

Easter Honeys,
Or
“What I Did In The Holidays”.

(Being the continuing diary of Amelia Bourne-Phipps, hurriedly sent off to the Songmark Aeronautical Boarding School For Young Ladies after crashing her 8th home-built aircraft on her Father’s prized glasshouses. This installment of the diary bears the heading – “copied out later from waterproof field notes”. As ever, the original is written in the never-popular Lexarc shorthand system, as invented by one of Amelia’s public school teachers and taught by very few others.)

April 11th, 1935

Dear Diary – hurrah for a life on the wave! Yesterday we finished term, and waved our dear friend Maria farewell, as our little band scatters homewards across the planet on every available flying-boat. Only a dozen of us are staying on the islands over Easter, and eight of those are heading out prospecting tomorrow to distant Cranium Island. The one dorm of Songmark that is not being taken apart for cleaning, is busy with everyone packing and re-packing Adventuring equipment. Sadly, only second and third-years are being taken for this trip, which would have left Molly, Helen, Sopyy Forsythe and myself in something of a pickle as our normal Holiday venue is closed. Happily, we have managed to get berths on the local fishing fleet, which should keep us out of trouble, although it might get a little dull at times.

This morning, our tutor Miss Devinski called the four of us over to give us our marching orders. Three weeks at sea helping with the local fishing fleet should at least give us plenty of practice with the local language. “Sopyy” has managed to find a second-hand Pacific Nations grammar and phrase book, covering the Chinook, Spontoonian and Tillamookian languages. By the end of the trip, we should be quite proficient in native tongues.

Anyway – tomorrow we are expected on the dockside of Beresby, one of the Scandinavian fishing villages on the North coast of Main Island. Water taxis have been booked, and we are warned to be up and packed by eight. Molly complains that we should be on holiday timetables now – but our Tutor was having none of it. (Although one would not wish to pry, I did notice on Miss Devinski’s desk a receipt for a suite booked for two at the Marylebene Hotel for tomorrow night. Possibly she is having relatives over to stay.)

One good thing is we four have the afternoon off – we will need little packing, as we are warned that it will be strictly hammocks and kit-bags this holiday. Poor Molly is most upset, as she always travels with about a dozen cases, even after some of the more aggressive contents have been seized by Customs. I fear she may need some acclimatisation to our new roving life – not having had the advantages of a proper boarding-school Education. Dear old St. Winifreds, what a place that was! By ancient tradition, the first-years arrived at the school with all their possessions in tea-chests after carrying them the six miles through Grimpond Mire from the nearest railway halt. As our school motto proclaims, “What does not kill us, makes us stronger”, and indeed we had not suffered an arriving-day fatality for several years. But I digress.

Having a few blessed hours free, I voted for a stroll down to the Eastern Islands docks, to plane-spot. Helen and Molly agreed, on condition we slipped away before Sopyy found out – after all, we may be in her company non-stop all holiday, and one can have too much even of a good thing.

Quite a sight! As we arrived, we noticed a Lockheed Lamprey making a rather rough touchdown on the seaplane way. Last night on Radio LONO, we had heard that a film company would be arriving for location shoots, and this proved to be them. Molly is quite a movie fanatic, and has “Film Frolics” airmailed to her every month – she claims to have met several of the famous names at parties catered for by her family’s wines and spirits company. (She is quite a critic too, and just last week was roundly denouncing “G-man Hero” as being not only unrealistic but also extremely prejudiced.)

Alas, we are out on the boats tomorrow, and will be missing all the lights, cameras and action. Such is life!

April 12th, 1935

(Written in, I fear, a most unsteady hand, courtesy of a swaying hammock in a rough sea.)

Our first day at sea! Everything began much as our other term-time trips: down to a water-taxi with borrowed naval kitbags slung over our shoulders, and across to the uninspiringly named Main Village, Main Island. It turned out to be market-day, and the place was quite packed. One of the reasons for the bustle could be seen in the distance: the first real cruise-ship of the year steaming down the strait between Eastern and Main island crowded no doubt with loud-voiced and loud-shirted tourists. I noticed a few last billboards being taken down, mostly those advertising radios and other modern items – and a final batch of “ancient” stone sculptures fresh from the workshops ready to be scattered artfully around the coastline.

Molly suggested we stop for a Nootnops Blue, as there is no guessing on how well supplied the boats will be. But regrettably I had to support Sopy and squash that idea – first impressions are important, and Molly will be hard enough at the best of times to pass as a sober, hard-working asset to a working ship's crew. Helen is being particularly quiet – or as she puts it, “jus’ rememberin’ feelin’ OK”, as she is not looking forward to our little boating excursion.

I had equipped myself with a map of the islands – one of our own, drawn up in January from aerial photographs, showing the true locations of all the roads and villages. Very odd, that the published land maps are so far out, despite the coastal navigation charts being spot-on.

I spotted the correct road to Beresby and not the one marked on the Tourist map, and we headed out over the main ridge. It was scarcely a mile over the top, with small farms mixed with bamboo groves – quite scenic, indeed. We noticed a small monument in a clearing just off the road, with a neatly raked crushed coral track leading to it, and decided to investigate – it proved to be a memorial to a Gunboat Wars battle. The plaque has two inscriptions, one in English and one in Spontoonie, which seem to say entirely different things – at least, the native one is four times the size. Interestingly, the inscription is also set on the side facing away from the main road: like many things, this seems to be calculated to avoid disturbing casual tourists. (And from what Jirry has told me, a lot of them are incredibly casual, and look on the islands as nothing more than a collection of bars, sea views and beaches built specially for them.)

“Sopy” declared she was worn out already, and indeed her kitbag is twice the weight of any of ours. But we outvoted her and pressed on towards the village, a collection of roofs already visible through the trees. As soon as we started off, the rain came down again – and we discover just why she has such a large pack. She has a complete set of deep-sea winter weight oilskins, bright yellow in colour, complete even to tail covers. Being a squirrel, she has a lot of tail to cover. Helen and Molly are following my policy of a waterproof hat and straw cape, which is not nearly as uncomfortable and dries out much quicker.

In another ten minutes we were in the middle of Beresby – about two hundred houses, a harbour and jetty, two shops and very little else. Having seen Polynesian, Chinese and Red Indian type settlements around Main Island, this was something else entirely. Stone walls and steep roofs seemed decidedly designed to shed snow, some of the roofs sweeping almost down to the ground. One of the larger buildings could be identified from several hundred yards downwind – a most appetising aroma of cooking fish, clearly the cannery which will be taking our catches this trip, assuming we catch anything. (I recall the last time my brother cast in our park lake, he landed an old Wellington boot and a quantity of barbed wire.)

According to our marching orders, we were to meet the boats by the docks at midday, and arrived indeed with time to spare. Sure enough, there was a little flotilla of six boats and a larger steam vessel, heading in towards us. We seem to definitely be expected, as one boat headed straight towards us, and its crew fairly bounced up the ladder to greet us.

A decidedly odd crew! All four were exceptionally rounded, cheerful-looking and not one of them reached as tall as my chest – they introduced themselves as the Noenoke cousins, two ladies and two gentlemen clad in decidedly minimal Native costume (though their fur was so long it made little difference – they rather resembled thatched beach balls.) From what we could gather as they all spoke at once, they were to show us the ropes (and probable the nets too) for the first few days.

As we found out, the bigger ship is the depot where they deliver their catches to be packed in ice, letting the fishing boats range far out among the smaller islands. We were introduced to Captain Sigmarsen, an avian gentleman who is in theory in charge of the whole enterprise – though from what I gathered, he spends half his time hunting down his wandering boats before the ice melts. Quite an urgent task in the height of Summer, one would expect.

Our accommodation proved to be extremely basic, merely consisting of a matting “cabin” arched over the fore end of one of the boats. The boats all hold six crew in rather cramped conditions, with just enough room for hammocks to be stowed above the piles of netting laid out on the deck. Sopy was quite aghast at the sight – although I did remind her that as a Quaker she should be the one promoting the simple life, she seemed not to appreciate it. Still – nobody had exactly mentioned the word “holiday” to describe this trip, so it is rather late to complain.

Indeed, after scarcely an hour of frantic activity as the main ship was unloaded and its cargo hurried off to the cannery, the little fleet turned right around and set sail – time and tide waiting for nobody, one assumes. So here we are, moored off the North coast with two dozen Natives around us. Quite cosy, really – though Helen had some worries at first, she seems to have dismissed them from her mind. Or at least she has other things to do now, having been leaning over the side being unwell since we left harbour.

