds of a certain "quaint Native hut" and disturbing my rest with a camera flash would I fear have rather more happen to them than they deserved and a lot more than the Tourist Board would like.

Happily, I slept well till midday and was much refreshed. When I awoke Miss Cabot was busy with fuel calculations and supplies list – this time tomorrow we will be on our way, and Helen is off with Maria in the 506 collecting our orders from the seaplane slips on Eastern Island. I checked Miss Cabot's figures and could find nothing wrong with them – it is most unfair our Tutors refused to sign her graduation certificate as she is perfectly well qualified in every practical skill Songmark taught us. She is infinitely less likely than Molly was to set any buildings alight and laugh wildly at the sight, which was always a black mark against her with our Tutors who are still living down having unleashed that dorm of highly successful Air Pirates on the Pacific.

We had some unexpected visitors who were keen to say farewell, now Songmark has finished for the other years and they have some time on their paws. The unlikely dorm-mates Meera Singh, Rosa Marquetta and Eva Schiller, living proof of how our dear Tutors love to put folk together who will sharpen each other's edges, so to speak. A lot of loud and painful grinding is sure to be involved. Especially in the first year. A jolly British-educated Indian princess, an utterly uncompromising Bakuninite Anarchist and a star member of the League of German Maidens, who is in very good odour with her Party back in Germany especially since she found the Horn of Heimdal for them last month. One expects they will not be playing Jazz tunes on it. Alpha Rote is the other (absent) member of the dorm, but it goes without saying that after another whole term forbidden to speak with her "wife" Nancy in Songmark they will have a lot of catching-up to do right now. Chatting with my dorm (who they always seemed to have something of a down on for some reason) is really not their priority.

Meera had some interesting photographs her lower-school chums back in England had sent her, of how they are progressing without her. The Congreve Club is progressing nicely since a very practical Physics Mistress joined forces and got a gas liquefaction plant working. It is only the second Public School in the country

to have one! There are pictures of cheerful third-formers with their neat uniforms supplemented with heavy gauntlets and leather splash-proof aprons, standing by their latest torpedo-like efforts holding hosepipes that seem to be spewing dense fog as the damp English air condenses around the super-cold liquid. As modern aircraft use compressed oxygen cylinders rather than liquid oxygen for high-altitude flights it is nothing we have handled ourselves in Songmark, but is said to be nasty stuff – being so cold splashes can do exposed skin as much damage as molten lead would. Still, Roedean is a famous school that takes some very distinguished girls and I am sure their Science Mistress is taking all possible precaution with her young pupils as they prepare another postal rocket that is destined to put the “Express” back into “Express delivery” across the English Channel. At least liquid oxygen evaporates harmlessly; Meera has mentioned they used to play around with hydrogen peroxide or red fuming nitric acid for that place in the rocket diet.

Intriguingly, there are all sorts of rules and regulations to get around had they gone for cordite or black-powder propellant, but absolutely none bar aircraft safety overhead when using the much more powerful and volatile liquid fuels. Still, cordite is a registered military material and liquid oxygen and alcohol are not. Anything using such tricky materials would be far too difficult for the average soldier to use in the field, and be much too expensive to build. So many advanced systems have proved to be vulnerable to that levelling factor in military life, the soldier’s boot. In a century or so there will quite possibly be postal rockets punching out of the atmosphere like a Paris Cannon shell, but the world has nothing to fear from liquid-fuelled rockets!

Rosa is not someone I have had much contact with, and from what I hear I have not missed much. She is what she describes as an “anarcho-surrealist” and loves pointing out the many absurdities of modern civilisation. She asks me if our travels are likely to include Spain, where her many relatives are fighting on all sides. Her own brother is a “pistolero” or hired gun for the Nationalist landowners, she says, and her father has joined the communists. I expect her family reunions are likely to be rather turbulent. I had to disappoint her – if I have anything to do with it we are going nowhere near Spain, whose raging Civil War seems likely enough to come to us. English furs are fighting on both sides, and (amazing to Maria) our Government is letting any remaining Reds freely leave the country to join the International Brigade - presumably because fewer will be expected back.

As her uncle mentioned last week, Eva Schiller is leaving in a few days as they are both heading back to Germany. She says she looks forward to showing us the wonders and triumphs of her homeland, and hints that for the right people there is a lot more to be seen than features in the newsreels. Her Leader is famous for having strong opinions on who are the right people, and indeed who counts as “people” at all. Not someone I would really trust with the sort of artefact Eva sent to Berlin special-delivery. Hopefully the Horn of Heimdal will prove more problematic than other impossibly ancient artefacts to get working for its new wielders. Violins and bagpipes are not the sort of thing one can just pick up and work out a useful tune from first principles, and if half the legends are true the genuine Gjallarhorn has rather more possibilities than just playing parade music, even if the outwardly similar ancient bronze battle lurs is now again the official Germanic instrument replacing the decadent saxophones of the Weimaraner Republic \*. As any Spontoon Priestess knows all too well from the island’s history when such powers were more widely used, [complex and little-understood rituals] x [absurdly high power levels] = abundant chances of things going HIDEOUSLY wrong.

Exactly how Eva and Rosa are managing to get along without having each other “killed in a horrible workshop accident” I may never know. They certainly spend a lot of time hauling each other up rock faces on ropes, where it would be all too easy to accidentally let go or kick a melon-sized stone down. Red Dorm managed not to bump each other off and they too have done quite well on points although they started with a lot of vigorous intra-dorm “self-defence practice” in their spare time. No doubt they are gloating over the one obviously well-matched dorm, Crusader Dorm having finished bottom of their year. A Songmark course demands one hundred percent, and any distractions however noble for sleuthing or anything else cannot fail to have an impact. At least our distractions with Mr. Sapohatan and suchlike have been semi-officially approved by our Tutors – at least they had plenty they might have said about them, and never did.

