

Final Approach

Being the twenty-fourth part of the diaries of Amelia Bourne-Phipps, who is returning to Spontoan for her final term at Songmark Aeronautical Boarding School for Young Ladies. She's back from German Antarctica, where the Natives were Restless...

Thursday April 15th, 1937

Home to Spontoan at last. Last night we arrived at Eastern Island just as darkness fell, with the lights of Casino Island just starting to come on across the water. Getting through Customs was trickier than usual; either they have brought in a new batch of officials who do not know us by sight, or some furs with the fresh passport stamps for German Antarctica have been known to bring back interesting souvenirs. If so we can hardly blame the Customs furs for being edgy – considering the sort of artefact Professor Schiller collects, and what we have seen down there.

Having established Molly was not actually trying to smuggle in the 400 million year old Unholy Sword of [] * we were finally let through and stood on Spontoan soil again. Songmark is open right now though the arrival date for third-years is sunset Sunday night, but nobody suggested we return to our rather hard dorm beds and the rather plain Songmark cuisine a minute earlier than we need to. Instead – before the Dornier X had even finished refuelling for its next stage to Vostok we were waving to the crew from a water-taxi heading for South Island.

It was excellent to be back amongst the scent of jungle plants in a warm evening, with birds and insects calling all around. In Antarctica the only sound was the howling wind, with the crunch of snow crust breaking under our skis and everyone around panting for breath. Being in our shorts and shirts was very fine as well, feeling warm wind on our fur. Strictly speaking it is quite cool in April here and of course we were much warmer two days ago crossing the equator, but after acclimatising to Neue Suden Thule it still feels tropical.

Mrs. H was pleased to see us as ever – and although it was late a meal of her excellent baked vegetables was ready as soon as we were out of our respectable Euro outfits. Marti is here (I doubt we will see much of Helen till we have to leave for Songmark) and the good news is that Jirry is returning next week! Just my luck that we will be hideously busy at Songmark, but even an hour or two would be something.

This morning we spent relaxing and catching up with the Hoele'toemi family, after sending a postcard to Post Box Nine that we had things to tell Mr. Sapohatan. I am sure he knows we are back, but it is polite to tell him myself. Although it is always hard to work out what to put on these cards, having sent him a postcard printed in Berlin of innocent tourist scenes in Wotansberg (keen-looking sports furs skiing outside in the snow, jolly-looking waitresses in dirndls carrying big beer steins indoors) with the message "Eventful trip, wish you were here!" should attract his attention. Saimmi will no doubt find us in her own time; it is a fairly pointless task to go looking for Spontoan's High Priestess. She might be anywhere, and if she is not here this morning it is because there is something more urgent elsewhere.

Molly was all for heading off to the attractions of Casino Island right away, but the rest of us decided a day of relaxation would do better. This is one of the last chances we will get, after all – it is like furs describe things in the Great War with troops on their last days of leave knowing they will soon be back at the Front. They never know what will happen after that – unless there is news of a "big push." We certainly know there is one awaiting us! After all, it is the final term at Songmark with exams at the end of it ... that is going "over the top" as much as we have ever done. In terms of being on Spontoan, it is something most of us are never coming back from.

Still, that did not mean we spent all our time on the beach. Just getting back into the Hoele'toemi garden patch digging and weeding was good exercise but relaxing in its way – and we are very aware of the debt we owe the family, whether or not they ever mention it (I doubt they ever would.) Being up to our tails in greenery rather than snow was a great improvement, and as for helping with the taro plantation – though we are no fans of poi the rest of the family certainly are. I can hardly forget the circumstances last year when I had a craving for poi; it set my ears blushing thinking that this time next year I might be looking forward to the dish in the same way again.

After luncheon we strolled up to Hotel Bay and saw some familiar snouts; Jasbir and Meera Sind, plus Sophie D'Artagnan, fresh back from Gull Island! The two mongooses (would that be "mongeese"? I never think to ask, and they would probably reply it is not an issue in any of the five Indian languages they can speak) and the French otter have been having a very fine time considering the lack of facilities there; apparently after a day or two on Gull Island one hardly notices the smell, though oddly enough staying as sensitive as ever to other scents. Roast seagull is the national dish although it is a brave fur who goes hunting on the main nesting colony there – the gulls know exactly what the resident foxes like to eat, and are prone to mob them by the thousand. Meera seems extremely ... impressed by her experiences. The locals were extremely friendly, and the Sind sisters seem to have reciprocated. Amongst other things.

Actually it was quite a time for catching up; we hear that most Songmark girls have been making their most of their holidays, not just the final year for whom it was the last chance. By repute Miss Rote and her famous Crusader Dorm have had an eventful trip to Vostok, evidently quite as "interesting" what Maria calls

our own Tsar Trek – this next generation of Songmark seem quite keen to maintain our traditions. Considering that by reputation every loyal Vostokite girl wants to be a secret agent and hunt down deviants and heretics of all imaginable shades however trivial, sleuths must be viewed as something on the lines of visiting movie stars to them.

Evidently we have missed out on a lot, but our own Easter was as eventful as it gets. Nobody gets to do everything, after all. I suppose the parts my diary has said least about would seem as Adventurous in themselves as most furs could wish for, trekking across the Antarctic plateau pursued by what was released from that ancient archaeological site. Covering forty miles a day over the snows is a heroic thing to do on paper (let alone snow) but at the time it gets to be rather a strain if not exactly a bore – there is far more that actually happens in half an hour on Casino Island any day of the week.

When we returned to the Hoele'toemi compound we were reminded that Spontoon has a rather efficient postal system, at least for some forms of communication. There was a postcard for us, innocent enough on the outside unless one knows the circumstances – “*glad you had a nice holiday – will drop by tonight to see the photos!*” and no signature except an “S”. Still, there can be no single point on the Spontoon islands more than an hour away from any other by water taxi and post bicycle, with the exception of Mount Kiribatori.

We had to stick close to the longhouse after discovering we expected company, but the weeds in the garden patch always need hoeing, and indeed they are shooting up this time of year. As we piled the weeds and assorted plant debris into the compost heap we managed to fill it a yard deep in a few hours' work. Mrs. H says South Island would quite like a “Bio-reactor” the second of which is now being built near the plantations on the South-West spur of Main Island, but this neighbourhood is designated a tourist spot and the Althing is approving nothing too modern-looking. Hotels are an exception of course – tourists may spend the day marvelling at quaint Native longhouses and (carefully preserved) untamed jungle, but insist on returning to a five-star Art Deco construction with clean rooms and hot water in the taps.

Mr. Sapohatan arrived after dessert, looking less weary than last time we met. He says married life is suiting him, though we naturally inquired no details. He congratulated us at returning from German Antarctica – although many furs might think it is so remote from Spontoon that he would hardly care about it, Moscow, Washington, London and Paris are equally remote and of great interest. I hope to see something of London this year, whether or not that involves taking up the Allworthy seat in the House of Lords.

One thing we could tell him was that we saw no definite military preparations down there unless one counts their sponsoring the archaeology. Having described what was encountered in the millions-year old city, he seemed more agitated. After all, if such things exist they might just possibly be tamed, or at least negotiated with. At any rate, it would be more a matter for Priestesses than troops to deal with; Maria pointed out that Starling's Russia is now wide open to such a threat as it has never been before. They used to have Priests and monasteries with centuries of traditions of dealing with what came out of the darkness. Rather than counting their rosaries (if Eastern Orthodox monks do that) it is a lucky ex-monk who has survived long enough to be counting trees in Siberia.

It took two hours of him closely questioning us before our story wound up; he congratulated us again about getting back in one piece. I did ask him if it was all right to pass on what I had seen to Major Hawkins – after all I hope to be in England this Summer and need all the good words putting in for me that I can get. After pondering he agreed, and indeed he is easy enough on my sharing information on things outside the Nimitz Sea. The information gathered on our trip to Macao was happily shared – though the “torpedo breaker” Alpha Rote came up with as a consequence was not.

Actually, he had a present for me as Lady Allworthy – he handed over a sheaf of blueprints of complex metal forgings he would like to commission from Barrow-in-Furryness. They are obviously machine parts, but there is no indication of what they go into. I am not too surprised. Anyway, I accepted the commission and promised to send the blueprints along with a letter first thing tomorrow when the post office opens.

He made his farewells to us and the Hoele'toemi family, and left us feeling both relieved and exhausted. Being grilled is tiring work, and at least he seems happy with our Easter break. I have even got another commission for the Allworthy estates, which is all to the good – though the Depression seems to be lifting across most of Europe, some more foreign exchange will always help matters over there.

A quiet end to the day, as Helen heads off first with Marti and the rest of us head out to the single ladies' hut in the village. Definitely we will try and catch up on sleep before Sunday – it is about the best preparation we can make, being quite fit now. Someday I expect a Songmark girl really will spend a holiday doing what our Tutors always accuse us of – lying on a beach with ice-cream and chocolates all day. But she won't do it twice.

* Editor's note: Amelia's diary is written in phonetic short-paw, using the never-popular Lexarc System that was invented by one of her schoolteachers and never caught on. The symbol on the page is presumably untranslatable in any language speakable with a normal biology, which is possibly just as well.

Friday 16th April, 1937

Definitely not a day for lying on a beach – April in Spontoon is noted for sharp, torrential downpours and today we had some. The jungle around is not inviting, with the leaves lashed by squalls running in from the East and

visibility down to a quarter mile. We are glad we are not on gate guard right now or out on the open airfield rigging a canvas covered aircraft – though we are very aware that will happen soon enough.

Actually we hardly expect to see Helen most of the day – the guest hut is very comfortable and she and Marti have a lot to catch up on. Of all of us, Helen is the only one with a secure future planned out; she has agreed to accompany us on our trip to Europe after graduation (or at least after we leave Songmark) provided I can arrange her return ticket to Spontoon afterwards. She will be Helen Hoele'toemi by then, and will probably be adding tiger stripes to the family features by this time next year.

As South Island in the rain has little to offer in terms of leisure (unless one has the use of a Guest longhouse and agreeable company) we headed out to Casino Island after breakfast. It is busy despite the weather, with hotels and such being decorated and spring-cleaned ready for the tour-boats arriving next month. There are posters up for a “hiring fair” such as we used to have in England before the Great War, where hotels and businesses fill their vacancies for the season from the crowds of hopefuls coming in from the Kanim Islands and further afield (or should that be “a-wave?”).

My first duty was to be at the post office as soon as they opened, and indeed the blueprints and my personal note was soon winging its way towards distant Barrow-in-Furryness. That done, I could relax a little. One part of a “normal” life we miss is just simple shopping. Whenever we get here in term time it is a matter of rushing from one appointment to the next, and we checked that tomorrow the dance classes will be held. It will be the first time in quite awhile we have been there, and this time we will not be able to show the rest of the class any new dances such as we found on Orpington Island last year. Although according to those terrifying bas-reliefs the builders of the city in the Antarctic certainly had rituals that might have been dances, we do not have the biology to copy them. A sea anemone might have a better chance, or perhaps that odd pet invertebrate *Angelica* seems to have following her.

Having hardly had the chance to spend a cowry of my allowance recently, I happily stocked up on essentials. Songmark food is plentiful and nutritious if not particularly tasty; I bought a bottle of anchovy essence for myself and one of “Cajun chilli extra-hot” for Helen. It makes poi quite bearable. A few tropical chocolate bars are handy to keep ready to grab for sudden emergencies when the Tutors call us out at three in the morning and we are half-way up Mount Kiribatori by dawn. I even patronised Molly's enterprise with a can of “fish log” which is much better than messy sardines or too-solid corned beef to eat on its own straight out of the can.

Although the rain kept coming down, Casino Island was quite crowded even apart from the workers busy on preparing for tourist season. I spotted the Siamese girl Malou, and arranged to meet tomorrow for more lessons in what I suppose is disguise through behaviour. I would really like to give Kim-Anh Soosay an airing – and with that in mind I purchased fresh fur dye and a new comb for applying it.

Malou is really a very pretty girl, and I would do well to model Kim-Anh on her behaviour. I found myself blushing at all the implications of that – remembering she has an equine husband and an adorable child. We have not actually met but he sounds... impressive, and she is evidently very happy with him. Considering Malou is even smaller than I am, that is something to definitely think about.

Luncheon was something not on the Hoele'toemi family or Songmark menus, a plain dish of “Euro” sausages and mashed potato. Lovely grub, as they used to say in school. The amount of meat we each get in the average week at Songmark would hardly feed a wild crow, but there is always plenty of fish. The diet may be Spartan but there is no doubt it is healthy and indeed the quantities are one thing even Missy K has never grumbled at. Looking at us, we could star in that new “Women's League of Health and Beauty” that is proving popular back in England and have mass rallies with open-air sports. I know Prudence subscribes to a Health and Efficiency magazine, though that mostly consists of furs showing their whole fur patterns as they play beach volleyball and similar vigorous sports in the fresh air. Actually we could have used a few pounds more insulation in Antarctica; oddly enough it is our Spontoonie classmate Missy K who is the best suited to a climate like that.