April 13th, 1935

Hard at work! We Songmark students were divided up amongst the boats, as presumably one “passenger” apiece is quite enough for a working boat to handle. The boats have a regular jib sail, something I have fortunately used before when sailing on the Norfolk Broads *. (Molly says she knew some broads from Norfolk who worked at her Father’s establishment, but I doubt we are talking about the same thing.)

We spent most of the morning sailing Northwards till Main Island was just a distant blur on the horizon, before casting our nets. Quite a feat of navigation without charts or anything – as our target is an underwater reef, quite invisible to the surface and scarcely half a mile long. I had a good long talk with Pateeta, the eldest of the Noenoke girls, who speaks the best English of her family. She tells me they can be out for weeks at this time of year, picking up water and supplies at sea when they pass the catch up to the Ice Maiden, our support ship. It sounds a somewhat bleak existence, but no doubt folk here are used to making their own amusements.

(Later). Despite looking decidedly rounded, the Noenoke family must be as hard as ball-bearings under all that fur – I thought I was in fair training, but by the end of the day hauling nets had me aching in places I was unaware I possessed! Supper was naturally fish, and very fine too – each boat has a tiny clay-lined hearth, with a kennel-like metal cover keeping the wind and sea spray off. The whole fleet gathered and lashed together into a sort of floating village while we ate and compared bruises. Poor Molly is nursing a sore head courtesy of an unexpected gust and a swinging jib, but at least now knows the Spontoonian for “Duck!”

*Editor’s note: the Norfolk Broads are a set of semi-natural inland waterways in the East of England, favoured with the leisure boating set. Being actually rather narrow and twisting rather than Broad, they should make a good giant slalom venue for anyone into Extreme sports involving seaplane landings.

April 15th, 1935

Dear Diary – it has been 2 days of solid work, sailing from first light to dusk, hauling nets and packing baskets of wriggling fish. I have stayed with the Noenokes, who are a playful bunch, always joking in the Spontoonie language. I have been making notes and trying out my basic phrases – indeed, I am trying not to speak English at all this trip. The local dialect is tricky, but not as bad as Tillamook, which according to Sopyy’s book has thirty different prefixes! * Possibly they have wholly separate forms for events that happen on a Tuesday, or going downhill.

Pateeta and Paloma have been telling me about their ancestry; they are proud to be “genuine” Pacific Islanders, their grandparents having sailed over from the Marquesas group. An interesting island chain by all accounts; having no protective coral reefs, the seas have removed all the flat parts and left the mountains rising straight up. It must be vexing trying to garden, vines and climbing beans excepted – though Pateeta tells me one of her other cousins returned to the ancestral island peak and is now the proud owner of the world’s first par One Thousand golf course.

The two gentlemen, Tihan and Ropapi Noenoke, are really quite a treat to watch in action – one would think they had been born in the water, to watch them. The first thing they do when arriving at a fishing ground is slip over the side and simply take a look for any shoals in the area – the reef is eight fathoms down, but Tihan was down to the sea bed, gathered some shellfish for a snack and returned to point the way to the shoal in under a minute.

(Later). It seems I have the best of the Native teams to work with – most of the other fishermen are of the reptilian persuasion, and according to Molly, not much fun. “Sopyy” is constantly glowering about her fur being soaked despite the oilskins: she will insist on wearing them in all conditions, and is rapidly becoming a steamed squirrel as the weather gets warmer. Helen has decided to take to native dress as soon as possible – alas, there is nothing available to make a costume from out here except seaweed. That experiment was not a great success, and the smell of rotting kelp took all day to wash off.

The Noenokes are certainly the most “Native” Natives we have met – Tihan tells me they rarely even go to Casino Island, being nothing there that they actually want to see. Sopyy was quite scandalised to hear that their home islands have no Euro churches at all, having thrown out the missionaries fifty years ago. It seems that the Marquesas were amongst the last islands to contact Euro culture, and had only the Indigenous priests and Primitive Methodists.

Pateeta was showing us how to adjust our hammocks so they do not let us down unexpectedly in the night. The hammocks are slung from notched poles secured to the rails on each side of the boat, and are really quite comfortable once one learns the correct approach to getting in. Being much taller than the Noenokes, we sling our hammocks much further up the poles – a top-notch performance! The first time round, I got mine rather skewed, with the foot end much higher than the head. This caused a suprising amount of merriment amongst the Noenokes, though I can hardly see why. Paloma asked if I was planning on meeting someone special on shore leave – most odd.

*Editor’s note. Sopyy’s book is correct about the 30 prefixes in Tillamook - at least, the Guinness Book of Records agrees.

April 17th, 1935

An interesting encounter – while fishing off the North Coast, we spotted a large yacht, drifting in the current. Our fleet headed that direction as the currents were taking it towards the rocks a few miles away, and we hoped to be able to help if they had broken down and needed a tow. As it turned out, we met most of the film crew we had seen arriving last week – camera teams, cast and all! Their producer tells us they are looking for a suitable little cove for the smuggling scene – and after our fishermen conferred, they directed them to one on the Western edge. It seems there are only two deep-water landings on the Northern coast, and they are both too built-up to suit.

If Molly spent as much time working on her aeronautics as she does in memorising faces and screenplays in “Film Frolics”, she would definitely be top in our class. But it paid off today, as she could tell us the producer is the famous Cecil “Beady” Mill, and the leading star is the all-action heartthrob “Rocky” Rhodes. Molly was quite surprised we failed to recognise them, as Mr. Rhodes can usually be spotted by his trademark red beret, which relates to his politics. Helen commented that she had appreciated the costume, which included breeches so tight that she could tell his religion too. (I must ask Helen what she means, but on past experience I will probably regret it.)

Still, we could indeed have done worse, as the cameraman, a local Spontoonie, told our fishing friends that an even bigger film team had just arrived to film the all-singing and dancing puppy prodigy, Little Shirley Shrine. Helen turned pale at the prospect, claiming she has a Doctor’s Certificate excusing her from exposure to anything excessively twee, and she is feeling nauseous enough at sea without having to watch Little Shirley as well.

Soppy is at least keeping busy and out of our way, as she has taken up bird spotting. She is always to be found with a powerful set of binoculars in hand in her leisure moments, scanning the cliffs and waters for exotic wildfowl. Of course, last holiday it was botanising, and indeed we found her poking around in all parts of South Island, notebook and collecting trowel in paw. She should certainly have quite a collection of sightings by the time we finish up, as she seems to spend half her time noting down things, even when I can hardly see a bird in the sky. Those must be good binoculars.

April 18th, 1935

Land ho! After a week of hard work, at last we put back into port for a rest and refit. Beresby looked like an exciting metropolis by now, with shops and supplies. “Soppy” shed her oilskins in record time and went looking for a fresh water bath. She was gone all afternoon, and claimed she had to cross over to the reservoirs on the far side of the watershed to find somewhere suitable. I had Words with her about that, as I doubt the inhabitants of Main Island will be too thrilled at brackish, squirrel-flavoured drinking water – at which Soppy told me to mind my own business in no uncertain terms. True, she never voted me in as spokesperson for her dorm, but one would expect some more consideration for others from a Quaker.

Still, we used our time to get ourselves traditional “lava lava” cloths for Costume, and some more traditional straw hats. The fishers have to manage without fresh costumes at sea, but Pateeta and Paloma reappeared in traditional flower garlands before we set sail again.

I seem to have picked up rather more Spontoonie language than our hosts suspect – while of course not trying to eavesdrop, I spotted Tihan and Ropapi looking at us four from Songmark distinctly worriedly – and on a small boat one cannot help but overhear conversations. I might not have known the words “council” and “orders” and “espionage” except that I had had a try at translating the Spontoonie edition of the “Daily Elele” into English last month, and those words had cropped up in a tricky story about the Vostok Trade Delegation. The new Vostok Ambassador had arrived to replace his predecessor who had been under investigation for espionage - prior to his accidental death by a cluster of coconuts falling from a tree he was walking under.

I could be quite wrong about this – but what I thought the conversation was about, was something involving a leak of secrets, and various very firm instructions that had been passed on concerning it. Oh dear! I had hoped we had been “cleared” of all that last holiday – and took the chance to quietly tell Helen about it. She was quite upset, and suggested we incorporate life-jackets into our Costume. The Pacific Ocean is a decidedly large place to “accidentally” fall overboard into.