The Cant 506 made a fine landing in the lagoon, much to the united envy of the first-years. They will have to wait another whole year to fly a multi-engined floatplane, unless Songmark acquires more in the meantime. At least I could offer them a treat, if only a back-seat ride for an hour with Miss Cabot navigating. We headed out into the Kanim Islands at full throttle, this being a good time to check just what the fuel consumption is. Rather heavy, as I push the throttle past cruise speed – this is not an aircraft designed to outrun a fighter, as some of the other “mail planes” are. That German adventure film we saw last year showing an honest independent postal delivery firm in Africa flying Heinkel 111s attacked by Air Pirates who had somehow “acquired” Gloster Gladiators which could not catch them, was probably more than it seemed.

Thinking of pirates, it was with something of a pang that I looked down on the beach where Molly and I were cast ashore with Lars last year, after the sinking of the Parsifal. It was quite an adventure. Although we are fairly certain it was Lars all the time who ended up selling us to Kuo Han, it is nothing we can prove in a court of law, and indeed on Krupmark anyone is liable to sell anything whether or not it is theirs. Helen and Maria were given every possible assistance to get after us, though it might be Lars did not want a Warrior Priestess to deal with. They even salvaged that Vostok-built “crop sprayer” and a full tank of fuel, which Maria donated to the Rain Island military on Moon Island for study (though she has not heard of such, it may well be one of the technologies Vostok is sharing with Italy. If not, she says Il Puce will be very interested to find out why not.)

I know Molly would have been liable to want to storm ashore on Krupmark and roast Lars to charred venison with his own gift even on the circumstantial evidence we have. Miss Cabot agrees we cannot prove it, Krupmark being what it is. She is perfectly capable of using such a weapon, but less liable to howl with manic laughter and note it as one of the high points of her year having done so. It is doubly galling our Tutors will not give her a graduation certificate, considering she has lost all the unfortunate behaviour they used to take marks off Molly Procyk for in the first place!

Back to South Island bang on time, with three excited first-years in the back all clamouring for a go at the controls. I had to disappoint them – we need this aircraft tomorrow and are taking no extra chances with it. Their Songmark fees will pay to pull any dents out of the school's Sea Osprey, when they get round to flying that.

Then – over to Main Island where our final supplies were awaiting and we could put Meera, Rosa and Eva to good use as “supercargo” loading the aircraft up. I left it at Superior Engineering where furs there will be giving a final check on the engines before we head out tomorrow with the wide Pacific to cross. It will be the first time I have navigated so far over open ocean since the return from the Albanian South Indies last year with Zara and Brigit. At least this time I am in better company. The only thing I want with Miss Mulvaney is exactly who this “Doctor Phil” may be whose signed photograph is in pride of place on her desk – although I know it is about the last thing she would be inclined to tell me. Both Major Hawkins and Post Box Nine would be very interested to know.

Farewell to Meera and Rosa, then “Au Revoir” to Eva as we may meet later on this Summer. Back on a water-taxi to North Beach, then a slow walk back down to Haio Beach for the last time in what may be a very long while. It seems very strange, thinking about it all. Nearly three years ago I arrived on the cruise-ship from Hawaii, when I had expected to be starting my final term at Saint Winifred's. I hope some of the girls there who were junior-years at the time will remember me – on the face of it arriving as a qualified Adventuress having become Lady Allworthy in the least likely place on the planet, Krupmark Island! If they invite me to speak as a Saint Winifred's “old girl” I would rather shock them if I told them the full facts about all that! Ironically, making the same speech at Saint T's would be roundly applauded, with most of the girls taking detailed notes and asking extremely practical questions afterwards.

One final evening at the Hoele'toemi compound, finishing after supper (two finger poi, clay-roast fish) when we regretfully helped each other remove the fur oiling and all the patterns. I have never seen Helen cry but she was jolly upset to comb out her “married” markings especially as traditional Spontoonie weddings do not use a Euro style wedding ring and she never thought to get one. Losing my own Warrior Priestess markings was bad enough, but Helen lost both. At least she has enjoyed a week of Marti's company, indeed almost every night since we got back. It is ironic, having spent three years learning to be active Adventuresses and following Mrs. Oelabe's practical advice as best we can – either one, two or three of my dorm will be leaving Spontoon with a kitten on the way. In Helen's case, of course, that would be a perfectly natural and welcome idea.

Helen and I performed Evening Song for the village, our last public duty here. Tomorrow we will be up before dawn and heading straight over carrying little more than the clothes on our back and our passports; a water-taxi is booked for six at North Beach, and before even the keenest tourist is awake we should be starting engines and flying out over Main Island, heading East towards our first refuelling stop in Tillamook three and a half hours away.

Off to the Hoele'toemi longhouse for an early night – my diary being the last thing to go in my satchel apart from the alarm clock which is set for four. Then farewell to Spontoon!

\* Editor's note: see “The Cabaret of Doctor Caligari”, a shockingly decadent 1925 expressionist film shot in the unnatural nightclub of the same name. Copies of the film may be found in its homeland on top of the pile at any good public book-burning; ask your friendly local brown or black-shirted public service official for details.

(Amelia's adventures will continue as she heads across the globe, in “Storm Birds”.)