Having been relentlessly athletic in Antarctica, we finished up on something else that we never get elsewhere – chocolate cake. It must be months since I had any, certainly not since Christmas and perhaps not then – so much for us being the “*pampered plutocrats living on the workers' backs and the fat of the land*” that Liberty Morgenstern keeps accusing everyone of as a matter of principle. Presumably anyone (except her) who can afford Songmark fees is far too rich, and her philosophy only recognises wealth as being extorted from the Workers. To quote her, “*there is no such thing as an honest profit.*” Today we hardly care and know it is definitely a day to remember; from past experience we know this time next week we will be looking back hungrily from our bowls of three-finger poi wishing we had eaten another slice of gateaux.

Maria had to contact her Embassy to see if they have anything for her, so Molly and me had a relaxing time window-shopping – that is, ducking between shop awnings in the driving rain. Her bank account is doing rather well, much to her delight – after all, apart from royalties on the increasingly popular “Fish Log” she is quietly paid rent by the Althing on that cargo ship Captain Granite had, which used to be called the Three Moons. Having the rentals without responsibility for its bills is definitely a happy combination.

While she counted her shells in the bank, I saw one thing out of the window that I hardly liked to mention to her. I had been thinking about fur dye and such, and perhaps was looking rather harder at furs passing by than I generally do. I saw two canine ladies pass right outside the window, and after some head-scratching recognised them both. The very pretty and elegant vixen Gilda is a “huntress” that I have met at Miss

Rachorska's house – off duty this time of day, one might think. The other was a hound of definitely mongrel appearance, with bold black blotches and tawny highlights on her exposed fur, looking quite striking. But there was something I knew was familiar about the shape of her muzzle – when I saw her eyes I recognised her. Florence Farmington! Right now she is almost unrecognisable and though I know she has a perfectly good pedigree ... an uncharitable observer might speculate her mother and grandmothers worked on the China Dock with more popularity than Precautions.

I know she asked my advice last term about finding a suitable ... companion, and though I passed her onto Prudence (who surely is better qualified to judge – oddly enough Prudence seemed rather peeved I had sent Florence her direction) she came back asking for details of a qualified Huntress. Although I was glad to be able to help point her via Miss Rachorska, I hardly like to think of getting the reputation of being the one to go to for that sort of advice!

Fortunately they were out of sight by the time Molly came out from her bank and I hope Florence is back in her usual fur pattern by Sunday night. Not that there is anything our Tutors have exactly said about changing one's appearance, and indeed I am sure Miss Devinski once saw me patterned as Kim-Anh. Though she gave no indication of recognising me at the time, I would not bet a cowry that my disguise fooled her for a second.

We met up with Maria at Lingenthal's for teatime (tea for me, coffee for her and Molly) and noticed she had a large metal posting tube under her arm. Her Uncle does like sending her drafts of posters, which she often returns covered with as much savage criticism as any Red or Anarchist might make. After all, as she says, Il Puce cannot do everything himself (though he apparently tries rather too hard) and some of his Party are more enthusiastic than gifted when producing propaganda.

Apart from the usual sheaf of heroic style posters showing military and economic triumphs (rather overstated, she glumly admits – Italy still has to import every drop of oil having found none in its Empire) there was one that definitely caught our attention. It depicted a rather radical aircraft taking off without the obvious aid of a propeller. It was a low-winged design with a cigar-shaped fuselage open at both ends, climbing at about forty-five degrees having just cleared the end of the runway and evidently heading somewhere in the direction of the Pleiades at about three gravities acceleration, with a streak of blue flame jetting from its tail outlet. I was rather reminded of one of Monsieur Le Duck's designs, or the strange high speed models we used to see being test-flown around the Spontoons until they presumably moved them somewhere remoter and more secure.

Of course we quizzed her on that one – she wriggled slightly in embarrassment and said such an aircraft codenamed the N1 was actually in construction by Mr. Campini at the Caproni works – though its rocket-like performance was something of an “artist's impression”. I recall seeing other Italian artist's impressions with the big Caproni Ca 60 triple triplanes performing various aerobatics as if it was a Tiger Moth. This Caproni and Campini effort when completed is meant to get around the problem of starting a Le Duck design by having a good reliable piston engine inside to get it off the ground and the air inside the duct moving fast enough to ignite the burners of the “thermojet” that really produces the power to accelerate it to five hundred miles an hour. According to the inventor, anyway. Maria says the original design sketches had quite sharp edged wings as proposed from tests in the high-speed wind tunnel in Guiodonia, but it has to take off and land at ordinary speeds and wings that only start generating lift at three hundred knots might be troublesome that way.

We wished the constructors well, awarded them ten out of ten for bold thinking, and look forwards to seeing floatplane thermojets blasting off the lagoon at Speed Week someday - though we will not be holding our breaths.

Back to South Island, having absorbed our ration of “Euro Culture” for awhile. The rain stopped, but we had a wet walk in through the trail under the dripping trees. Still, that is what keeps Spontoon green and pleasant; nearby the flatter Orpington Island is dry and scrubby in the centre to the disadvantage of both farmers and anyone wanting to set up a tourist trade.

The Hoele'toemi household has had quite a range of distinguished guests in the past two days, which does not include us! Saimmi was there, having arrived an hour ago and evidently been busy catching up with her family. Although she technically has no family being High Priestess, she does not take that too literally. For a change she quizzed the four of us not just Helen and me; Maria is getting somewhat less uncomfortable as time passed with us being what she still calls “witches”. Having seen what we are up against and what we can do about it, I suppose anyone would have to admit it is a practical skill rather than a theology. Her crucifix certainly did nothing to protect her on Cranium Island last year.

It took another two hours before Saimmi was satisfied, both that she understood something of what we found in Antarctica, and that the Germans are not likely to be able to control let alone export it. She also had to be certain we had not brought anything back with us – there are things she would spot that the Customs officials are not qualified to. It was a relief to be given a clean bill of health, so to speak. We are still beginners as far as warrior priestesses go – part of the problem is there have been none such on Spontoon for centuries, and we have nobody local with direct experience in the job to learn from.

Saimmi says she has been talking with our Tutors, and knows we will not be available for our usual Sunday training – the final Songmark term is notoriously severe. But just as with Songmark, she expects us to make up the work in whatever time we have available – farewell sleep!

Saturday 17th April, 1937

A far brighter day than yesterday and one we resolved to make the most of. After nine hours wonderful sleep (such a sweet thing to get, we shall miss it sorely) we headed out to Casino Island, with Mrs. H and Moeli waving us farewell. Moeli is getting definitely round now, and will be adding another kitten to the family before either Helen or I get the chance to marry into it. If the Spontoones posed for family photographs it might be difficult as her husband is one of the Natives of No Island and they are notoriously camera-shy. I keep wondering how the locals handle their paperwork at the Registry of Births, Marriages and Deaths on Meeting Island. Do they have special locked drawers with everything written in Spontoone, or do they just avoid the risk of exposure and ignore paperwork entirely?

The islands look very clean in the sunshine after yesterday's rain; a fine bracing breezy day that makes one want to jump into a sailing boat. We had a lively time on choppy waves crossing in the water taxi (Helen says she has not missed this part of Spontoon life one little bit) and soon were back on the Northern side of Casino Island with the dance class getting ready. It was quite packed, with a lot of natives and "Natives" who only actually wear grass skirts in tourist season, even though they may be Nimitz Sea locals. Some are from Orpington, Mildendo and suchlike islands where furs generally wear plain shirts and working overalls on docks and plantations, rather than paw-woven skirts and flower leis.

It was rather embarrassing; Mrs. Motorabhe our Dance teacher had the four of us up to perform, and was quite loud in our praises of "the Palm Sway". Having furs who were born a hundred miles or so away told to learn from us was rather a shock to both us and them, I believe. Still, we have had over two years' practice at local dancing and I suppose we are fitter than almost anyone else around, which certainly helps.

Jasbir and her dorm are not with us yet at dance class: we have seen Jasbir and Sophie around but they are presumably recovering from their efforts on Gull Island, and Jasbir mentioned Irma Bundt is due to arrive today from Switzerland. Unlike most European Songmark girls, I think she always went home for the holidays – except for the long summer breaks most of us prefer to spend the travel time and money nearer Spontoon. No more! It is rather a strange feeling knowing tomorrow is the last time we will all be meeting up.

Two hours of hard and strenuous dance had most furs definitely panting and drooping – by twelve we were very glad to do the traditional dash across the road, over the beach and in to bathe! The water in April is not tropical, but very welcome after such exercise. We had the beach to ourselves; apart from one party of three or four with a picnic basket the sands were empty. In a month or two there will be tourists lined up with cameras eager to see the dance class running onto the beach with Leis and grass skirts flying, and secretly hoping the costumes will have an "in-flight structural failure."

Thinking of tourists returning, it was rather a coincidence that I mentioned Moeli to one of our friends at the dance class, a dark-furred ewe called Aatohi. She works in a hotel here and could tell me about the one tourist on the beach, a mouse who is decidedly in Moeli's condition though embarrassingly without a husband. Three Spontoone males of various species were being very agreeable to her, and indeed she is being treated as quite the belle of the ball much to her amazement. It seems the lady was here in August and (as is not unknown) carried home from the islands a souvenir she did not have to declare to Customs. On her return trip she is being courted by several local gentlemen, who are astonished that no Euro has done so at the sight of her. I did overhear one of them saying his mother and sisters would love to meet her.

Molly came out with a proverb about a wise farmer not buying a field unless he has seen crops growing on it regardless of who ploughed the field beforehand. Spontoones quite agree about such things, for which a year ago I had cause to be very glad. Certainly we have met Spontoones who have "arrived" in circumstances that would shock my teachers back at Saint Winifred's. I expect if she wants, the murine lady can have anything from a paper marriage certificate back-dated to August, to a permanent place in a longhouse with a family who are not worried that her first-born will probably not look like the rest of the family. By all accounts a millionaire cannot buy a Spontoon citizenship but a penniless girl has other ways to get one. It has become a lot stricter since Countess Rachorska arrived in much the same condition in 1918, but the Spontoon islands were not deluged with tour-boats back then carrying thousands of holiday-makers who might want to stay. Indeed, twenty packed tour-boats including their crew are about the same as the current population of the islands.

Back into Euro costume and to the Euro restaurants – ham and eggs is such a rare treat at Songmark, and generally only appear as part of the "flight breakfast" before something too nerve-wracking for us to really enjoy the meal. Just being able to take an hour over lunch is such a treat (grilled Portobello mushrooms! Fried bread!) – Molly was almost cross-eyed in wonder as she contemplated spending the rest of the day on the beach with a crate of Nootnops Blue, if she really wanted to. She decided against it, but we all understand it is so nice to have the option. An hour on the beach and one bottle apiece was voted for by and seconded by Helen and Maria, and they headed out to put the plan into action.

Actually, if anyone was watching the ladies' powder room of the restaurant closely they would have had a surprise – as Amelia Bourne-Phipps went in and fifteen minutes later Kim-Anh Soosay walked out, dressed quite differently. Helen took home the bag with the clothes I walked in with, and I wore the silk outfit I was given at the Allworthy's house on Krupmark. I wonder what happened to their marsupial maid and dresser Judy? She was in on the plot to deceive me about Leon Allworthy being a harmless old gent ruled by his wicked sister, but seeing who her employers were and the island she was working on, irritating them by giving the game away

might not have been a good move for her. Things happen to employees on Krupmark worse than being thrown out without a reference. She was quite right about Leon's wicked sister – I have heard things since then about the previous Lady Allworthy that scarcely bear recording.

Fortunately the house Malou lives in is only a few streets away, and there are no tourists about. Not the tour-boat kind at least, though some Euro gentlemen of the loden-cloth or tropical twill costumed Adventuring types were very attentive as I went by. I found myself waving back – it would be hypocrisy of the worst kind to put on a dress like this and then be insulted that some gentleman notices it. Mind you, I was grateful Malou does not live too near the China Dock end of town.

By three o'clock I was sitting at her table drinking green tea while she constructively criticised my fur-pattern, clothing and most importantly how I wore it. She is quite unimpressed by the outfit, and says I could learn what she has to teach wearing a potato sack. Certainly she is a hard task-mistress, and gives excellent value for one Shell! Two hours of coaching in move and manners earned her grudging nod, and left me as tired in a way as the far more energetic dance classes earlier on.

Malou works just as hard teaching as I try to learning, and seemed very grateful for the break and more tea. Her kitten – or her child, I should say, as it is not pure feline – was awake and needing to be fed, which she let me help with. As far as I physically could, naturally. She winked and said her husband would be returning soon – and dressed as I was, might greatly appreciate finding me here. She had intimated before that she is not the jealous type.

Naturally I had to be off anyway, but I think my eyes might have glazed over somewhat at the prospect – it is nothing I am ever going to do, naturally (I hope to be reunited with Jirry next week however briefly). Still – I hope to be Tailfast in two months time and beyond the range of such "adventures". I could not avoid my tail twitching as I recalled my encounter with Mr. M'wede in Macao – and Malou's husband is apparently of a similar species, though he hails from the Fillypines rather than Africa. It might be a good idea next time to bring species specific precautions with me – just in case. I had no prior intention of having such an encounter with Mr. M'wede either, and Songmark girls are definitely encouraged to think ahead.

It would be very embarrassing indeed to see the yacht "Scimitar" anchored off Eastern Island and a certain Onager gentleman turning up with a bouquet of flowers and enquires after my health and ... family circumstances. As far as he knows I could have reason to be very pleased to see him, three months later.