Our little flotilla has picked up an extra member – a grey-furred gentleman of the ferret persuasion, who the other Natives seem to defer to. Quite possibly he is a senior fisherman – at any rate, after he pointed towards the Eastern end of the island, the boats all headed that way without the usual argument. Whatever else he might be, he is a quite masterly performer on the Hawaiian guitar, and is sending haunting tunes across the waters. Molly is quite enthralled – but then, she is normally to be found before lights-out with radio headphones securely on, and has been suffering severely from entertainment deficiency.

April 20th, 1935

Well! It came as something of a relief, that we were to leave our fishing grounds and attend a Native sports gala – Helen has been looking over her shoulder so much she must be developing a crick in her neck, expecting every trip out to sea to be our last. True, having the four of us isolated from each other and outnumbered by loyal Spontoones could be worrying – but as I know for a fact we are innocent, I refuse to worry about it.

The sports gala was an interesting event, various boating races and swimming races held in the bay of Main Village and the straits outside. There were rowing and sailing boats competing, and even an event for motor-boats. I wondered what our support ship the Ice Queen would do, being hardly built for speed, with half a dozen other trawlers to compete against. It was a very unusual race indeed – all the trawlers “raced” out of port at their best speed, their decks loaded with big lobster-pots. I had wondered what the rail track on the deck was for, and I found out. Every trawler was equipped with a drop-down area of railing at the stern, which must make loading fish and supplies much easier – and they each dropped a string of lobster-pots completely across the strait, each pot rolling smoothly out on rails and over the stern.

A definitely odd race, but one supposes fishermen spend a lot of time thinking about new things to do with their boats. I cheered, of course, when the Ice Queen won!

Soppy Forsythe seemed quite interested in the event, and spent the afternoon watching through her field-glasses. I hoped she would find something to distract her, as she has been complaining non-stop about the food, accommodation and company all this trip. Sports are certainly a great builder of character, and I was glad to hear her asking quite a few Natives whether the lobster-pot race was a new innovation or descended from older Tradition.

Thinking of Traditions, Helen has adopted a daring but wholly authentic Native costume again, and Molly has followed suit, though not without a few blushes. She had complained that there was nobody out here to appreciate them – and indeed, her boat is crewed with lizards, who may have well-polished scales but very few other visible physical charms. Honestly - Molly complains that nobody would appreciate her costume far out at sea, but is too embarrassed to wear it anywhere except in Native company!

April 21st, 1935

A decidedly bright, hot day, with quite dazzling sun shining off the waters. At least, Soppy is looking happier, as she has been scandalised by Helen and Maria’s costume and can say, “I told you so.” A rather indelicate matter, but – not having such all-covering fur as the Noenokes, my friends are suffering sunburn in rather delicate places not generally accustomed to hours of exposure. Rather painful, I should think! Soppy is still steaming inside her oilskins, but seems to mind it less. My own costume is something of a compromise, being one that I might wear without embarrassment on Casino Island, not that we are likely to visit there much on this trip.

Pateeta has mentioned that the fleet usually sails with her younger relatives, several boats of aunts, uncles and spare cousins. A decidedly large family, the Noenokes – as indeed is Jerry’s. Helen murmurs something alarmist about sending the children out of the way of any dirty work, but she is always saying things like that. I suppose being brought up travelling to oil wells that were always blowing up or already on fire would tend to pessimism, as one always sees the worst side of things.

Molly is certainly learning some new words, today she learned the Spontoone for Moray Eel (“Polaw’fih”) as well as to stay clear of one caught in a net. There is a bright side to most things; at least I took the chance to practice my field First Aid, and the sort of thing we are sure to be asked about when we return to Songmark.

Thinking of languages, today we learned a few words of something more exotic. Although there is little traffic to and from the Northern coast of Main Island, this evening we were hailed by a small steamer towing a very substantial barge piled with lumber. Its flag was that of Vostok, that fine island where the best of the Russians escaped to exile – and we managed to sell them some fish, a busy ship’s crew rarely having the time to tow nets. Their Captain had quite a conversation with Mr. Sapohatan, though it seemed the only language they had in common was that of the Tillamook coast. I jotted some of it down, which I later tried to translate using Soppy’s book:

Vostok Captain: “Tikiloahata-ma rantopaha pitikutliva po na ki-nahapupetu pi-topapetel stolataha-ma nafapacolatahipo na pa lo-popayaha”

(Literally: “Water-house in the direction from the Northern star in the means of going with that which is from the great forest-spirits of the land of mountains ruled by the great Chief of the East”

(Or, more compactly: “We’re carrying timber from Vostok.”)

One never sees a “chatty” Red Indian in the films or newsreels – whenever asked a question, they always are shown as thinking it over for five minutes before answering. According to Soppy’s book, Chippewa has more than 3 thousand irregular verbs – and I thought that French was hard enough to learn. With such a language as that, it is hardly surprising – surely it takes half one’s time to work out how to say “Good morning!”

At any rate, one mystery is solved. On the Northern coast I had noticed the Red Indian type houses had great cedar roof beams, and some villages had totem poles twenty or thirty feet high. Although there are some fine trees on Spontoan, I had wondered where the cedars and redwoods came from. One lives and learns.

In the past few days, the Noenokes have decidedly “dried up”, in terms of talking to us, and indeed there seems a definite coolness – they have almost stopped making jokes, which is a pity. Our latest arrival is called Mr. Sapohatan, a decidedly sharp-eyed individual. A good thing too, as he spotted that Molly had tied the net the wrong way round today – we would have lost it overboard if we had tried to catch anything with it tied that way.

Molly seems quite impressed by Mr. Sapohatan, and is often to be found in the evenings raptly listening as he plays sad songs on his slide guitar. Slide guitars seem awfully hard to play – like ukuleles, most players one hears would be better advised to give up and take up something more musical (such as hacksawing sheet metal or demolishing buildings). Mr. Sapohatan, happily, is the exception to the rule.

April 22nd, 1935

A most curious event this morning – I was the first one awake in our boat, moored off our main fishing reef some eight or nine miles from shore. It was a decidedly misty dawn; one could see scarcely four boat-lengths ahead. Although there was no sound of engines or sailing craft rigging, I definitely heard voices from out of the fog, certainly no voices I recognised from our party. There was a quiet splashing, and they vanished.

Not ten minutes later, the fog was clearing a little, with “lanes” of clearer air appearing – and I saw a disturbed area of water, perhaps two hundred yards away. Only Sopyy was up, and I pointed that way – just as something broke the surface. Sopyy has her binoculars permanently ready around her neck, to not waste a chance at spotting a rare sea bird, she says, and she got what must have been a good view with them for a few seconds.

Sopyy’s expression was very strange indeed – she stared into the mist, long after the clear lane had closed up. When I asked her what was out there, she said “Shark”, very abruptly, and refused to elaborate.

Very strange, indeed – I would have asked the Noenokes, but they seem to be avoiding us, as much as one can do so in such close quarters. I hope we have not offended them somehow – and I fear that asking pointed questions about the “Natives of no island” would be sure to alarm them, if nothing else has already.

April 23rd, 1935

A wet day! Not a glimpse of the sun from dawn to dusk, with rain lashing down in blankets (one would have said sheets, but these were far heavier.) Just like home in dear old Barsetshire. At least Molly gets up early for a change, courtesy of a leaking roof dripping right over her hammock.

A decidedly dismal breakfast of cold roasted fish left over from last night, and then we were hard at work all day, as one might as well be wet and productive fishing as wet and idle trying to shelter inside the boats. At least the Noenokes cook their fish – we were quite shocked to see the reptilian folk eating it raw, in what one is informed is the Japanese style. Though I have learned to appreciate some of the local culture – I am sure that is one tradition that will never be fashionable amongst the restaurants of Europe! Sopyy was chittering most discontentedly, even in her arctic-weight oilskins. Not suprising, as I have seen the state of her fur when she takes them off, and few drowned rats would envy it.

One interesting encounter – when we docked with our supply ship the Ice Queen, Mr. Sapohatan swarmed up the side in response to some signal given by one of the crew. He returned only after we had quite finished swapping fish for supplies half an hour later, with some unexpected news. We are to try and meet some new customers, as a fleet will be traversing Spontoonian waters in the next few days! Exactly which fleet it might be, he declined to say, except that they should appreciate some fresh supplies. According to Jane’s Naval Review, there are quite a few minor powers who patrol these waters, though few of them have anything like a fleet. Vostok has only the aging craft that carried its better citizens over from Russia to escape the Bolsheviks – and though New China has a navy, I have heard it referred to as a collection of junk.

Helen had some very odd ideas, I must say – true, we are as “incognito” as we can get; wearing these costumes, our best friends back home would be hard-pressed to recognise us. But she seems very keen to see how we will “measure up” to an unsuspecting audience, of whichever fleet it might be. I will keep my own costume at its current coverage, I think.

April 24th, 1935

Hurrah! In the mid-morning, we noticed a smudge of smoke on the horizon, heading our direction. In an hour, it had resolved itself to be three vessels of capital ship size and a covering formation of smaller ones. Sopyy was most excited, and spent half a precarious hour clinging to the top of the mast before announcing it was our very own Royal Navy, the biggest vessel being the new carrier the Lord Moseley. One wonders how Quakers become so

familiar with current military forces, as they passionately dislike the whole idea? Possibly they memorise Jane's Naval Yearbook at their meetings, to give themselves some real facts and figures to criticise.

Quite a sight indeed – as we watched, a squadron of Handley-Page Heyfords touched down on the deck, coming in from patrolling somewhere off to the Northwards. One of the smaller vessels, a Destroyer I believe, headed our way as the Noenokes raised signal flags indicating we had provisions for sale. The fleet passed by, heading towards the French Sandwich Islands, while we had ten minutes of rapid haggling as the purser and some very Able-looking Seamen jumped down to our decks to buy up our morning's catch.

I must say, Molly and Helen put on a good show, and were quite convincing as mysterious Island ladies. (Had they opened their snouts, Helen's immediately recognisable West Texas drawl and Molly's Chicago accent would have quite spoiled the whole effect.) We left the talking to the Noenokes and Mr. Sapohatan, while Sopy looked on with an oddly frustrated expression. Waving farewell, the destroyer surged off at full throttle to rejoin the fleet, leaving us all rocking in the wake.

One hopes they enjoy the fresh fish, as I confess to being a little tired of it meal after meal myself – something I would never have believed possible back at Saint Winifred's. Especially since back there, the fish was not all it might be – my dear friend Mabel being a Vicar's daughter, once wrote an essay on "The Piece of Cod, which passeth all Understanding."

(Later). Mr. Sapohatan mentioned to us that the fleet will be returning in a few day's time, where we will be ready and waiting. Quite lucrative, one supposes – our Navy paying for official purchases in universally acceptable gold Sovereigns, which avoids fussing with local currencies. We will certainly do our best for them!

April 25th, 1935

Another decidedly hard day, but with one very strange thing to report. Just towards dusk, we were far out from land, twenty miles and more, when we spotted some aircraft picked out by the setting sun. Although they must have been two miles away and at four or five thousand feet, we could follow their aerobatics quite clearly. Whatever these were, they were either stunt aircraft or fighters – they were throwing themselves around all over the sky, sometimes in maneuvers that I could scarcely put a name to. It must have been a trick of perspective, but I would have sworn that some of the aerobatics was impossible. I know there were triplanes in the Great War that could do a flat turn without banking, but – these looked as if they could have flown rings round any ace.

Very odd indeed. I begged a look through Sopy Forsythe's binoculars, but she was most ungenerous with them, and kept them glued to her face the whole time. Of course, we see the local Air Force every time we go across to Moon Island – and we have all studied the "Osprey" flying boats very thoroughly. But they are definitely not what one would call "hot ships", being far more dangerous to shipping and submarines than other dedicated fighters.

Helen thinks they must be something the carrier is testing in secret, far from prying eyes on land. But unless they have halted or turned back, a quick look at the chart puts the carrier three hundred miles away by now, and dogfighting generates a notorious thirst for fuel. So I hardly think they would have flown all the way back here, when there are much emptier pieces of the Pacific to test any secret inventions. Very odd indeed.

April 26th, 1935

Helen's birthday, hurrah! We made her a cake (fishcake) and Molly handed over a tin of her family product, PAMS as a present. Helen seemed to enjoy the prospect of eating it for a change, and indeed anything would be a welcome break from fish by now. Except poi.

Indeed, something we have noticed in the past week, we are all ravenously hungry with working flat out in the open air all hours – I mentioned at breakfast that I must be eating enough for a family. Paloma congratulated me, though I can't think why.

We have been over a week at sea, hardly coming closer than three miles from land. Sopy is still sealed up to her muzzle in her oilskins, and both Molly and Helen have relented and produced more modest costumes that cover all eventualities. Still, tomorrow we will be heading back to visit Chiklooha, which will feel quite like a city by the time we get there. Molly is drooping slightly, missing bright lights and company. The Noenoke gentlemen are quite a sight to watch, but must be already engaged or some such. At any rate, Helen says they show no ... interest in her or Molly.

Thinking of which, I miss Jirry quite achingly. We could hardly take our radios out to sea, as they are naked wires and batteries that would survive about two minutes in the spray of our open boats. At least I could keep in touch even from within the guarded compound of Songmark, and find out what is happening! With all these film crews and the first tourist boats arriving, very likely Jirry and his brothers will be hiring out as Guides and porters again for the season. So even if we get any "shore leave", he may be otherwise engaged by the time we arrive, alas.

Helen says that next time she meets with Marti, it will be a meeting he will remember even when his fur turns grey. It would be unladylike to record the rest of her description, but it seems that a life of fresh air and fresh fish every day certainly builds up ... an awful lot of energy.

April 28th, 1935

Dear Diary. This has been a decidedly shocking two days. Where there were four of us Songmark girls on the trip, there are now only three. And yet – it might be that things have turned out for the best, all round.

Yesterday, after a day of fishing and handing out catch to the Ice Queen, we headed for Chiklooha, the Noenokes letting me handle the sail for the first time. A gusty wind, but getting decidedly warm even on the sea. Sopyy was splashing water over her oilskins to cool off all day, which surely defeats the point in wearing them. An excellent evening meal on the shore – roast chicken, which was a very welcome treat. Helen ate half a chicken herself, and I must confess I devoured the rest and looked around for more. Mr. Sapohatan seems to have arranged it beforehand, which was very kind of him. When we finished and looked around, there was no sign of our shipmates, but Molly found a note explaining they had been called away, and would be back late in the evening.

Mr. Sapohatan turned up ten minutes later, explaining the rest were at a town council meeting – the news had come in that our fleet would be calling again tomorrow, and the locals were discussing a suitable entertainment. I could see Helen and Maria cheer up at the prospect – if the Chiklooha folk are planning any dances and need extras, we will certainly volunteer to help. Indeed, he mentioned that a shore party would be landing – hopefully not the whole crew of the Lord Moseley, which carries two bomber and five fighter squadrons aboard, and might rather overwhelm a small village with its aircrew alone.

For the time being, we were left to our own devices, though he suggested a walk on the cliffs. Sopyy eagerly took up the idea, as she has been keen to spot what birds nest on these cliffs, and is always jotting nature notes in her notebook. I managed to sneak a glimpse as she took her oilskins off – there were quite a few maps and diagrams, and some very odd flight patterns sketched in.

Having an hour or so before dark, we went up the cliffs out to the West of the island, towards where Mr. Tikitavi's sculptures stand looking out over the Nimmitz Sea. Very quiet indeed, without a sight of a native, and not a boat to be seen on the whole horizon. About two miles from the village, we were just North of the volcanic cone, and approaching the "sacred area" where hardly a single trail goes.

Molly was the first to prick up her ears, having indeed the best ears of the party. She swore she could hear an aero engine quite close – but though we scanned the skies, there was nothing to be seen, and still the noise continued for a full minute. Then it cut out, sputtering most unhealthily. A few minutes later it started again – and this time Molly was sure it was from below us, under the angle of the cliffs. It was getting quite dark, so we cautiously looked down over the edge into the long shadows of the precipice, with hard dark lava dropping straight down to the surf.

I only caught one glimpse, as it vanished into the deeper shadows of a cove – but a very sleek amphibian seaplane was heading towards the rocks, its engine evidently misbehaving! It seemed obvious that it must have hit engine trouble out to sea, and been taxiing round the coast towards Chiklooha, the only decent landfall for miles, only to be swept on the rocks by the currents.