On the return trip I was glad it was Spontoon in Spring and not London, and not because many of the locals were wearing less than me. A single layer of silk over the fur feels very smooth but it is rather minimal insulation. The good thing about being in dyed fur is only folk who really know me are likely to recognise me – to the rest I might just be an exotic dancer from Casino Island on a stroll between rehearsals.

I was the last one back at the Hoele'toemi household, and a relaxing evening followed. Jirry's ship is three days away; Mrs. H is looking forward to its return if anything more than I am, as she has both her husband and son to welcome home. Helen is the lucky one – though naturally Marti and Jonni are keen to see their brother home after what we assume was a long and risky voyage. It was certainly long enough.

Molly has much the same to look forward to – she says she has heard from Lars, who does indeed send her postcards from exotic places – in the past six months she has had stamps from Bora Bora, Vanierge, Mixteca and Argentina. Evidently her stag has been busy. But he is back on Krupmark, which is within reach. It is certainly awhile since their paths crossed. Like the rest of us she is thinking about what to do after she graduates or finishes Songmark, at any rate – we have learned to assume nothing. Certainly we are not likely to get the chance to see him much in term-time – in fact we have already written off the next three months. That chocolate cake was the last treat we will have for the foreseeable future – except for Helen, who retired early with Marti to the guest longhouse.

Sunday 18th April, 1937

A very spring-like day; Molly, Maria and I had promised ourselves we would enjoy a long luxurious lie-in as the last one we will probably get as Songmark students – but the light woke us early and indeed all the village girls are up and about just after dawn. Sleeping in late is a very "Euro" thing to do.

There is never any shortage of things to do at Haio Beach. We joined some of the neighbours reef fishing off the South Coast with outrigger canoes and nets. The canoes are quite plain; they will go into the village boathouse at the end of the month and the elaborately carved and painted Polynesian canoes will replace them for tourist season. Certainly some of the freshly repainted designs on the tourist" traditional" boats are so eye-catchingly bold one can well believe they would scare the fish. We had some success with the fishing and trotted back with our catch to the Hoele'toemi household – even Moeli was fishing strenuously, though one might have thought her better advised to stay at home until her kitten is born. She just laughed when I mentioned it, and recounted tales of some of her friends just working in the fields till the last day, or even delivering the kitten there and then. Definitely the Spontoons are a poor business opportunity for high-priced consulting midwives. One hears that a midwife's secondary skill is discretion, and around here the locals seem immune to scandal.

Saimmi was there when we returned, and put Helen and me through a definitely strenuous bout of Warrior Priestess training. Although it is more of a parlour trick than anything, at least now we will never be short of ability to make a fire. Doing it in such a way is about as much effort as cutting down a tree and whittling

out a matchstick with a pocket knife though – apart from ceremonial occasions such as lighting the solstice fires, Saimmi says priestesses use flint and steel or matches like anyone else. It is a good thing Molly is not learning this – she would be in endless temptation, and at risk of dangerously wearing herself out. It is far easier to make a fire by rubbing two sticks together, and we found out in the first year what an awful job that is even given textbook conditions and perfectly suited woods (hard and dense like holly or mahogany for the drill, soft and splintery like willow or pitch pine for the block, and with dried fungus for tinder.)

At least that is one secret I will not have to worry about leaking out – it is quite impossible to write down what we do in our Warrior Priestess training – rather like the classic comparison of a blind fur trying to learn about different colours from a Braille book. Writing a thicker and more comprehensive book would not really help. Having seen some radically different “styles” of such things, it surprises me that they all work more or less; we described to Saimmi more or less what Minden, Riss and Wurm did in Antarctica which was effective in a sort of sledgehammer way. Brute force and ignorance, might better describe it – but with enough brute force one can move mountains and indeed their approach somehow seemed to expect far more energy would be available from somewhere; more than the three of them actually had. Getting it is another matter; as the saying goes, being a millionaire is easy if one only has the money.

Luncheon was excellent and came as a surprise – Molly and Maria cooked the whole meal themselves! Of course all Songmark girls learn to cook well enough to avoid hunger in their first year, but Molly and Maria are generally content to open a can of beans and a can of corned beef, mix, heat and serve. Molly has even been happy enough with Maconochie, given a decent batch (the military sub-contractors varied heinously in what actually went into the tin) and being served a well cooked traditional leaf and clay-wrapped baked fish with yam was quite an experience. It just goes to show; even at this late stage my friends are full of surprises. Mrs. H. can surely use a break, and happy to report the meal was perfectly edible.

Then – Helen and Marti vanished off for an hour, “packing up” as she said though I know all our Songmark kit has been ready since yesterday. Saimmi reassured me that should our Tutors throw me out, there is a place for a trainee Warrior Priestess here – which is one piece of reassurance to take with me today. We need everything we can get, heaven knows. It was an uncomfortable feeling, rather like waiting to go into an exam. By three o’clock all of us were dressed in our Songmark uniforms again, with the three barred notes on our collar and shoulder patches, saying farewell to the Hoele’toemi family. The mile or so across South Island to the ferry dock had rarely seemed so long, and there was more than one wistful look back between us. I recall our early holidays when we actually had two weeks of holiday on Spontoon rather than being sent off on trips.

Songmark was still there and waiting – the first two years had been back since last week. The final term is staggered somewhat to help with the exams at the end of it. So it was Florence’s dorm who were on gate guard to welcome us in – Florence Farmington and the Australian girl Kate, whose family had to leave Perth when the area became New South Sion. I did not mention seeing a “mongrelled” fur dyed Florence walking with Gilda the huntress but if she wants to tell me about it I will be interested to hear the story. In five minutes we were putting our kit away in our old dorm – it seems somehow smaller than I remember it.

We are certainly back with a vengeance and the Tutors are not planning on wasting a minute. On each of our beds was a sheaf of mimeographed papers with the timetable for the term – at least, three weeks of it. After that we will presumably stop taking new classes and spend the rest of term demonstrating what we have learned so far. Molly just gave a groan and flopped down on the bed carefully – and indeed there was a fine collection of drooping ears and tails.

At least we were all in the same boat, so to speak – I heard sounds of lamentation next door and noted that Jasbir’s dorm are back. Li Han just made it in time, her connection from Kuo Han being delayed by a typhoon sweeping across the area. In fact everyone is back; even Adele Beasley has returned alive and apparently well from Krupmark where she was apparently a guest of a most alarming resident living high “up the hill” from Fort Bob. Even I have heard of Miss Chartwell. Molly has been to Krupmark more and heard much of her via Lars, and I can hardly imagine anyone going to stay with her given the choice.

Back to Songmark food! Not Poi for a change, though everyone seemed to have resupplied with various sauces anticipating our usual weekend dish. There was pastefish though, which is the protein equivalent. Adding my fish sauce (anchovy) to the fish dish might seem an odd idea, but pastefish is generally dried and fed to chickens rather than people for good reason. Perhaps Liberty Morgenstern has been complaining about our life of luxury again. As a fact, a Songmark girl develops a digestion like a blast furnace and though we may grumble anything edible put in front of us goes down fast. The second-years are tucking in with the promise of hard work ahead of them – they are taking over our gate guard duty and will be spending many a relaxing three o’clock in the morning wandering around Songmark’s luxurious fences in the rain.

We had an hour or so to catch up with everyone. Nobody seems to have had any trips quite as extreme as ours – though Prudence and co were half the distance South themselves back to Yip-Yap island to clear up that case with the forged solid “Millstone” currency – and indeed they have to have as “social” a time as Jasbir and her sister. The difference is, presumably they will not be worrying if their Precautions had proved sufficient. We have looked at the stories sent in from previous Songmark graduates, keeping us up to date on how their careers are progressing – a couple of graduates produced children rather less than nine months after graduating. Although we are expecting the final tests to be as strenuous as a Berlin Olympic games with us entered for every event, evidently Mrs. Oelabe becomes somewhat pragmatic in the final Songmark term.

It is certainly something to think about – something Beryl told us as soon as we arrived today happened to be true. All Songmark is invited to a wedding; that Russian member of Red Dorm Tatiana is getting married on Tuesday, on Casino Island. Molly hit the roof when she found out to whom.

(Later) It is half an hour to lights-out but we have managed to get everything done we really need, and from now on we know that half an hour's sleep will be like half a bar of gold. Farewell to the final hours of our last holiday!

Monday 19th April, 1937

Dear Diary – this may be our last term, but our dear Tutors seem to be intent on making sure we remember it for the rest of our lives. Miss Devinski addressed us all at breakfast in the finest Sergeant-Major style, her theme being that having spent three years loafing we now had to get off our rumps and do some real work if we wanted to pass – and that though they had never failed a whole year before, they would do so in a heartbeat rather than devalue the name of Songmark and the qualifications of the deserving and hard-working years before us.

Though we certainly hope she is exaggerating, I am taking her seriously. We thought we worked hard enough before, but with Miss Devinski there is no such thing as hard enough. Just as aircraft components are tested to measure their breaking strain, it looks as if we have a similar examination ahead. It was certainly a collection of drooping ears and tails amongst our year hearing her promise as much. Then, I believe she says something similar to all the final years, just to remind us not to rest on our laurels. It would be about as comfortable to rest on holly.

Anyway, as per usual Miss Blande looked us over with a steely eye and announced she had never seen such a collection of flabby, gone-to-seed specimens who had evidently spent the entire holiday in a hotel bed with room service bringing up five meals a day. A brisk trot round the beaches of Eastern Island followed, with her and Miss Wildford cycling along the coast road chivvying us along while we grimly jogged through the dry sand dunes. When I think of our experiences in the Antarctic I half wished I was back at Wotansberg with the staff serving up roast pork knuckle, yellow split peas and steaming mounds of potatoes. Still, we knew it was going to be like this.

After an hour and a half we were directed onto a fleet of water taxis heading over to Moon Island. Molly's ears went up – but initially we stayed clear of the firing range much to her disappointment. Casino Island is not the only place being refurbished; the Rain Island naval base is rebuilding some of its original accommodation blocks, and demolishing others. This leaves three half-wrecked buildings with holes in walls and floor, broken glass, sharp timbers with nails exposed and other hazards.

Looking around, one would certainly think this is a place to move slowly and cautiously. So naturally Miss Blande had us running a timed relay-race through the tottering structures, passing a hefty chunk of pig iron ship's ballast as a "baton". When we were panting for breath she ordered an indoor self-defence exercise, pointing out that after Songmark we have no guarantee of only defending ourselves on nice soft sandy beaches.

Most of us finished the morning with minor cuts or digging out splinters; definitely we are learning to play rough! We will be trained in all sorts of confined spaces, caves, (lava tubes around here I expect), aircraft fuselages, buildings and anywhere else our Tutors can borrow. At the end of it we were asked to suggest how we could have done better – both Maria and Beryl gained a point apiece for suggesting trying to throw our opponents onto the splintered wood or the broken windows still edged with broken glass. Beryl had rather rough gym lessons at her old school – she wistfully recounted how her games teachers recommended they wear hobnailed boots with steel "horseshoe" heel taps, a determined back kick from which has a good chance of breaking bones. Not the sort of sporting advice we learned at Saint Winifred's!

At least we had a decent luncheon at the canteen on Moon Island. Standard Rain Island military fare is still better than Songmark's which is doubly irritating as we pay for ours and theirs is issued free – they have something called "scrod" which is a white fish dish rather tastier than last night's pastefish although papier-mâché is probably tastier than that. They also have beer available just as part of the regular ration – and Miss Blande had a large and foaming mug full, without forbidding us to. I suspected this was rather a "trick question" and stuck to fresh pineapple juice, but five of us followed our dear Tutor's example.

It was just as well it was not white wine or I might have been tempted more – as ten minutes later we were all out on the firing range, first with basic marksmanship for our tutors to check how much we have forgotten, then with the "charging" targets that pop up at closer and closer ranges up to two yards away. Definitely a test of reflexes as well as accuracy. One's heart is certainly racing as the targets jump up nearer and nearer, and they are grim-visaged portraits of snarling carnivores for the most part.

At the end of it, Molly gave a cheer as we were allowed to use the Vostok "Fedorov Avtomat" self-loading rifles again. Even better, she noticed one of the new model that you cannot buy commercially – she saw one at the Thieves' Bazaar last time she was on Krupmark. It is an odd-looking thing, looking rather plump but actually a pound lighter than the standard model. The stock and everything except highly stressed internal parts is made from a patent Vostok material, a sort of lightweight magnesium alloy foam. She whispered with eyes wide that even with a full magazine it floats. I can guess what would go down well with her as a Graduation present, if Lars can get his hooves on one! She has an ambition to convert one to full automatic fire as they are currently built as self-loaders and one has to pull the trigger for each shot rather than jumping round the corner

spraying lead while laughing maniacally. Then, given an old muzzle-loading cannon she would probably try and convert that to full auto as well.

What with our strenuous morning most of us were rather staggering by the time we even began taking aim – interestingly I was in the next “lane” to Sophie D’Artagnan who had sampled the Rain Islands naval ale, and she was scoring no worse than the rest of us. Perhaps as she said, one glass may steady the nerves rather than the opposite. Certainly the British Army and Navy have their official rum ration, though significantly the Air Force does not.