A very quick argument followed, Helen being all for trying to get down the cliffs to help. But the cliffs were decidedly sheer, and even if one reached the water with an unbroken neck, rescuing a possibly wounded pilot without ropes and climbing equipment would be impossible. So we raced at top speed back towards the village, arriving greatly out of breath to find all the boats pulled up high on shore, and nobody around on the dockside to help. Molly volunteered to run and raise the alarm, while I took our boat out with Helen and Sopyy to look for the wreck.

It was decidedly stirring, heading out into the fading light, on a mission of rescue! Quite the sort of Ripping tales that one reads at home – though at the time I was too busy spotting rocks and managing the sail while Helen steered and Sopyy swarmed to the top of the mast, binoculars ready. We had to go quite a way out to clear the rocks, a quarter of a mile or more, before we reached the right part of the coast and cautiously tacked in towards land. The tide was coming in, and at least we hoped that the more jagged rocks would be safely submerged.

For ten minutes we scoured the cliff line, looking and shouting – but there was no sign of any wreckage, no stranded pilot waving from the top of a rock. I was quite hopeful that he might have fixed his engine and flown off in the time we had been running towards the village – but Helen seemed gloomily sure the surf had smashed the aircraft to pieces, and it was resting on the bottom along with its pilot. As it happened, Sopyy was the one to spot its fate.

Right below the tallest part of the cliffs, there was a deep cove where the waves hit without breaking, showing the cliff went right down underwater. Sopyy had been staring at it for a minute, and chattered to head in closer. I could hardly see why, but she had the best view and the field-glasses, so we followed her route in past great buttresses of black lava down into the cove.

Just then Helen pointed at what Sopy must have seen – almost the last thing I expected. As the waves fell, we could see what looked like the top of a natural arch – and in the deep shadows of the cove, a dim green glow of lights underwater! For a second I thought some patented emergency beacon light might be marking where the aircraft had sunk – and then Helen pointed out something else. Completely black-painted to match the rock, in the sheer face of the cliffs there was a large mooring-ring, wholly invisible until one approached to ten yards or so.

Well! I had a decidedly uneasy feeling as Sopy surveyed the ring, and dropped down to deck to squint under the entrance to the arch. She announced that there were at least four lights inside, and that she was going to investigate. She grabbed a snorkel from the locker, which quite surprised me, as she has been making quite a thing of not liking to swim – and told us to wait outside. I protested, but she was out of her oilskins with a speed I would hardly have credited, and over the side before either of us thought to grab her.

Helen and I looked at each other, our ears down. From what we discovered hidden away under these islands last holiday, discovering secrets is liable to be damaging to the health, unless one is “trusted” to keep silent about them. Which we seem to be, but Sopy is decidedly not – and indeed she has often expressed little liking for the Native culture. Helen volunteered to look for Sopy and drag her back before she finds something too incriminating, but alas she is not the best of swimmers. West Texas, by her accounts, is generally hard pressed to have enough water for drinking, let alone practice swimming in.

Still – one of us had to go. I waved Helen farewell (not without some trepidation), took the second snorkel set and went over the side, following the underwater lights into the cliff. I had a moment of panic when I spotted some dim fish-like figure off to the side like a sentinel – but if it was a shark, it made no move towards me. The passage underwater was only about five yards, before I broke surface in a long, mostly flooded tunnel easily four yards across. I had been shown “lava tubes” on the slopes of Main Island, and this appeared to be just such another volcanic cave, heading in towards the cold heart of the extinct volcano.

Another twenty yards, and the tunnel opened right up, lit by electric light in a wide underground harbour! There seemed to be nobody around – but four small, sharp-looking seaplanes of an unfamiliar type were moored by the far wall. I did my best to keep in the shadows of the dock, and spotted an iron ladder leading up. There was no sign of Sopy to be seen.

However – when I climbed the ladder to the dock, I spotted a wet trail leading towards the seaplanes. Of course, she would be interested in the seaplanes, especially if they were the ones we had seen performing such incredible maneuvers last week. I carefully followed in her trail, both to follow her and not to leave evidence of a second unexpected visitor for anyone finding the tracks.

At last – I got a good look at the aircraft. And despite being soaked, my tail surely fluffed out like a bottle-brush. They were sleek metal-skinned biplanes, with the top wing supported by a single streamlined pillar and not a bracing wire to be seen – but in general layout, they were obvious descendants of what else but my own dear Flying Fleas! The engines were nowhere to be seen, until I spotted cooling air intakes behind the single pilot’s seat. Radiators were very sleek cylindrical French-style “Lamblin” units just behind the pilot, and not the square boxy units that I had had to make the best of on my own projects. Everything looked sleek and very well-finished – oddly enough, there was no Rain Islands insignia to be seen, or indeed any other markings at all.

I must confess – I had never seen such a beautiful aircraft in my wildest dreams. It was everything I had in the back of my mind when assembling Flying Flea #1, and an awful lot more. This was decidedly a fighter rather than a stunt aircraft, as I noted from the twin gun tubes in the nose – not cannon, but perhaps .50 caliber.

I had almost forgotten where I was, at the unbelievable sight – and indeed I was looking over the design piece by piece, quite fascinated. The cockpit layout was very modern, and I recognised a radio-compass, a gyro gun-sight and several other items I had only seen in books. There seemed to be something very odd about the rudder pedals, though it was hard to say what from the top of the ladder. The idea of just sitting in the cockpit and getting a feel of the controls almost overwhelmed me, and I was half-way down the ladder when I stopped myself.

Indeed – it was not that this was such a dangerous place for uninvited guests that stopped me. I told myself that it was simply Wrong of me to interfere. Although I could imagine literally nothing more tempting – I sighed, and forced myself back up the ladder towards the dock. I almost thought I heard someone applauding, but that must have been the slapping of the waves and my imagination.

Hastily rejoining Sopy’s damp trail, I followed it inland towards various tunnels that seemed to be artificial: one could spot drilling marks in the black basalt. Just then I heard voices from one of the tunnels, and hurriedly dived into another one that I could see was filled with piled-up crates. There appeared five folk in Rain Island undress uniform, carrying tool bags and boxes of spare parts – they strolled over towards the dock, and one of them called down towards the aircraft, out of sight. I could not quite hear what he said – but someone answered, up from the water! It was certainly not Helen, or Sopy either, which was quite baffling. Three of the mechanics went down the ladder, and in a few minutes I heard the engine turning over, as someone tinkered with it.

I could see the far side of the underground dock from my hiding-place, and watched as one of what I must call the Sea Fleas taxied out, making a tight circuit then returned. The three mechanics had climbed back up – so

where did the pilot come from? There were no boats or other tunnels visible that he might have been hidden on. Most curious.

Just then there was a great disturbance further up inside the complex, various people shouting and blowing whistles. My heart sank indeed – evidently Sopyy had done more investigation than was good for her, and been spotted. The six mechanics dropped their tools and ran back up the tunnel, leaving the dockside deserted.

For a second or two all was quiet, as the sound of running paws vanished. I realised that folk would be back to make a thorough search, and would certainly find me if I stayed where I was. It was an awfully hard decision, to retreat leaving Sopyy in unfriendly hands – but all alone in an unknown base, I realised there was nothing I could do for her, and getting captured myself would not help. Very quietly I walked over back to the dock, found some deep shadows behind a crate of ammunition labeled “Machine Spares”, and leaned over, trying to spot where the pilot of the Sea Flea had gone to.

There was nobody there. Every cockpit was empty, and there were no boats, submarine or otherwise to be seen. Fortunately, by this time my fur was no longer dripping enough water to make a clear trail, as I reached the iron ladder. Just as I ducked below the edge of the dockside, I heard more voices coming back, and hurriedly dived in with as little splash as I could.

Getting back seemed an eternity – but in two minutes I surfaced next to a very worried Helen, who had almost given us both up for lost. I sketched out what had happened in as few words as I could (being thankful that we do not speak Tillamook) and we headed away from that cove as fast as the wind would carry us, hoping nobody saw us.

Happily, it was almost dark and we carried no lights – but we managed to avoid the rocks and circle out to sea until we saw the lights of Chiklooha in the distance. When we arrived, we found the rest of the fleet just setting out to search for us, Molly almost frantically trying to egg them on. Nearly three quarters of an hour seems a rather poor show to get a rescue attempt underway, I would have thought!

Still, we had time to rehearse our story – in perfect truth I told the Natives that Sopyy had gone down to look at what she thought were lights underwater, and had not come back – and that I had gone down to look for her, but had found neither her or any aircraft wreckage. I do so hate lying – and yet revealing what I did find in the underground hangar, might end up with more than one of us lost in a “tragic boating accident.” Helen had used that phrase a few times, and indeed I had seen it in small print quite often in the “Daily ‘Elele” last term.

It was pitch black by that time, so all we could do was follow the rest of the boats back to Chiklooha, listening to Mr. Sapohatan playing a sad tune on his guitar all the way back to the dock. Molly was most upset – although Sopyy was not exactly thrilling company, having her lost like this is very discouraging. (Helen and I have not decided how much to tell Molly – she tends to be impulsive, and I had uneasy visions of her idea of a rescue mission.)

The Noenokes seem very sympathetic, but are quite obviously watching us carefully. Helen suggested that we take turns staying awake on watch, but I vetoed the idea. There seems little point – either the locals decide we are actual Agents, or they clear us once and for all – and either way, there is little we can do about it. Trying to make a run for the nearest transport out of the Spontoon area would hardly encourage belief in our innocence – and I rather doubt we would get very far if we tried.

The next day, the 29th, we were roused from an uneasy sleep by the ringing of a large ship’s bell that serves as a fog warning and general village assembly bell. Looking out to sea, we could see why – again, out on the horizon we could see the smudges of smoke showing where our Fleet is heading this direction, presumably returning towards Humapore. Mr. Sapohatan quietly told us that boats had been out searching the coast since first light, but had found nothing – and indeed, I would have been surprised if they had. Of course, we volunteered to go out and join the search – more for Molly’s sake than anything, as otherwise we would have to tell her why not.

We searched the cliffs with field-glasses all day – and at lunchtime, one of the other boats came up with a sad piece of evidence – a bright yellow oilskin tail-cover, of quite unseasonable Winter grade. Molly is not quite as hard-boiled as she likes to think, and broke down in tears – while Helen and myself nodded and exchanged glances. It is a most convenient piece of evidence – too convenient, I would have said if none of the Natives had been listening.

All this time, the fleet had been getting nearer, smaller warships surrounding the carrier and the new battle-cruiser HMS Blue Steel, which I remember seeing launched in the newsreels last year. Quite a sight! The whole assemblage headed towards us, and anchored perhaps a mile from Chiklooha while launches and skiffs were winched out to carry the shore party over to land. I raised a cheer as I spotted a very neat formation of Hawker Demons coming in to land on the carrier, their aluminium doped finish sparkling in the sun.

The village had certainly planned well last night – there was an afternoon of most elaborate dances and general merriment, such as one sees in the films. Of course, this being Spontoon, our sailors soon discovered that while watching the dances was free, nothing else was – and I shuddered at the prices the natives were charging for coconut rum punch served in the shell, and for the clay roasted fish they were serving by the yard. Still, nobody objected out loud, and one supposes there is little enough to spend one’s wages on while out at sea. I watched the merriment along with Helen and Molly, but had to confess my heart was not in it.

And then – the last boat was leaving three hours later, when something happened that completely changed everything. The deep water channel passes a high rock before the bay opens out into the ocean – and as the steam-launch full of happy and impoverished sailors headed back towards the waiting Destroyer, I spotted movement on top of it. As ever, I had my field-glasses to hand – and though it was three hundred yards away, I spotted Sippy, poised for a second just before making a perfect swan-dive into the water just ahead of the launch!

Had I not been watching with excellent glasses, I would certainly have missed the very strange things that happened in the next minute. From the ocean side of the bay I saw something moving under the surface; for a second I thought they were torpedo tracks, but they were smoother, less bubbly and more sinuous, more like dolphins moving at speed. Sippy seemed to have spotted them, and redoubled her efforts – she reached the launch about five seconds ahead of them, and was pulled over the gunwales. She then showed the Captain something – it might have been a document, or it might not – and he seemed to stiffen with alarm, and gestured towards the fleet. The launch foamed ahead at full speed, and our last view of our classmate was her sitting next to the officer, talking very animatedly and occasionally pointing in our direction.

Well! One really has to think again about our classmate. I fear she was not entirely truthful with us as to her being a Quaker from Lancashire – from Lancashire she certainly was by her accent, but if that was her real name I will be most surprised. (Apart from her first name being Charity, I mean. She was christened “Sippy” immediately on arrival, though I now think she tried hard and successfully to cultivate that image.) Molly looked on open-mouthed – and all Helen and I could tell her, was that it looked as if Sippy was transferring from aircraft to the Navy ahead of schedule.

An uncomfortable early evening changed dramatically when Mr. Sapohatan reappeared, and had a quiet word with the Noenoke family. Whatever he said to them cheered them up considerably – and then he came over to us. By his account, he had been having a long conversation with our chum, and she had decided that leaving the climate of the Spontoon Islands would be good for her health. Molly nodded at this, as she has told us a lot of similar tales from her Father’s profession. He reassured us that he had received answers to some questions that had been troubling him and his colleagues for some time – and that we were to regard ourselves as freed from blame. Our tutors would be told the relevant facts, indeed – he seemed to know all about the difficulties I had been in when I had “lost” Molly last month. Bowing, he excused himself and took his leave, explaining that his duties now called him elsewhere on the islands.

When Molly was fast asleep, I had a long whispered chat with Helen. Our best guess is that his story is as true as the one I told him – perfectly true, but leaving out a lot of inconvenient facts. I could well believe that he had talked with Sippy – and that he was the one asking all the questions. What I was less convinced of, is that Sippy had simply been released and told to leave – she had left the cliff in an awful hurry, and something had been trying to intercept her at the launch. Whatever else she was, Sippy turned out to be an absolutely champion swimmer – or I have a feeling she would not have got to that boat at all. There was something underwater heading towards her at a great rate of knots, and I doubt it was to wave her farewell. In which case, it is surely a draw between two Intelligence agencies – one agent exposed and having to flee the islands for good, though alive and with some information I doubt the Spontoonies would be happy to let her walk away with.

I talked over what I had seen of the “Sea Fleas” with Helen, and drew a sketch that I hastily tore up and disposed of in the galley fire when she had looked it over. I pride myself on being quite fair on sketching from memory – but Helen is a little doubtful, claiming that anything very similar to my version would be radically unstable, and fall out of the sky in all directions at once. Which I can hardly argue with – except to point out that we had seen some aircraft performing very dramatic aerobatics that no Tiger Moth could match, however expertly handled. The Spontoonies have managed it somehow – but I doubt they will be giving us guided tours to tell us how.

April 30th, 1935

A bright day, in more ways than one. We set sail from Chiklooha quite late in the morning, and met up with another small fleet of three craft at our fishing reef. The boats were quite swarming with the Noenoke clan and their relatives – there must have been a dozen hamster cubs, but it was hard to count as they never seem to stay still long enough. Pateeta and Paloma introduced us, pointing out Mama Mikano Noenoke herself, a lady who seemed made almost entirely of round shapes under the fur, and was very busy with two very new cubs. She also introduced two of her brothers of about our age, Potahic and Rinamo, who are already “captains” of their own boats.

It was a very different trip with the cubs along – very boisterous balls of fur and frolic, wearing nothing but their fur while onboard the boats – when they are in the boats, as they spend half the time in the water. As soon as they saw us they climbed all over us – Helen and Molly were most surprised, and I confess it was rather undignified. Back home, all but the youngest would be in proper school Uniforms by now – though they happily do not seem to understand what they are missing.

Still, there was a lot of hard work to do after our two days off, Captain Sigmarsen hovering around in the Ice Queen, worrying about his ice melting before we fill the hold. I expect that must be a popular job in the full summer heat – handling ice at the Beresby cannery. Their ice factory is a strange building, looking like an excessively thatched hut with layers of plaited palm mattings nearly a yard thick for insulation – by all accounts it has been running since the cannery opened twenty years ago, though it needs constant re-thatching. A thick modern filling of good fluffy asbestos would last better, be fireproof, far healthier and more hygienic, one would think.

May 1st, 1935

Hurrah! The canning plant is closing for a few days of maintenance, so we have 2 days leave. In fact, we only have till the end of the week till we are back at Songmark – time has certainly flown.

One thing Helen has commented on, is that we have certainly improved our condition – our fur decidedly gleaming, with all the sunshine, hard work and fresh food diet. Helen has been getting along very well with Mama Noenoke, who has been sharing quite a few household tips – useful ones when your “household” is a half-open boat out in the fresh air all day.