Back to Songmark! We noted the second-years on the gate guard, including Rumiko and Saffina. Rumiko is one of the very few Japanese girls entitled to wear two classic swords; she is of good Samurai stock, and in her homeland of Okinawa they kept up traditions of female samurai that their homeland gave up on centuries ago. Saffina was unarmed, but as a full-blown lioness she is quite well equipped by Nature. By repute Rumiko’s family sword can bisect a fur from shoulder to hip in one slash – but I think Saffina could just pick most furs up and break them like a loaf of bread. Once inside, Mrs. Oelabe was there as ever to give us a brief check before starting term proper; she first marked us on our first aid skills as to the patching up everyone had needed to do to their classmates. The more in-depth investigations take time, and we are all taking our turn tomorrow.

As third years are now a scarce and diminishing resource, our Tutors are making the most of us. We often get tasked with using our wits to set up tests for the junior years, and today we were happily “sabotaging” all sorts of equipment which they have to try and fix. Having seen all the ways equipment can fail, we can faithfully reproduce the trickier defects to spot and hopefully give (say) Red Dorm hours of fun.

We had rather a surprise just as we were busily sabotaging some of the radio components. Second years are not meant to enter our dorm without permission, but that Cranium Island shrew Alpha Rote braved the dragon’s den and turned up with a rather odd request. Or perhaps not – on Cranium Island perfectly insane things are regarded as entirely par for the course, and it might not be healthy to think about what they believe to be odd. At any rate, she has found a copy of “Criminal World” and being attached to Crusader Dorm, naturally wants to subscribe as a source of Intelligence in the military sense.

It was interesting – I think Molly was about to go up in smoke regardless of her not learning our Warrior Priestess exercises. Still, Alpha was respectful, more so than one might expect and she put her case to us very well; Molly passed her the details for her to subscribe. This might not be such a wonderful idea – one subscriber can approve another, and if there is one thing Cranium Island does not need it is their mad scientists getting ideas from reading Criminal World after Alpha approves her friends and relations getting it too. The worlds of organised crime and mad science are probably kept wide apart. Whether they collaborate or quarrel the results are likely to be extreme for anyone caught in the vicinity.

Actually, reading the latest issue that awaited her in the post-room yesterday was one thing that had Molly’s spirits raised (until we got to the firing range, which is guaranteed to cheer her.) There are new articles on commercial swindles; I seem to recognise “the long fraud” from Beryl’s happy descriptions of her schooldays. At the back as ever there are the most surprising classified adverts for materials, services and all sorts of stolen goods. The comics pages are always fascinating in much the same way as an aircraft wreck – one can hardly avoid looking at it. The artist who draws that handsome and dashing super-criminal “Rick Traceless” certainly knows his business. The scene where he gets two undercover detectives of rival forces to arrest each other is certainly a well-engineered logic trap, whatever else it may be.

According to Molly, most of the racketeers were just honest businessmen forced into crime by the evils of Government. I recall thinking years ago how it might have been if Britain had suffered Prohibition, and indeed there have always been plenty of furs keen on the notion; I recall the governor of the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands last year imposing it on the population. There are families of reputable vintners and sellers of aged port and sherries to all the best families with centuries of good reputation – overnight one could imagine them being forced into becoming machine-gun toting gangsters desperate to protect the last case of the ’08 Amontillado from government-sponsored howling mobs of Salvation Army irregulars eager to smash it in the street as the American police did from coast to coast in 1919.

Naturally, Molly’s education has rather prejudiced her against doing anything for free. She has an idea of making Alpha pay for the privilege of subscribing to Criminal World in a rather odd way – of acting as her maid for awhile. I would have thought that was rather like asking a racing greyhound to pull carts; a uniquely qualified Mad Scientist might be far more valuable producing unorthodox equipment, as she did for me with that Torpedo Breaker. Molly says that is exactly the idea; making (say) an automatic combination lock cracker would be useful but something Alpha would probably enjoy, so would hardly be a repayment – acting as a respectable maid would be awfully difficult not to mention embarrassing for her.

Down for another generous meal; neither poi nor pastefish, happily enough but a rather palatable fish and rice dish with vegetables, somewhat resembling kedgeree. It certainly vanished off the plates like fuel into a Schneider Trophy aircraft on full throttle; ten minutes cleared the tables. Clearing up plates around here is a very minor chore; I doubt there was a grain of rice left unaccounted-for.

Unlike yesterday we are back to evening work and study, with a dozen very stiff navigation exercises to do before lights-out. Help!

Tuesday 20th April, 1937

Back in the air again, much to everyone's relief. Actually we were flying the Sea Osprey and the Junkers 86 with a dorm apiece; the remaining dorms took turns to visit Mrs. Oelabe for the usual ... in-depth investigations. My dorm all passed with nothing to remark, though from what Jasbir hinted she and Sophie had some fairly stern questioning, and though she said nothing to us Adele Beasley came out of the examination room looking definitely shaken.

The flights were very welcome; though we have been up in some excellent aircraft last holiday there was nothing we could put in our logbooks and our Tutors had a lot to say about that. If only we could have taken the stick of that amazing Horton flying-wing for an hour or so! It would have been quite something to have flown the DO-X, too – but they were both registered as Lufthansa flights, and the Germans are always sticklers for regulations. The Junkers 86 needs a lot of pre-flight work; though far from a “hangar queen” it takes five times the maintenance as the Tiger Moths need despite only having twice as many engines.

Our logbooks slowly filled, and indeed we were flying the Sea Osprey after lunch. It is the last month we will be able to do takeoffs and landings at will in the Spontoon central waters; in May the tourists arrive and the seaways fill up with scheduled commercial flights. After that it will be a matter of getting landing permission from the tower for every practice flight; our Tutors have been discussing a “summer camp” on the Orpington Island airstrip to use when the Spontoon airspace gets too busy, though that will not be in our time here.

What with the flights and exams, the day was taken up till after lunch and then we were all back to wash, groom and dress in our Songmark best, including the full blazers we have not worn in ages. It is warm enough to wear them right now; I am grateful Tatiana Bryzov did not go for the traditional June wedding day. Still, getting a half-holiday is quite unique around here for whatever reason, and even folk who are no great friends of Tatiana were glad of the time off.

Though all Songmark was invited, a few of us were allowed to beg off attending church. We could not guarantee Molly would restrict herself to throwing rice and confetti at the bride and (bride?), and Rosa the anarchist is just not safe to let near a church. It is hard to imagine Tatiana of Red Dorm getting married to another girl, especially that snooty Millicent at the embassy who used to take great pleasure in snubbing me. I recall once tracking down Tatiana to the Double Lotus, certainly – but she had been as horrified as a goldfish dropped in a piranha pool, and as eager to be rescued even by me.

Actually, Prudence's dorm hardly seem entirely pleased at the prospect either. With anyone else I might say Prudence was jealous that a mere second-year sets the precedent for getting wed in term-time (Wo Shin was married before she joined us, as were the Rotes.) But Prudence is not the jealous type. I must ask her sometime what she objects about. She got rather sniffy last term about me pointing Florence Farmington her direction, for that matter. Who else would I ask for qualified advice, after all?

Despite the ... unusual cast list the wedding went splendidly, and the ceremony was ninety-five percent completely standard. I have to say Millicent looked amazing in a very regal white dress with gems – if they pay a junior in the Embassy enough to afford that, we are evidently in the wrong careers being mere Adventuresses. Tatiana seemed to be playing the part of the bridegroom well enough, though indeed I would never have suspected that of her. She was given away by someone we have not met since our Krupmark Island trip, the Priestess Oharu, who I heard adopted Tatiana as her daughter. If I reflect sometimes on how strange my life has become since arriving on Spontoon, there are girls who have it stranger. Oddly, Priestess Oharu seems to have changed her voice completely; I would never have recognised just hearing her.

Actually, I am not surprised our tutors “allowed” Molly to stay behind and guard Songmark – if there is one thing worse for her than seeing this wedding, it would be seeing Priestess Oharu involved in it. Definitely I am glad she and her saw-backed bayonet are inside the Songmark wire looking out. Miss Devinski is the most practical fur I have ever met, and is taking no chances of Molly doing anything rash.

Apart from the slight irregularities with the cast, the wedding went off splendidly and anyone who wanted was invited back to the reception at the British Embassy where Millicent's father was hosting it. I had permission from Miss Devinski to go, as indeed Millicent and Tatiana have turned round and become very helpful to us, albeit for odd reasons. Tatiana even asked if she could join my espionage ring, which was embarrassing as I have not got one! I suppose folk who hear third-paw accounts of our trips investigating Cranium Island, Krupmark and German Antarctica rather jump to conclusions. We might be occasionally asked to look into various things by the proper authorities such as Mr. Sapohatan but that hardly makes us spies, any more than say naturalists or journalists.

It was a splendid reception, and I met various folk at the British Embassy who were keen to greet me as Lady Allworthy. Apart from trying to get a replacement passport and being abruptly shown the door awhile ago, I have never been in our embassy – unlike Maria who is on first-name terms with everyone in hers. Their first names of course, not hers. The notion seems to be that anyone who has been given a Title cannot possibly be an enemy of the Crown – which falls a bit flat recalling Leon and Susan Allworthy although one of the few charges not levelled at them was espionage except against Spontoon. I have since heard that under an ancient law aristocrats are hung with a silken rope rather than a common hemp one, but I doubt in the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands where justice caught up with them folk had one handy.

Had it been a Friday rather than a Tuesday I think the Songmark contingent might have emptied the reception of drinkables, but we are flying tomorrow and after a very nice white wine I paid my respects to the happy couple and headed back. Having the evening off as a half-holiday is a rare treat, but we have such a pile of work to get through.

I expected to find Molly stalking the place with a fixed bayonet and a scowl, looking for any excuse to open fire on potential raiders (for obvious reasons, Rosa the anarcho-surrealist was not trusted with carrying ammunition for Molly's rifle. She might have given her some for inscrutable surrealist reasons.) Molly certainly had the fixed bayonet, but seemed very pleased with herself – though she did ask if I could finish her guard shift for her while she went for the bath. Considering nobody else was in Songmark (a very rare occurrence in term time; even the cooks had been given the afternoon off) this just seemed a sensible way of getting a relaxed bath without the other eighteen of us impatiently queuing up with our towels and soap as per usual. Given a decent sit-back bath, showers are a very poor substitute and with increasing prosperity one can well believe them becoming extinct except for prisons, the military and such things as sports changing rooms.

Actually she confessed cheerfully that she had reason to be pleased. Lars is back, and she has met him – and indeed rather more. This rather puzzled me. Miss Devinski has a standing sentence of anyone who lets him set hoof on Songmark territory being instantly thrown out – and even Molly would not risk that. She would get the same if she left Songmark while on gate duty too. If she was inside the chain-link fence and Lars was outside, they may have whispered sweet nothings but I can hardly see what else would be possible.

Whatever, she seems extremely cheerful and full of herself; indeed I had to ask her to calm down or our Tutors would get more suspicious than they usually are. She has much to tell me about Lars, who has indeed returned from a dangerous and profitable “shopping trip.” He has returned not quite captaining a ship full of stolen munitions as last year, but having “arranged” consignments to appear in various perfectly neutral and legal warehouses from which they can come to Spontoon more or less openly. Goods are rarely searched at Customs leaving a country, and if they are expecting a consignment of “tractor spares” sourced by Lars the Spontoon authorities will know what to do with them. Spontoon being such a transport hub for the Pacific, we actually do get cargoes of mining machinery coming through although we have no local mines, and similar odd-looking deliveries.

Anyway, Molly says Rosa is proving a good comrade and rather shares her view of the world – which may or may not be a good thing. She is certainly not going to report anyone for breaking regulations, being an Anarchist. We hear strange stories out of Spain, where Anarchists are heavily involved in their Civil War. Although in theory they are fighting on the same side as the Reds, should they ever beat General Franco the war will then continue until only one side survives – I recall Liberty Morgenstern quoting her own idol Trotsky as saying “*on the first day of the Revolution we must have the Anarchists on our side – on the last day we must have them liquidated.*” Ioseph Starling seems to be of much the same opinion.

Thinking of events in Europe, Eva Schiller made a brave effort to get the half-day off labelled as a religious festival rather than the wedding; she says she will have to tell her Embassy the Tutors made her go to a ceremony that would not be at all approved of back home – just in case anyone else saw her going to Tatiana's big day and reports her first. Today is her Leader's birthday, and folk at Lingenthal's on Casino Island were celebrating soberly as I went past. As her Leader is a teetotaller despite having done early meetings in beer-halls, he would not condone wild parties – his is meant to be the only Party in town, so to speak. I know the National Socialist Party doubles as a religion in some ways, but I was not putting any money on her winning the discussion with her year Tutor Miss Windlesham, even at the eighty to one odds Beryl was offering. Eva's argument that Christmas is just another leader's birthday celebration may be good legal precedent but cut no ice with our Tutors, who politely requested her to put her request in again when her Reich has celebrated its famous thousand year anniversary, when the then Songmark tutors will reconsider. Possibly.

Back to work on navigation problems! The wedding was a nice break, but anyone (except the happy couple) who stayed out drinking champagne till the last minute of their Passes is going to be just that little bit behind with the work, and none of us can really afford that. In fact some of us seem to have landed in trouble with the Tutors already (and not for anything Mrs. Oelabe found, evidently). Susan de Ruiz, Li Han and Missy K are going around looking as if the floor just dropped out from under their paws. I hope it is not catching!