Helen has gone back to her more breezy “Native” costume, and now looks rather different – Mama Noenoke has showed her how to make a sunburn preventing cream from palm oil and the unripe juice of some native nuts. By all accounts it is very effective, though it has the effect of greatly darkening the bits it is applied to, and is all but impossible to shift from fabrics. Helen certainly could pose for a postcard of dusky island maidens now, though I think few postal services would deliver it! Molly seems quite keen on the idea.

A busy morning – we were dropped off at Beresby, and hiked over the ridge to Main Village in record time. There was a dance contest scheduled for that evening – tempting, but with two whole days we decidedly felt like sailors on shore leave, and (though I hesitate to mention it) almost the same priorities. I found a public telephone and tried ringing around to see if Jirry was free to meet us – alas, although I got through to the Guide agency, I discovered he and his brothers are hired out today carrying film equipment around South Island. Still, he is free tomorrow, as there are currently no tour boats docked – so I arranged a meeting.

Fortunately, although we have standing instructions from our Songmark tutors to stay off Casino Island this holiday, there is no ban on bringing anyone else to meet us. And although we have not been paid for our fishing, I hit upon the idea of sending myself postal cheques to wait for collection at all the village post offices on the island – so we are in funds wherever we end up, and whether or not our costume has room for a purse.

One visit to Main Village post office later, we were buying an excellent lunch, roast chicken. Hurrah! We were joined by some of the Noenoke clan, Potahic and his cousin Tihan. They seemed very pleased to see us, and indeed Tihan mentioned they were very thankful that we had managed to avoid accidents. One got the impression that certain people around these waters are prone to unhappy accidents. Helen somewhat pushed her luck, I thought, as she mentioned our ex-comrade and commented that Sopyy’s departure seemed to have taken a lot of the damp mood with her. Indeed, without Sopyy around the mood does seem to be decidedly lighter – and the locals do seem far friendlier.

Promising to meet later on, we waved farewell to the Noenokes and went out in search of some supplies. Molly had been pestering us all term to try out the fur oil we discovered on South Island, so we purchased Tulupas oil, curing agent and combs, and headed down the coast to a secluded part of the beach to apply it. A lengthy business even with three of us checking for missed spots – but inside an hour we were all three of us feeling and looking decidedly different. Molly seems quite delighted with her new look, and comments that she feels a long way from Kansas now. (A look at the map quickly confirmed she is perfectly correct.)

In the evening we retired to the Northern coast with knapsacks full of supplies, as Helen is very keen on a beach party after so long at sea. A very pleasant evening, meeting with Potahic, Tihan and Rinamo. I must say, we must have looked a very strange party, with none of the native gentlemen coming up to my shoulders in stature – though they are all surely far heavier than any of us, being exceptionally solidly built. The Nootnops Blue was exceedingly welcome after all this time, and a very fine time was had by all (but especially Helen and Molly. Had Jirry been around, I would have done much the same, especially when Potahic demonstrated with Helen some possibilities of a hammock I had not thought of before.)

May 2nd, 1935

Our last day of shore-leave, and one we surely made the most of. First, we checked with the fishing fleet, and lent a hand with some boat maintenance on the beach. Mama Noenoke was in her usual cheerful mood, and commented that we looked very fine with our newly waterproofed fur. Helen and Molly did indeed look decidedly glowing.

Quite an embarrassment though when Mama Noenoke jokingly asked us if we had worked out our wedding dowries. Her unmarried daughters have dowries of between two and three thousand local shells apiece, and are keen to add to them. I spotted Helen scribbling sums in one of the waterproof notebooks she had begged off me, and

indeed the cost of a year at Songmark would quite set up anyone with a longhouse and a garden plot should they desire it. Helen being sadly orphaned, she has nobody to disapprove if she ever does take it into her head to go Native to the fullest extent.

Indeed, no sooner did we sit down with Mama N than the four youngest additions to the Noenoke clan swarmed all over us – being quite adorable and very rounded balls of highly energetic fur. I was wearing my second most daring Native costume, and the two youngest seemed to ... associate me with refueling, one might say. I think my ears are still blushing. Mama N thought it a great joke, and said something about an omen. My Spontoonie is becoming adequate for simple conversations, but I was far too embarrassed to ask for details. The most embarrassing thing was, having to disappoint the Noenoke cubs, who looked quite adorable.

We returned to Main Village for supplies – and indeed Jirry was there, carrying a stack of film canisters along with half his family working with a film team. Happily, they finished at lunchtime, when it was time for the star to take her afternoon nap. On hearing that the star was Little Shirley Shrine, Helen made her excuses and left in a woodland direction, with Jirry's brother Marti in close formation.

By Jirry's accounts, this is scheduled to be a busy filming season on the islands, there being six film companies arriving this month alone! He and his family are fully employed, which is of course good news – though sadly it means I will be able to see far less of him.

We were catching up on news when a loud party of about two dozen tourists shunted through the village like a goods train, cameras popping loudly and dropping litter all over the place. On spotting Jirry and myself, about a yard of film must have been fired off, to cries of "Gee, what a cute Native couple!" and similar, in broad American accents. Jirry smiled stoically, and I suppose in a few weeks I will be labeled as a Spontoon native girl in holiday albums on the far side of the world. In character, I smiled and waved, while expressing myself in the Spontoonie language – a phrase I had heard last week when Rinamo got his paw bitten by a lobster. Some of the fishwives around looked shocked, so I believe I picked a suitable saying.

(Memo to myself – I can say things like that while in Costume. As far as the tourists are concerned, it was a Native girl greeting them cheerfully – one sometimes wonders just what the Natives are saying with a smile to some of the more obnoxious visitors. Of course I could never use such language in English, it would be quite unladylike.)

A most memorable afternoon, Dear Diary, catching up on lost time. All this fresh air does certainly make one ... energetic. Somewhat later, I broached a subject that I had long thought about – Jirry has mentioned being employed as a guide to various visitors to the island, and Helen has speculated that some of the lady tourists might pick their guides for more than their knowledge of the local geography. Jirry admitted that this has happened on occasion, and seemed to be bracing himself for my objections.

Actually, Helen had practical advice to share – she points out that Missy K is the only one of us who is Engaged, and has any right to worry about what her fiancé is doing when she is away. I told Jirry much the same – after all, guiding tourists is part of his family's living, and I can hardly ask him to turn away customers. Plus, tourists are here one week and gone the next -whereas I hope to be here another two years and more.

Things improved greatly after we cleared the air on the matter, and indeed Jirry pointed out that it worked both ways – something I confess I had not considered. But for the time being, I had exactly the company I had been waiting for – and again, demonstrated that the fresh air makes one exceedingly energetic!

May 3rd, 1935

Back to work on the nets indeed, for a final few days. The weather seems to have taken a turn for the tropical, and the sea is far the most comfortable place to work. It is a definitely strenuous life, sailing the boats and hauling the nets nine or ten hours a day, but never dull.

We have learned quite a lot that will prove useful - our fishing, boat handling and general survival skills have improved immensely, and Mama N has been giving us many hints on the local customs that I am sure have not been written down. She has "hit it off" quite considerably with Helen, and seems to have almost adopted her as an extra daughter (Helen jokes that she already has enough daughters to spare, but the other ones all need dowries paying for).

Being "authentic" Polynesians with no tourist interest, the Noenokes have many tales to tell of life on the waves. Mama N keeps insisting we need feeding-up, all of us being far too skinny for their ideas of beauty. It seems that living on a raft at the mercy of wind and currents can lead to some months-long impromptu voyages of discovery – and indeed that must have been how Easter Island and Walpurgisnacht Atoll were first settled. Having eighty pounds of surplus weight would be an advantage there, I suppose – and might explain why Missy K is proud of her figure. She is definitely carrying enough spare fuel, so to speak, to drift to Easter Island and paddle back home against the current.

I hated to disappoint Mama N, but I quite like my current shape – and when scrambling in and out of aircraft cockpits, the more agile the better. Samoa is famed for its wrestlers and weight lifters, but I have yet to hear of its gymnastic team.

I had hoped Molly would have calmed down, but alas I was wrong. True, working flat out does tend to leave her with little excess energy to get into mischief, but she seems to be making the most of what she has. She begged an advance off me on our shore leave to go shopping, and now is the proud owner of a new and more powerful fishing spear-gun. A most formidable affair, with bungee rubber cords as thick as one's thumb, and a three hundred pound draw weight (there is a very effective double lever system to pull the catch back, rather like a medieval crossbow.) As I write, she is sitting in the prow of the boat with it armed and loaded, looking for sharks (she says). The only two things she has managed to hit were a jellyfish and a sunfish – which the Noenokes cooked and presented to her with great ceremony, as everything we kill we are obliged to eat, this being a Tradition. Molly now knows that neither are remotely edible.

May 4th, 1935

After all the blazing heat of the past few days, we awoke in our hammocks hardly able to see the far end of the boat – a decidedly heavy “Pea-souper”, just like home. The fish seemed to be staying at home, and in any case Captain Sigmarsen would have an impossible task of finding us, so we had a fairly restful morning fixing nets and generally “housekeeping”.

Just after lunch we saw the fog starting to break up, and were about to weigh anchor when again I heard voices from the fog – but no sound of any ship. The sound of oars carries quite a way, to say nothing of ship's motors, but there was only a faint splashing. For a second I was looking out in the direction of the reef when the fog lifted suddenly – and saw three swimmers in the water. One of them turned our direction – and then they dived straight back underwater, vanishing without trace. Most alarming, as we were easily four miles off the Northern coast of Main Island.

Paloma was in the next boat hauling up the anchor, and must have seen them too – yet she seemed not at all alarmed. I managed to get a quiet word with her later, and voiced concern that anyone would swim out so far from land. She seemed to find it highly amusing, and said something I could not quite catch about them rarely coming so close to the islands. Very odd! And yet I remember the shape that I thought was a shark, back in the underground hangar with the Sea Fleas – and the shapes that tried to intercept Sopy looked like and yet unlike sharks or dolphins. I think there are some exceedingly odd Natives around here – ones who do not pose for cameras or postcards.

May 5th, 1935

Just two days to go – and indeed the weather seems to be trying to put in as much holiday sunshine as it can. Quite scorching today – we swim every day in good weather, and were a couple of hours in the water helping Tihan, Potahic and Rinamo untangle some nets that had drifted onto a patch of stag-horn coral. Tihan is quite amazing underwater – I have seen otter gentlemen diving that way, but one would not have thought hamsters had such skills. He can easily stay underwater for two minutes swimming vigorously, without even looking out of breath when he reaches the surface. Though the Noenokes would appear too rounded for any great bursts of speed, their stamina is quite amazing. If there are swimming marathons, I would certainly wager some of my allowance on their team. If I approved of wagering, that is – playing dice with Molly has quite cured any interest I may have had in such things.

It has become a very pleasant routine, every morning this week Helen, Molly and myself have groomed and oiled – and in their case, applied Mama N's sunburn prevention cream to relevant areas. A casual watcher would be hard pressed to spot we were “Euros” at all – as we speak the Spontoonie language onboard the boats, and have Mama N coach us on dress and behavior. Whenever an aircraft goes overhead, I remind myself that I will very soon be in a sweltering hot flight suit in full semi-tropical sunshine, that or sitting in a classroom working out wind drift and fuel flow problems. Definitely, we should make the most of our opportunities, especially now that Sopy is not around to object to them.

We had been fishing of the West coast of Main Island, and put in for fresh water in a sheltered little bay not fifty yards across, definitely the most isolated piece of the island we have seen so far. There is a beach and a pleasantly wooded ledge – and then the cliffs go right up, six hundred feet of cliff and pathless forest, with Crater Lake somewhere on the far side. Mama N announced we might as well land for the night, having just transferred our catch to the Ice Queen an hour before, but catching quite enough since then for a splendid feast. It was a fine evening indeed, the sun going down over the waves – and I spotted Helen vanishing into the trees with Potahic and a hammock.

Dear Diary – whether it was the relaxed company, the prospect of another term behind desks and elbow-deep in oily engines or whatever – I found it was the most natural thing in the world to unship my own hammock,

and invite Tihan for an evening walk. Things certainly do seem to happen naturally in these islands – and they did so. Again.

I feel I should probably be worrying about this, but somehow it is resolutely failing to happen. Indeed, my only faint regret is that I may be starting with exceedingly high standards, and setting myself up for future disappointments! However, there have been none whatsoever so far – so far, so good. And I am furthering my education at the same time, having learned from Tihan some new words in the local language – so that's all right.

May 6th, 1935

Another fine day indeed! Mama N has been helping us with our oiling and costume – she has been teaching us some of the finer points of grooming, and what some of the fur comb-marks mean, now she says we are qualified to wear them. I blushed somewhat when checking my notes from our previous holiday and discovering exactly what Jerry's sister "wrote" on us the first time we used Tulupas oil.

Mama N extended an open invite to all three of us to join her fleet any time we feel like it – which is very nice of her. It really is quite flattering, I must say – having discovered she was joking about how much wedding dowry we are "worth". Indeed, the more we are getting to know the locals, the more inviting their lifestyle becomes – and the less likely that we will open our mouths about what we have seen here. This may not be a coincidence.

Helen has been speculating about the usefulness of having alternate plans – and indeed, now it seems that both the Noenokes and the Hoele'toemi clans would be happy to take us in should we need to. Of course, we are fully booked for a full course at Songmark – but a lot of things can happen in three years, if the last two terms are anything to go by. It is quite a sight, Mama N sitting under the shade with her two youngest cubs to feed, while she recounts fascinating Native tales and provides us with some decidedly Practical advice that was not in the timetable back at St. Winifred's. Looking after cubs is a definitely new experience for me – especially since her youngest do keep trying to ... refuel from me, one might say.

We spent part of the morning fixing nets and the palm-matting arch of our boats – who would have thought when I took those raffia-weaving classes at St. Winifred's, how useful they would be? Helen and Molly are picking up the rudiments as well; though very skilled at basic repairs and construction, Helen has more experience with metal working than Traditional materials. Indeed, she is far better at working with aluminium than spelling it.

One final afternoon of fishing, which we are now managing to get through without particular aches and pains. A month of exceedingly strenuous work has quite paid off – most of the expensively groomed tourists we see are really looking quite off-colour and unhealthy next to the Noenokes and ourselves. Our current lifestyle may be short on luxuries, but it leaves one exceedingly fit to enjoy what pleasures we do have.

(Memo to myself – Tihan and myself must look exceedingly odd standing together in the boat – he being a third less tall but more than twice my width. At least there can be no confusion as to whose costume is whose in the dark. Mama N of course runs a respectable family boat, and everyone is back by dawn.)

May 7th, 1935

Alas! Farewell boats, farewell fresh air, farewell breezy Native costume. And farewell to Tihan and the other friendly Noenokes, as we parted company on the jetty at Beresby. We were due to report to Songmark for evening meal today, it being a Saturday. Molly complained that we should claim adverse winds and have one more night of it – but our Tutors would be sure to check. Plus, we will certainly need some time to "change gear" and prepare for classes on Monday; I for one am hardly feeling like sitting a Navigation exam right now.

There are public baths and showers in Main Village, and we spent a few cowries each ruining our painstakingly oiled, combed and patterned fur – ready to don shirts and shorts once again. Fur decidedly feels flat and thin, after being accustomed to the Native waterproofing style. Helen and Molly are quite pleased that the sun-tanning treatment Mama N provided looks likely to be long lasting – though I can imagine what some people will have to say about it, especially Madelene X who regards the idea of "going Native" with utter horror. I hope Molly will keep quiet about certain events, but that may be too much to hope for.

(Later) Back to Songmark – I am filling the last page of my waterproof notebook, before opening again my Diary proper. We are all three smartly kitted-out in our uniforms, ready to go down and tell a version of our holiday adventures to our Tutors. At least there is no unpacking to be done – one advantage of dressing in the Native style, is a blessed lack of laundry and ironing! And as for starching – most Natives would hardly recognise laundry starch, and probably assume it to be a new invention – instant Poi. But still, there are advantages – Maria returns tomorrow, and from the post room we have received new dance challenges from the Technical High School on Moon Island.

One hopes that some of our fellow students have had nice, relaxing holidays lying around eating pastries and chocolate on the beaches. Molly has checked our timetable, and we have a refresher self-defence class on Monday morning – with our current level of fitness, we should be like cruisers against wooden sailing junks. We

may have some surprises in store for Madelene X if she provokes us in her usual style. Ah well, Dear Diary – a holiday over, and another long term ahead – but on Monday at least, there should be something to look forward to seeing!

***** End of chapter. Amelia's adventures will continue! *****