Wednesday, 21st April 1937

An exceedingly damp day, so of course we had our refresher Survival training on Main Island. Arriving in the middle of a streaming wet jungle, our Tutors put up their umbrellas and took out their stopwatches as they cheerfully announced we had to get a good fire going. Molly's Extreme Danger matches were disqualified, as were those magnesium blocks used with flint and steel that Alpha Rote has sold to most of us. Hard work and about a mile of hiking through the forests located enough dry tinder deep in dead timbers caught up in trees, then manage to keep it dry long enough to return it to the campsite. There are always tolerably dry dead branches caught up in foliage and half-fallen dead trees in any natural forest – the trouble is, half fallen trees are called “widowmakers” by the loggers for good reason. One never knows just how much or little persuasion it will take for them to fall the rest of the way.

Most of us managed to get camp fires burning in shelters – Helen and Maria had rigged up a sort of umbrella of split bamboo suspended a yard over the flames that shed most of the rain off the fire, which was built up on a “hearth” of timbers above the wet ground. Lunch was a tin of Maconochie each warmed up on the ashes; Songmark is down to its last two cases and probably the new first-years arriving in September will be spared the experience even as an emergency ration. To be honest, a good batch of it is not bad when eaten hot by a hungry fur – most of the complaints from the Great War were from troops who had been fed it five days in a row and anything would get tiresome served like that. Our own logistics classes are tricky, working out how best to feed a party of furs a long way from the nearest shop, with severe restraints on food weight, bulk, cost and perishability even before we can start thinking about whether it makes an edible meal. One would have to work out a complex system of at least half a dozen different but equally well balanced cans to keep the troops happy for any length of time – Rain Island do a very nice canned salmon and pasta mix which would do for one of them.

The rain happily stopped after lunch, and we trotted back through the dripping forest. I recall Adele last year coming out of the woods drenched when the rest of us were only somewhat splashed – all the rain squalls that had about a one in ten chance of shaking the trees over a passer-by, shook themselves over her. Molly and Maria never could work out how the mechanics of that happened, though Helen and I have studied it with Saimmi. Anyway, Adele is now cured of that curse, as far as having any extra trees drop branches on her – which is not so say it will never happen. It would be nice if there was somehow a store of her several years’ unused supply of good luck piled up for her to draw on – she could probably bankrupt the Casino winning roulette on long odds and nobody could catch her cheating. Unfortunately except for the Casino, it does not work quite like that.

Despite the rain having stopped the waters were decidedly choppy in the Lagoon and this afternoon I re-started my small-boat handling course. In two weeks we are examined for our “certificates” which certainly do count towards the Songmark course. Happily I was sailing with my brother from a tender age, and was reefing and luffing years before I ever spun a propeller. Cats are not famous for liking the water, but that is one of the great benefits of our Public Schools – one gets accustomed to all sorts of things as part of the team spirit. It has taken me all this time to get Molly and Helen to pull together but of course they did not have my early advantages.

Actually the boat handling is about as much relaxation as we will probably get this term; although a few minutes per hour are hard labour that is nothing we are afraid of, and running before the wind through the Spontoon springtime waters is the sort of thing tourists eagerly queue up for, with the wind and sun on one’s fur. Once we are on course we can just relax until the next turning point which might be ten minutes away – a rare treat for us. I saw that odd rescue craft made from a crashed flying boat going through its paces, and next month there may be tourists stuck on the sand flats having misread the charts or misjudged the falling tide. It would be awfully embarrassing to be their first rescue of the season.

Back for a very welcome meal after our labours. The local garden plots are already turning out plenty of fresh vegetables, which the Songmark cooks do in a sort of stirred and lightly fried manner with a rather oriental spicing. It greatly surprised me when I first got here that there are other ways to cook cabbage than the usual half hour boil. That reminded me of my old school, and indeed awaiting my return on Sunday was a letter from there, as they are keen to hear from me as one of their distinguished “old girls”. Though I can hardly spare any time to think of such things right now, I know when I get back to England this Summer I will have a demanding time of it as Lady Allworthy with many duties to perform and a social scene for which I am hardly prepared. My dear friend Mabel spent a whole year at finishing school in Switzerland on such studies, and is now a respectably married lady of ever-increasing social rank. Alas, I can hardly think of myself as ladylike with all the “adventures” that I will definitely not be recounting to the old school if I go there on speech day or suchlike! Exactly how I became Lady Allworthy is a story I will leave to Maria to describe who is good at selecting the right journalistic angle on tricky issues.

Then, there is the problem that I hardly plan to settle down as Lady Allworthy – somewhere out in the world is the rightful heir, who I will happily pass the job over to and return to South Island, Spontoon to become Mrs. Amelia Hoele’toemi. How I can manage that I can hardly see right now, having more immediate problems “*the evils of the day are sufficient unto themselves*” as our Scripture mistress used to keep quoting.

Actually, Madeleine X came up with one of the best ideas on those lines I have heard. We keep on being hit with one thing after another but get through or over them somehow, rather like our sailing boats heading through one wave at a time. Madeleine is unfortunately just as much of a pain as ever, especially since the French have started a rather Songmark-like institution run by their Colonial Office, rather nearer Paris on the island of La Rochelle in the Bay of Biscay. She regrets it was not founded three years earlier, and so do we.

Madeleine even turns her nose up at our other French girls, who are not Parisian. Sophie D’Artagnan is a fiery Gascon who has inherited a lot of her famous ancestor’s spirit – or as Madeleine translates it, “brawl for one and one for brawl.” Saffina would be considered bad enough if she was just a Native of Ubangi-Chari, but being of mixed stock as her mother was a pure French Missionary’s daughter and married an African prince ... well, it is just as well Saffina has a fairly good sense of humour. Apart from her house-cat tabby fur Saffina is a full-grown lioness, and would make hash of Madeleine even if she is a year behind in the self-defence classes.

Molly has family troubles of her own, as I discover. Her Father somewhat cut her off as she refused to leave Songmark and join him in tax exile in Cuba, where by Molly's account the local scene is too crowded with exiled racketeers for any of them to get rich especially as the locals need no teaching when it comes to their specialities such as smuggling or corruption. But it is an unexpected and rather unwelcome "relation" she had no idea of – she has a letter from Captain Granite's mother, offering to officially adopt her in recompense for what happened to her. It seems that Captain Granite comes from a rich and a distinguished Boston family, and her actual name is Cabot after the great navigator.

Poor Molly! The worst of it is, it is a deal that she could do very well out of and so can hardly afford to turn it down on the spot. Of all of us her future is the most uncertain; she has never talked about marrying Lars and settling down, not even on Krupmark. She has sympathised with my being stuck with the Lady Allworthy title, which is such an irony in that many people would love to get it, and I would love to lose it to a rightful heir. The difference is that unlike with her and Granite almost everything I did with Lord Leon was my idea (and some of the other things he did I know Molly actually likes.) In fact, although she knows I am no "gold digger" she has often said I did the job by accident better than most of them could with long years of practice. Getting the Allworthy title from a family of wanted criminals would not bother Molly a bit considering her Chicago background, though managing to cope with Society would be the big challenge for her. I recall she once claimed that not everyone on Krupmark was actually a fugitive from International justice, but many just enjoy that lifestyle. Rather her than me, I should think! Then, she is at her happiest being trigger-happy and furs in Fort Bob mind that sort of thing less than in England.

Anyway, that is one more thing to worry my dorm this term just when we have enough on our plates what with our exams and such. It never rains but it pours, as they say. Fortunately a Songmark third-year is qualified in getting into shelter, or learning to live with the occasional soaking.

Thursday April 22nd, 1937

A rare and stately sight today; the arrival of one of those ultra long distance Caproni Ca60 airliners. They do not generally fly via Spontoon, being normally found on the polar route from Alaska over the top to Greenland, and this one is putting in for repairs. It is quite a sight, being the only commercial triple triplane to fly – and despite its somewhat unwieldy appearance they have been a big success, with thirty in service and an excellent safety record.

Maria rarely throws her political weight around, but after a word with Miss Devinski she was granted a Pass to trot down to her embassy and start making a few "suggestions". Result – all the third-years got passes to look it over this morning and were even allowed to taxi the Caproni around the central waters! It looks and feels rather like steering a galleon, and indeed all that wing area catches the wind quite alarmingly. Amazingly enough, one won a prize last year in Speed Week as the fastest of its class! It was not raced on its own as the sole entry in "triple triplane" class, either. It seems I missed a lot heading down to the Albanian South Indies, and not only in terms of Nootnops Blue and friendly company.

Unlike our disappointment with the strict Lufthansa regulations getting back from German Antarctica, my dorm were allowed to take the stick on a test flight, when safely airborne for a quarter of an hour each which is the minimum our Tutors count in our logbooks. Some of my poor Flying Fleas back in England did not survive that long in the air, alas. Actually we were in the second pilot's seat for the flight, which has dual controls. It really is a flying boat, as indeed the prototype was an existing houseboat on one of the Italian lakes before being given wings and engines. If we head over directly to Europe after graduation it might be via the polar route on one of these, as Maria has described many times. Touching down at Byrd Station, Maria is probably the first Songmark girl to have been very near both poles. We will pass over the Aleutians on the way, six months after our exploits there. I wonder what happened to that respectable plantation family the Penningtons? Living in such isolation, almost in hiding, I doubt we will ever know. They had been there generations with hardly half a dozen furs in the outside world knowing of their exact location, after all.

Flying the Ca60 was certainly one for the logbook; six engines to control (although actually the Flight Engineer handles the details) and a set of controls that handle like nothing else that flies. My admiration for the pilots who land these on the polar ice cap in pitch darkness increased quite a bit having sampled a little of their problem. The good thing is, with such a huge wing area the Caproni can stay aloft at fifty knots, which cuts down the strain on landing on ice or water. There is not enough money in the world to make me risk that sort of landing with passengers in a modern fast monoplane like a DC-3! Definitely for safety sake, this is the shape of future airliners. All it needs now is reversible propellers like a Vostok Balalaika, and as soon as the hull touches water or ice it could flip all six engines into "full astern" and I should think it could stop on a sixpence.

As soon as we had waved farewell to the Italian team, I had to wave farewell to the rest of my dorm. Today is the start of my night sailing classes; it is one thing to be a fair-weather sailor skitting about the central waters along with the tourists, but nobody gets sailing Certificates unless they can deal with night, storm and fog. Today was just the start of it.

I am one of just three Songmark girls taking the sailing certificate; Madeleine X and Sophie D'Artagnan are coming along with me. Why Madeleine boasts about her Naval ancestry is hard to decide – they were officers in Napoleon's fleet which rarely actually won any battles. Her great-grandfather was in the Crimea, but apart

from a few shore bombardments that was hardly noted for Naval action. She is quite good at sailing, as indeed is Sophie – but my money would be on the Gascon rather than the Parisian any time. The day a bichon frise beats an otter at aquatic sports a lot of bookmakers are going to go out of business.

Happily today was not the time we found out about the difficulties of navigating in fog; one would need to sail to Tillamook or Vostok to guarantee that at this time of year. But after four hours of our usual sailing practice the sun went down and we had to navigate by the lights and bells of the harbour buoys. There is no manned lighthouse on Spontoon in the traditional Euro manner, but a whole string of automated lights that help to keep the tour-boats off the reefs and sandbanks. Judging distances is always harder at night, and one certainly needs to memorise the chart in advance as having a torch to read it would quite ruin one's night vision.

Apart from passing the wrong side of a bell marker buoy we all steered the sea-going yawl successfully around the course and received Captain Ruzkov's gruff approval. Having feline eyes certainly helps in night sailing; indeed felines were usually chosen for night watch lookout jobs on the old sailing ships. If I manage to get my Certificate at least that will be another option available should our Tutors make good their threat to throw me out for foolish behaviour.

Looking back at the ship from above the Eastern Islands docks, I was quite glad it was too dark for anyone to see my ears blushing. It is about the same size as Mr. M'wede's yacht, and equally ocean capable. I might have woken up "all at sea" after that evening in Macao, with Lady Allworthy being given a ride back to Tillamook by the admittedly handsome Onager. That would have taken a week and more – and after such a trip in such company, I expect Mrs. Oelabe would have some embarrassing news for me at my next health check. Still, it is a peculiar feeling to know that fairly soon we will no longer be worried about family complications losing us our Songmark places. Still, it would hardly have done for Mrs. Amelia Hoele'toemi or Lady Allworthy to end up with a mixed zebra striped kitten – or colt, more likely. Although both Malou on Casino Island and our ex-tutor Miss Pelton are feline and have very handsome equine husbands, they of course are married.

As we have passes for our night sailing, that is not something that has an exact timetable given the vagaries of winds and tides; on the return we managed to squeeze in a visit to the Sunset Grill, that new place which has opened this Spring between the airport and the seaplane slips and indeed faces due West over the central waters. It is too far to visit Mahanish's from the docks this late at night – we would either have to risk being spotted going past the staff bungalows or go a very long way round to avoid them. Stopping off to dine on the way home as we missed the evening meal at Songmark is one thing, but heading past Songmark out to party is quite another matter. We will leave it to the first-years to climb fences and dig tunnels – when I might pass or fail my final exams by one mark I am taking no chances.

Although it was late the place was quite full; it seems the airport have been running a full "dress rehearsal" and training up new crew for the coming season. Certainly the tables were loud with furs discussing how they handled all the stressful things they had been practicing on. Had a rookie news reporter walked in and not known what they had been doing, he might soon have been rushing off to report on the two-aircraft pileup on the runway with every water taxi drafted in to take most of the casualties to the Casino Island hospital with those too badly injured to move far treated on Eastern Island. There has never been a serious tourist crash on the airstrip yet, but it is good to know folk are ready.

The Sunset Grill is setting up to cater for the tourist trade though not exactly the tour-boat crowd – it is not only in Speed Week that this section of the island is crowded with pilots, support crews and airline workers with Euro tastes and decent wages which the Spontoonies are always eager to relieve them of. The cuisine is Euro with local flourishes – the chicken grilled with chillies was decidedly welcome after a long wet evening on deck, and the breadfruit mousse a rather upmarket version of the Songmark equivalent. Still, we could hardly relax for long even tonight; in fifteen minutes after cleaning our plates we were all back in Songmark, washing the salt out of our fur before the hot water in the showers cuts off for the night.

I recall back in the first year going to bed bone weary every night, and being amazed to hear the then third-years complaining of much the same despite being so much fitter. One could say that though we are on a higher level now, the Tutors make sure the climb is just as steep. Certainly we are managing things that we could never have hoped to do two years ago – but it still hurts.

Friday 23rd April, 1937

Just as I was getting used to the bruises from Monday, our Tutors evidently thought it would be a good idea to refresh them for the weekend. Back to Moon Island for some more self-defence lessons but this time with a difference. We warmed up by another relay race through the half demolished barracks, narrowly avoiding the broken glass and splinters as we did our best to carve seconds off the time without the surroundings carving chunks off us. Just when we were getting used to that Miss Blande lined us all up and announced some more self-defence lessons with a difference. We have opposition – twenty furs in very plain Rain Island fatigues without rank badges, a couple of whom I recognise. One was in the batch of Rain Islanders whose unenviable mission it was to try and break into Songmark last term (I recall Belle and Carmen caught her and scared her witless by speculating on the ... nature of the interrogation they would give her) and two others I have seen as Spontoon Guides. All in all, not exactly a polished ceremonial unit but a rather practical bunch.

I am not too sure where our Tutors draw the line on “self-defence” – being able to bring down an unsuspecting sentry type from behind and immobilise him is not quite what the Songmark Prospectus talks about. Miss Blande was quite poker-faced as she explained that we needed to learn such things to prevent it being done to us. Molly seemed quite keen on the idea, but she has always quoted “*the best form of defence is attack, and the best form of attack is surprise.*” Preferably with a salvo of battleship shells at ten miles range, unless she can find where Krupp hid all the top-secret Paris Cannons at the end of 1918.

Having seen the “surprise self-defence” demonstrated a few times, we were invited to have a go. Naturally Beryl cheated, though not surprisingly she did it very effectively. She always carries a silk flying scarf as many of us do, folded into a pocket and she demonstrated how to throw a weighted end around a guard’s throat, instantly stifling and pulling him back. I could see she has practiced this, and she cheerfully explained that a holy Oriental fur back at Saint T’s had shown her eager first-year class how to use it. She showed Miss Blande the end of the yellow silk scarf is weighted for swinging by a small but heavy brass idol of a native Indian goddess that Jasbir recognised as the destructive aspect of Kali; evidently Beryl had some interesting religious instruction at her old school.

Of course, practicing such things on live furs rather than dummies is tricky in that they are always liable to turn and spot you, especially if they hear or scent you coming. To make things a little more realistic there were eight “sentries” at any one time and we had to pick one. We were warned that next time round we would have that job, and although bumps and bruises on the “victim” are unavoidable, not to get too carried away.

Adele Beasley and Li Han did object slightly that this was not exactly in the spirit of self-defence – though we pointed out to them that an Adventuress may have to escape from various situations and that involves getting past furs trying to stop her. Our defending that ship of Lars from pirates was self-defence though we did it with a two pounder pom-pom and a crate of high explosives – it is not the technique but the circumstances. Our Tutors have never forbidden Molly to carry my (unloaded) T-Gewehr, as in some circumstances they acknowledge I would be right to “praise the Lord and pass the ammunition” as Miss Blande put it.

All morning we had a decidedly stressful time of things, with everyone stalking and ambushing each other through the glass-strewn rubble. Some of the Spontoon Guides I have not seen in awhile – in fact one I last remember seeing last year and I recall him telling us it was his last tourist season then – as shepherding tour-boat crowds away from the cliff edges and quicksand has a decidedly wearing effect on even the most tolerant and patient furs. When the Guides start imagining which loud and stout Hawaiian-shirted tourist should in a fair world discover they were not fibbing about the quicksand after all, it is time to change jobs.

After we practiced our first-aid skills on each other again (one hardly expects to escape with a whole hide after half a day of jumping, crawling and being thrown around such sharp-edged rubble) at least luncheon at the base was good. The Rain Island system of having all leaders elected as “syndics” at least means furs who are no good at cooking do not keep the job. I have to admit, from everything Father told me about European armies the usual extent of using available talent goes more like “*anyone here musical? You? Right, you’re volunteered to shift this piano.*” The Syndic cooks make the most of their issued rations, and rather like Songmark they buy a lot locally to the great benefit of the local economy which also cuts down shipping costs. Actually I have heard the Rain Island military are one of the main customers of the fish cannery here; there is some complex deal they made many years ago when Spontoon was poor and casting around for alliances.

Ever keen to promote her product, Molly has been generous with cans of her “fish log” which she donated to the Catering Syndic. Unfortunately it is too expensive to be bought for general issue, and in the Rain Island system there is no separately catered Officers’ Mess which would have the funds and a small enough demand to be manageable. Even the increased production this year is only about four thousand cans and an army could eat that at a sitting – besides, they would want a bulk discount which Molly is not disposed to give. Better to sell it at full price to the tourists, with perhaps a stall at the airport shop to glean any remaining Shells from their pockets on the way out with promises that they will not find it at home.

Back to the airfield and some tricky maintenance problems! With some aircraft one gets the impression the designers are so confident in their designs never going wrong that they build cable runs and such into places nobody will ever get to. Unfortunately anything can wear out, and maintaining some of the bits is like trying to thread a needle blindfold wearing riggers’ gloves. Small paws and flexible figures are certainly what one needs – Beryl and Li Han are certainly better off than Missy K or Irma Bundt. That Oryx girl in the first year will hate this job; Maria and Irma have enough trouble with their own far smaller horns getting stuck. In a canvas covered aircraft, one hasty toss of their heads could punch a hole right through the fabric.

Four hours is more than enough of that on a nice day with blue skies to contemplate flying in – the Songmark prospectus mentions learning in the healthy climate and wide open spaces of the Pacific and is rather quiet about all the hours we spend with our heads stuck under an oil-dripping engine cowling. Maria grumbles that if ever a fur could catch claustrophobia, this is the way.

Although the second-years have been doing some Gate Guard already, we still have some to do before our final exam schedule takes up every second. I missed my share last night on night sailing class, and have to catch that up teamed with Adele Beasley who has been given extra to do. There being an odd number in my year (nineteen rather than the usual twenty, for reasons that have never been clear and are unlikely to be explained to us now) the dorms have always had to mix on these shifts to some extent.

Fortunately it was a fine evening for early gate watch rather than the usual night rains and we consoled each other that there should be fewer than half a dozen of these to do. Certainly our Songmark days are running out now, as things we do a few times per term can be counted on the fingers of one paw. The occasional treats like heading out to Mahanish's or Bow Thai are something we might get to do once before we leave, or possibly not.

Adele had a lot to tell me about her holiday on Krupmark, none of which she was likely to write home about. I recall that although she was cured of her curse in Tillamook back in February that had not cleared up all her worries. A lot of things happened in her life that might or might not be due to her curse – she tells me she had to check whether or not she actually liked some of the things she encountered while under its effect, or whether that was an effect of that old shaman's rather inaccurate cursing of her treasure-hunting parents.

It took awhile for the full tale to come out, and definitely she has had an ... interesting time. Although one hardly thinks of a Songmark girl as being a nurse and ladies' companion, she spent some of the holiday reading to an expectant mother. The details were odd – not just that what was wanted was romantic fiction by Bill Sandmoon (not an actual writer I hear, but the pen-name of a syndicate who turn out a dozen rather slushy romances a year) but why her "employer" could not read it for herself. Adele almost jumped out of her fur when the female of the rather odd guard dog trio came round the corner – she says Lady Osis is very like her including the surprising nature of her pedigree. It did seem rather odd that a four-legged hound should understand and like romance novels, but from what Adele hinted, Lady had been taking lessons from the plots of previous ones. I would have thought such a canine rather disadvantaged if a conventional romantic affair was wanted, but apparently Lady achieved what she set out to get, with the help of her "owner" a Miss Chartwell. The precise details were hard to believe, but Adele said she had verified most of them.

Apparently Lady has a brother, Lord, who Adele returned with to Spontoon and handed to Miss Chartwell's local employees – naturally such furs do not have passports, though nobody from Krupmark would care anyway when Macao is famous for issuing passports to a block of wood or a ham sandwich as long as the "administrative fees" are paid in hard currency. Exactly what Lord is doing here is hard to say, though Adele dropped some dark hints about sibling rivalry.

Considering what else Adele had to say (they say confession is good for the soul, and indeed she seemed eager to unburden herself to me - people do that for some reason) I am glad I went to Antarctica rather than joining her trip. I suppose it could be a lasting effect of her ill-luck curse; after all, if she had lost a paw last year as a result of the curse, removing the curse would not get her paw back. Similarly, discovering she actually likes various things is something that happened to her, and there is little the shamans in Tillamook could have done about that. What folk actually like is somewhat built-in, and finding it out a matter of opportunity. Miss Chartwell has a reputation if anything rather worse than Lars, and our Tutors are equally unhappy about a Songmark girl mixing with either of them – which may be why Adele has extra guard duty.

Back to the hard but welcome Songmark bed at three in the morning, more carefully than usual as we are not changing shifts. Definitely Molly, Helen and Maria would not appreciate me waking them. Even after all this time Maria is a sound sleeper and getting her up in the morning is like trying to bump-start a tank stuck in the mud of Flanders up to the sponsons. It is a good thing I was tired enough to sleep through a thunderstorm as her snoring has alas not improved – Songmark does a lot for its students but there are limits to what even our Tutors can do.

Saturday 24th April, 1937

Our first weekend of term-time! Having the extra half hour in bed was a mercy after last night's gate guard; if the Tutors had been really unhappy with me I expect they would have put me on the later guard so I missed out the weekend lie-in, such as it is. Maria has managed to snatch half an hour's sleep in those conditions, but that does little to prepare for demanding days like ours. We are painfully familiar with what half an hour's sleep a night is like – last Spring on the military exercises we could scarcely walk in a straight line after a few days, and were falling over our own paws. Four hours a night after gate guard feels like luxury in comparison.

An almost leisurely breakfast for a change; we are in no huge hurry as there is little point in getting to Casino Island until the shops and dance class are open. Prudence and co. were first out, evidently having a formation swimming event to rehearse for – and this time all Florence's dorm went with them. Florence evidently has an all-day pass.

Our own day was certainly busy enough once it started, with the whole morning demonstrating what we know to Mrs. Motorabhe and the dance class. Free Saturdays are going to be rare now, and it is anyone's guess how many more times we will get here. Knowing the Songmark timetable, the class were eager to get the benefits of our experience before we vanish in July. Jasbir's dorm turned up as well, and they probably will be vanishing forever – at least Jasbir is returning to Utterly Pradesh and Irma Bundt is heading the other direction to Basle in Switzerland where she will work at the "Goetheanum" which is the heart of her religion. I thought it was called the "Goethearium" originally, having evidently mixed it up with the idea of a religious aquarium. Molly makes the occasional good-natured dig about Switzerland preparing to unleash a devastating surprise attack of Theosophical warfare on Europe and Germany in particular. Beryl has told of an underground factory in the Alps where shells and aircraft spray tanks are even now being filled with Theosophical Warfare agent, but that

is just Beryl for you. What Li Han and Sophie D'Artagnan are doing I am not sure, but it looks like their dorm is breaking up. Only mine and Prudence's are sticking together after July as far as I know.

Anyway, today was a most excellent joint dance effort with many of the new arrivals stepping through their paces. Just because a fur grows up around the Nimitz Sea and learns his village dance traditions does not mean they can demonstrate a Spontoon Custom dance in formation with a dozen others, to the standard the Tourist Ministry want. Indeed, many of the Spontoon dances are about as authentic a tradition as Molly's "fish log" and not many years older. Still, a few days' instruction makes a lot of difference providing they already know the basics of hula dance.

After all this time, although we certainly worked hard we finished without feeling like a collection of worn-out rugs ready to slump on the floor. Three years of Songmark training definitely make a difference. In many respects we are getting hard as nails, though hopefully not as Beryl usually finishes that phrase "just as easy to hammer." We did hammer across the road to the sea bathing, where the very welcome waters cooled us off. It is getting warm now on a good day, and one can almost hear the engines of tour-boats warming up around the Pacific rim and the rattling of printing presses as tickets to Spontoon are eagerly snapped up for the coming season.

After a fine luncheon at the Missing Coconut Maria headed off to her Embassy and Molly and Helen followed – as far as we can plan anything we plan to visit both Britain and Italy after graduating as Maria and I have unfinished business. Maria has a gentleman of her nation and species working at the embassy who has had his eye on her for a long while; this has amused her but she is getting suspicious of his intentions. Having a Warrior Priestess around may be interesting especially if folk do not believe in such things, and Helen gets to practice her talents seeing what information she can pick up from him that regular means will not provide.

Having changed into my fur-dye as Kim-Anh Soosay I was booked to see Malou for my definitely specialist "deportment classes" but remembered to stop on the way at a certain shop. Amelia Bourne-Phipps is somewhat known on Spontoon but Kim-Anh is not, and no eyebrows were raised at a certain rather species-specific purchase of Precautions. If I never use it for its designed purpose, it will be useful as a spare high-capacity "water carrier, elastic, emergency" in our outdoor kits or waterproof the muzzle of Molly's T-Gewehr. Even with the muzzle brake fitted.

Malou was as ever quietly pleased to see me and had various things to say about my style and outfit as Kim-Anh – certainly, she says I might pass inspection as long as I do not try to speak any of the languages I supposedly know. That is the problem – I might run into someone who knows Macao much better than me. I know in those correspondence courses Beryl runs on being a bogus detective, doctor or vicar there is a chapter on how to recognise a real one even off-duty and to deflect unwanted questions without generating too much suspicion.

An hour of "deportment" was followed by a welcome break for green tea and to help look after Malou's child, then another hour hard at work. Certainly our Tutors can hardly complain I waste my time with frivolous entertainments at weekends – I have spent about three afternoons at the pictures since arriving here, not counting the official screening of "Olympia" last year our Tutors took us to. The other films were hardly Little Shirley Shrine epics either; I fondly recall that fine German film "Diary of a Lost Girl" starring Louise Brooks which was such an utterly stark expressionist "film noir" that many of the audience ran away.

Finally, Malou pronounced that I was doing fairly well in my studies with her. Anyone can put on fur dye to look different on a photograph (I recall Florence Farmington's efforts) but half of the clues to recognising someone is the way they stand, move and walk, and the hundred little mannerisms that furs pick up from their friends and neighbours that are very different in Asia than Europe. I could wish she could write me a training receipt for our Tutors – but it is enough that they let me take such training. Songmark is fairly flexible as to the extras that we learn on our own time provided they are useful; Prudence and co. can always take film jobs with precision swimming teams if the Adventuring does not pay well enough. On those lines, our Tutors have not squashed any of Beryl's money-making schemes provided she could prove they are not actually illegal under the Spontoon criminal code. Beryl knows lawyers, probably (extremely) criminal ones, and has completely memorised the local laws for good reason.

Malou seemed in a very good mood, and mentioned her husband's flying charter service was doing very well. She is very happily married by all the evidence, and when I told her I hoped to be Tailfast this year she congratulated me. Not being a Spontoonie except by marriage she was never Tailfast, but living here of course she has heard all about it. In a season's time I hope to be Tailfast, Helen may be married and so probably will Prudence! Of course, with Prudence it is rather different – though given the rather strange characteristics of spotted hyenas like her fiancée (fiancé?) Tahni, not as different as it was with Millicent and Tatiana last week.

I only just missed meeting Malou's husband today by all accounts - which was perhaps just as well, as Malou seems to like telling me things to test how well my composure holds up. My tail was certainly twitching by the time I left – and I reminded myself sternly that I should only be thinking about meeting Jirry tomorrow, for the first time in far too long. Still, spending twenty cowries on Precautions even if they are not used today is always a good investment – an ounce of prevention saves a tonne of problems as our dear Tutors tell us, though not perhaps thinking of these sorts of problems. On the other paw, possibly they are. Mrs. Oelabe is always very direct about such matters.

It was rather a shame to wash off Kim-Anh's fur pattern again after just a few hours; now I have invested more in getting her right she deserves to get more exercise. After all, she has a passport she has not used in a year since returning from the Gilbert and Sullivan islands. The Daily Elele has an article about those islands this week, with there being a new Governor arriving on the good ship H.M.S. Pinafore who has vowed to discontinue his predecessor's prohibition edicts. Apparently the local bootleggers are screaming blue murder and having clearance sales of "blue ruin" and other such bathtub distillates that will be swept off the market by a legal trade in less toxic beverages. The new governor is a very modern Major General (retired) of whom I have heard Father speak in admiring tones. Molly will doubtless disapprove; she has always said that a lot of honest hard-working bootleggers really turned bad when the wicked Government repealed Prohibition, gratuitously removing their living without consultation or compensation. Had they been in any other trade the Government would never have got away with it (she says.)

Back to Songmark for teatime, which was a rather fine scrambled egg dish with Popatohi for those who wanted it. Quite a treat and a surprise. A lot of Songmark girls will be out on Passes spending their allowances on food rather than returning for the meal provided, which is quite understandable when it is Poi or pastefish on the menu. Which just goes to show, our Tutors like to keep us off balance and tempt us back for the meals we have already paid for rather than patronising the Casino Island restaurants. Nothing around here happens without a reason, though sometimes it takes us awhile to guess just what it is.

Helen, Molly and Maria returned just when the last of the food was vanishing – apparently Helen picked up rather a lot at the Italian Embassy that neither she nor Maria liked. Maria is used to some furs being jealous of her position and indeed admired by many more – but Helen could read a lot in a couple of the embassy staff that was news to her. Not surprisingly, some "gentlemen" dislike the very existence of highly qualified, powerful girls who are absolutely not going to see things their way. Italy and Spain are rather famous that way. Maria has mentioned the Church is kicking up a fuss about her Uncle's youth organisation, the "Giovanni Fascista" or some similar name – having young ladies trained in public displays of athletics wearing suitable costumes is not what the Vatican wants to see.

Thinking of things furs do not want to see, Molly and I were put on evening Gate Guard – presumably as we will be too busy to do much later on this term. It was a nice Spring evening at least, and Molly was fairly calm until Florence Farmington turned up, the last one back on the day's Passes and with two minutes to spare. Having already seethed about Tatiana getting married, Molly was not at all happy with Florence getting a Pass to spend the day with Gilda the huntress – after all, Molly would definitely not get one to date Lars who is far more conventional.

Still, it is our Tutors who decide Passes, and Florence will presumably be writing a complete and conclusive report on her day's education (that might well be re-edited into next month's edition of "Extra-Spicy Pacific Tails", for all I know) which will be embarrassing for her. One way or another we earn our Passes.

If anyone had come over the wire tonight, given Molly's mood I would not have given tuppence for them getting out with a whole hide. Although she insists on still carrying my T-Gewehr (which is a fairly useless weapon at night, as in fifty yard visibility its mile plus-range is rather irrelevant, one might as well have a pistol) and our Tutors let her, she has a rather practical bayonet on the end of it that she has used on target dummies with great energy and enthusiasm. Her current letter-opener is a French Lebel model with triangular blade section, or rather three edges converging to a formidable spike. I was very glad to finish the shift at three in the morning without her having found a reason to use it! Actually with the mood she was in I fear she scarcely needed a solid reason, and was looking very hard for an excuse. I have heard one of the American second-years comment that her school magazine has a "*Girl most likely to...*" section for its graduates – and Molly's entry would be "*Girl most likely to use a bayonet and laugh.*"

I definitely worry about Molly. Some folk mock British public schools for trying to turn out a standardised character of student at the end of it, with deportment and elocution lessons to get rid of accents that would hinder their advancement in respectable areas, and a strict emphasis on team spirit and fair play rather than individuality. But that is hardly such a bad thing, given the alternatives.

Thinking about it, Songmark does not try in the slightest to influence its students in those ways – we have both Rosa Marquetta and Eva Schiller in the same first year class, and if they graduate as anything but staunch Anarchists and National Socialists respectively, it will not be of our Tutors' doing. Assuming they do not kill each other first, of course. Molly has certainly learned many things in three years, but at heart I wonder if she is still really the gangster's daughter now made far more competent and dangerous. The world would hardly thank Songmark for unleashing that on them.

I think Beryl quoted her old Headmistress as having a phrase about Saint T's graduates not being sent out into the world unprepared for its dangers, but rather being prepared to enjoy being one of the dangers. But I hoped that all this time and my best efforts would have mellowed Molly a little.

Sunday 25th April, 1937

A bright Spring day indeed, and despite being on gate guard till three in the morning I was awake well before the alarm. On hearing various furs declaim that a solid eight hours sleep is essential for one's health and beauty, a Songmark girl tends to laugh hollowly. The chance would be a fine thing, as they say. Mrs. Oelabe keeps a very

keen eye on our health though, and unless we absolutely must stay awake for days as part of the course (the joint exercises with the Spontoons militia last year are something we will never forget) we always get just about enough. In fact, when our Tutors tell us to get an early night our ears and tails go down as we are assured they have something more than usually severe lined up for us the next day. After the first term any Songmark girl knows to head upstairs to bed right away on hearing that, knowing that minutes are precious things even when slept through.

Out of Songmark and off to South Island the minute the gates opened! We did not exactly run down to the water taxis but I have rarely walked it faster. Helen is keen as ever to meet Marti, and in my case "absence makes the heart grow fonder" – Molly and Maria were quite amused. The way to Haio Beach has rarely seemed so long. At last we were there – and quite a reunion it was! It has been over a year since I met the entire Hoele'toemi family together (Saimmi is elusive, and both Jonni and Heneri live on Main Island) and with the obvious exception of Moeli's husband and kitten everyone was here.

It has been a long time since I met Jirry – indeed, I think he looks thinner after his long voyage though still in very nice condition. But after ten minutes Saimmi claimed Helen and I for our training (just our luck – Molly and Maria were the ones who got to stay and talk to them – being a Warrior Priestess has its price.)

Saimmi took us up to Mount Tomboabo, the hike being a pleasant stroll for us but I noted Saimmi was panting somewhat at the top. Like all Spontoons she keeps fit, but with her duties hardly has time for the near Olympic levels our Tutors have raised us to in three years and indeed it is a nine hundred foot climb of pretty steep trails. Certainly, it was a view well worth anyone's efforts – looking right out over the central waters, which we know inside and out now, literally in my case. Since starting my sailing certificate, I have committed the local depth soundings chart to memory and keep up with the changing patterns of sandbanks that amaze many tourists trying to sail the route they took the year before. The local surveyors are never out of a job around here, what with every big storm rearranging the sandbanks – and they are not the only thing that change the landscape, as we discovered.

Indeed, Saimmi noted our gaze and stepped us through a ritual we have not seen before. It was very strange – as if the world around us was fading with clouds – then for about a second we looked out at the islands – yet the islands were very different. The buildings on Casino Island were simply not there except for some stone structures, and even the shape of the lands had altered. It was just a brief glimpse then everything returned to normal – but from Helen's amazed expression I think she had seen it too.

Saimmi warned us not to try the ritual on our own, unless we were standing on a similar site of power; it would take far too much out of us. Helen guessed we had somehow seen the islands as they used to be. Saimmi nodded, explaining just how the Great Ritual changed the islands five hundred years ago. There were more islands back then; I had heard her say as much before but only thought of low lying islets with a few palm trees that come and go over decades like we have seen in charts of the Kanim Islands – not islands the size of Casino Island wiped off the map! In the Pulp Magazines that sort of thing usually goes with Cranium Island types detonating half a tonne of sensitised radium or allotropic iron while they laugh insanely. The fact that Spontoons rituals, however long and energetic, could do it is unnerving.

Rather chastened we returned to Haio Beach for an excellent luncheon. Then – it would be wonderful to record that (as Marti and Helen certainly did) Jirry and I caught up on lost time, and quite made up for all the time apart.

True enough, he was very glad to see me. I could tell there was something troubling him though, and it did not take long to find out what. My being Lady Allworthy is the problem – and not for the sort of inverted snobbery reason that, say, Liberty Morgenstern would sneeringly turn down a Duke for. It looks as if for a time I will actually have to go and be Lady Allworthy in England – and there is no guarantee I will be able to find a rightful heir. Even if one turns up with a legal claim, if they are as bad as the rest of the family seem to have been – I would have trouble handing over the Estates and the furs on them to such control. The rest of the family do seem to have a dark streak in them, and I can believe the tenants would be happier to have anyone take over as long as they are not related by such a bloodline. This may be why everyone in England is so pleased to smooth all the obstacles out of my way ahead of me just when I would appreciate a whopping big one that would wreck my progress to the House of Lords through no fault of my own.

Of all the troubles I ever worried about, this one rather hits out of the blue. Jirry was very willing to make me an honest Spontoons bride last year had I appeared with nothing but my bare fur, thrown out of Songmark and with a somewhat unexpected kitten on the way that would not match the rest of the Hoele'toemi clan. I can see his point of view – he has no ambition to see what the Barrow-in-Furryness climate is like while he does a re-enactment of Tarzan Lord Greystoke as "wild jungle consort" to Lady Allworthy. The Spontoons are civilised and well-educated indeed, but I doubt the newspapers and the local gossips would quite see that. If anyone back in England has heard of the Spontoons they think of it as somewhere like the impoverished Pauper New Guinea (next to Papua but with no gold) and all the Natives running around in bare fur or loincloths with bones through their ears. Persuading folk that they are perfectly civilised would be a job I doubt I can do, and indeed the Tourist Board would not thank me.

As I admitted, I have already started taking responsibility for the people of the Allworthy estates – I could hardly ignore them, and Jirry knows that. Which is part of the problem. One can hardly run a business by telegram and airmail letter, especially a business I have no experience in at a place I have never been. I know

Barrow-in-Furriness on the map, but that is my limit. Helen and Molly used to assume that Britain and especially England is so small I must practically know everyone there – not so!

Rather a disturbing day, in fact. Back to Songmark feeling rather under a cloud, though the weather was as cheerful as one could hope. Helen was very cheerful, and endured the water taxi crossing quite philosophically – she was not sick even once, which makes a change. Molly and Maria are putting their heads together to see if there is another way out of the problem we have not thought of yet – at least we have till the end of term. Of all the obstacles I had planned to overcome in terms of getting Tailfast to Jirry this coming Solstice, I had never thought he would be the reluctant one.

Having returned rather early, I had time to look through the Sunday edition of the Spontoon Mirror. I rarely read it (Molly is an avid reader, as she still likes to read about all the thrills and spills of Hollywood) and noticed they had an interview with Judge Poynter. His career of more than forty years in the Spontoons made quite an article. Though the Mirror often has some sharp things to say about “Euros”, it conceded that he had stuck at his post for very little reward, and was a fine example of devotion to Duty. Then, the Empire is founded on such furs – who never get rich or praised in the newspapers, spend years and whole lives tucked away administering and ministering to the local furs as doctors, engineers and suchlike in places one can hardly find on the map. Of any hundred who head out to the tropics, thirty or forty leave their bones there and many more return with their health shattered forever.

I wrote off to the good Judge immediately, hoping to meet on Saturday and discuss the sorry state of things. If I cannot solve my problems with being Lady Allworthy, it will not be through the lack of qualified help and sharp minds on the task!

Monday 26th April, 1937

Fine weather still, and as usual our Tutors made the best of it. We were straight out after breakfast to the airfield, and every machine Songmark possesses (or can lay claim to) was in the air by nine. It makes quite a little squadron, with the four original Tiger Moths now joined by the Sea Osprey, the Junkers 86 and even my little Flying Flea. As before, it was tricky flying in formation when the top speed of the Flea was so close to the stalling speed of the Junkers, even with its flaps half down. Still I think we managed a creditable enough show. Li Han flew my flea – she is the lightest of us and every pound saved helps the performance. Although the professionally built kit flies much better than any of my home-built Fleas back in Barsestshire, it is hardly a point-defence interceptor unless the threat is runaway balloons drifting in the wind. Not that the Flea could afford to carry the weight of any weapons to deal with them, even so.

An excellent day’s flying, with some challenging experiences and not just padding our logbooks. By lunchtime we had each logged another hour and a half solo, and more as crew in the Sea Osprey or the Junkers.

Rather than have us spend the time trotting to Songmark and back for luncheon, our Tutors let us lunch at Mahanish’s – there was no need to forbid us ordering any alcohol or Nootnops Blue. The new chef there certainly keeps up the traditions, and the chilli can really make a fur walk out panting on a frosty day! Some of the first-years have worried about such dishes damaging one’s snout, but we have talked to Spontoon Guides who use their scenting skill a lot (and would know if it was ever blunted) and they eat some very fiery local dishes without any ill effects. At least, not to that end – though last term we heard various alarmed cries from the first-year dorms early one morning and saw Mrs. Oelabe summoned urgently. If they lost points for a false alarm I hardly know, but at least they have gained experience of a sort.

It was a fine break – until Irma Bundt happened to look on the back pages of the Spontoon Mirror, where they have classified advertisements and announcements. In the centre of the page is about twenty shell’s worth of space, with just one line of bold text – “DEVINSKI – THY DAMNATION SLUMBERETH NOT.” There was no hint what it means or who it was from. Rather disturbing, I thought.

Not surprisingly, when we showed it to our Tutor she already knew. Maria and Beryl were tasked with enquiring at the Mirror offices – not that they expected to find much. Indeed, an hour later they came back with news that it had been phoned in from Hawaii – not, Beryl thinks, even by the person who wanted it placed themselves but what she calls a “cut-out”, which seems to be the same thing as Molly calls a stooge. The Mirror likes to court controversy as well as revenue, and there are some very strange things in the personal columns sometimes including blocks of code that furs like Susan de Ruiz seize on with delight as other folk would try the crossword. Beryl has mused that it would be a good joke and not too dear to phone in completely meaningless blocks of random letters, just knowing various highly paid professionals are scratching their head-fur out trying to decrypt them. Then, her idea of robust practical jokes includes land mines.

I should think this is connected with Father Dominicus. My dorm has not been much involved with the rivalry with the Ave Argentum, but Jasbir’s and Missy K’s have been tasked with some rather odd jobs this year, vanishing away for odd days and nights. Naturally they do not talk about them, any more than I tell folk just what Mr. Sapohatan asks of us. Anyway, it could mean things are hotting up – I know Father Dominicus had wanted to “save” one of our first-years from Alpha Rote’s dorm and take on her education himself. Presumably he thought converting Alpha herself would need too much of a miracle to hope for – I have seen those ancient books Alpha brought with her in the first term, and they could hardly be more toxic in one respect as if they were dripping with mustard gas in a more mundane one.

Back into the air after lunch, for something rather different. First there was a trip to Pangai, one of the nearer Kanim Islands, where we landed the Tiger Moths and I put the Sea Osprey down in the lagoon. There were crew standing by with what looked like cut-down telegraph poles, which they fitted to that release gear on the undercarriage we were told was for carrying drop fuel tanks when available. So in half an hour, all our Tiger Moths were basically carrying dummy torpedoes. Not something that is listed in the Songmark Prospectus – and out in Pangai, there were no non-Spontoonie eyes to see.

Interestingly, not everyone came on this outing though there would have been room in the Sea Osprey. Madeleine X and Beryl were given a separate long-distance navigation exercise in the Junkers 86, along with the other 2 in Madeleine's dorm * as crew. They went off in quite the opposite direction. There was time and fuel for us to get four "drops" each into the Lagoon, with the Sea Osprey taxiing around to retrieve the floating logs and pull them back to shore. A seaplane without a proper water rudder makes a rather clumsy boat, and it is a fine test of throttle control to steer it around collecting logs bobbing in the waves while staying clear of the reefs and shallows. Running into a ten-foot log at any sort of speed would be a bad move too, and anyone doing so would lose marks as well as get a lot more unwanted practice pulling dents out of the dural hull when we got back to Eastern Island.

Quite a day of mysteries! Naturally Maria noticed who was not invited to this part of our "education", and was not too surprised. As for mysteries, the more poetically inclined Songmark students sometimes think of a career involving finding fame and fortune travelling the world solving crimes and clearing up mysteries – in Beryl's case her idea is to see the world and acquire much of its portable wealth doing quite the opposite.

* Editor's note – this is the nearest Amelia comes to mentioning the "missing" two members of her year. Adding up the numbers in each dorm always comes up two short. Unless a second account of her class comes to light, we are definitely still left guessing. Beryl is certainly said to be the only new arrival since day one, so they have been with her all the time. Very strange.

Tuesday 27th April, 1937

Pouring with rain, alas. We all stoked up with breakfast grimly aware there would probably be something strenuous to do outdoors, and indeed our Tutors did not disappoint us. For the first time this term we jogged out to the cliff edge North of LONO hill, our paws sinking deep into the mud on the way there.

We have certainly explored every square foot of these rocks up, down and sideways, in rain and shine, day and night, and in everything from bathing costumes to full packs loaded with water bags. Today we were climbing without the protection of ropes. It concentrates the mind wonderfully. The rock was absolutely flowing with water and slick with green moss and algae; not what a girl wants as fur conditioner.

This time last year it would have been Adele Beasley in whose paw a supposedly solid chunk of cliff face snapped off after surviving hundreds of years of weathering – today it was Helen. Fortunately she was only ten feet up, and managed to jump clear of the rock face and make a decent rolling landing on the steep grass below without injury.

It is getting challenging to find obviously new routes on this cliff, but we keep trying. Sophie D'Artagnan managed to string together some of our older routes into a sixty foot traverse that varies from two to twenty feet up the main wall, and she has named it "Last Waltz" in the notebooks*. Quite possibly we will be leaving this little cliff to the junior years now, making it our last waltz indeed with these stones.

It was just our bad luck that we were not using ropes today, as now three dorms of us (mine, Jasbir's and Prudence's) are wearing the modified shorts we built with an inconspicuous sewn-in harness of two inch cargo strapping. While taking a fall of a few feet in such a harness is hardly fun, it is far less painful than the traditional three turns of rope around one's waist. Possibly that was a reason Miss Wildford had us leave the rope behind today. She spotted that trick with the badly vulcanised "sticky" plimsolls a couple of terms ago, and forbade us to wear them on Songmark climbs. Everyone who has a pair kept theirs though, and in the next year they might be worn in some interesting situations around the world.

Back to Songmark for some more classes indoors, which made a nice change – it was an interesting exercise in what Maria called "ruthless geography". That is, looking at the profitable resources of the world and who owns them – similarly, who is short of them and has the ability and/or ambition to grab rather than buy. We knew that Vostok is turning out about a quarter of the world's magnesium and a tenth of its aluminium (I keep having to correct Molly's and Helen's attempts at spelling the metal) but we had not realised just how hard-up Japan is for metals. No wonder all the scrap metal merchants we see here are Japanese. Similarly, unusual metals such as tungsten are going to be increasingly important as engineering wants more exotic alloys – and nations that get refused commercial trade in them will find other ways to lay their paws on them,

Maria has interesting news from her homeland – her Uncle is actually putting some of her ideas into practice. In Cyrenacia, Eritrea and the rest of Italian East Africa (he has declared the word "Ethiopia" to be as extinct as the nation of Carthage and not to be used any more) there are now wide-ranging teams of young geologists based on four airships surveying twenty times as much ground per diem as they ever could on their paws and managing to live to tell the tale. When they see a promising outcrop they spin up the autogiros carried on docking booms under the airship, land for half an hour's geology then back into the clouds with their

samples to analyse before the un-pacified locals turn up with spears and skinning knives. Having the airship in unfriendly terrain is very handy; one can hover over a likely site out of range of Native musket-fire and survey it at leisure before heading back to all the comforts of a secure base camp every night as well as supplying covering fire and spotting ambushes. She says they have already found chromium deposits in the West of Italian Eastern Africa – that is, just East of the Sudanese frontier. While the Natives already know about ordinary metals such as gold, lead and copper, chromium is the sort of “modern” resource they would not have recognised – or be able to do much with if they did.

Back to work on our textbooks – much to Helen’s despair. She says that after she finishes Songmark, the monthly edition of “Extra-Spicy Pacific Tails” is the only book she intends to read.

- These notebooks seem to have survived somewhere to resurface decades later as part of the official “Guide to rock, Spontoons and Nimitz Sea edition”. Last Waltz is recognisably labelled a classic, or more exactly: *“Last Waltz: Grade ES (Extremely Scary). Start from same greasy runnel as “Crack of Doom”, break left in layback along questionable scoops to outcrop below main mantle of “Head Case” and find sparse claw-holds along almost featureless slabs. A tentative head-jamming hold might be possible to the left by a heroic dyno move, otherwise friction holds on greasy scoops are the only protection. Crux is a succession of dyno moves across the loose flute to the overhang on Dragon Rock next to “Eton Wall Game”, which only furs with extreme flexibility will be able to complete – involving 3 tricky double paw changes and a back twist that has drummed up much trade for local osteopaths.”*

Wednesday 28th April, 1937

Off to Main Island! A far brighter day, and one we resigned ourselves to starting with a few bruises when we met up again with half a dozen Spontoon Guides. Quite a long walk first, West of Main Village then over the ridge that goes up to that volcanic cone, to the quarry where the sculptor Mr. Tikitavi has his quarry and workshops.

The quarrying has exposed some lava tubes that once ran down from the active volcano, and the biggest are about ten feet across. As there is nothing in there to damage, we had a morning of self-defence exercises in the cramped caves. All the moves many of us have prided ourselves on practicing are rather constrained in such close quarters – trying any high leaps and kicks is hardly a good idea inside a seven foot tunnel. I found myself matched against a hefty badger guide, whose style was more “grab and grapple” and suited a tunnel tussle embarrassingly well. The Guides are decidedly well trained, and it is no disgrace to get convincingly sat on, as indeed our Tutors have instilled in us a hard-earned knowledge that any fight can be lost however skilled one may be. No Songmark girl ever lost points for running away, especially to get reinforcements.

Lava tubes look smooth but up close (as in, being thrown against the walls or sat on by a very solid badger) they are more like welded rubble. Definitely wearing on the fur. Still, our Tutors seem to be happy enough with our progress though Beryl was cautioned that her “sleeper hold” would have her disqualified in professional wrestling. I believe Saint T’s was the only girl’s school to have that as an official sport – but then, they did bare-knuckle boxing as well. Not a sport that appeared in the Saint Winifred’s prospectus.

It was a rather battered collection of furs who sat down for lunch near Mr. Tikitavi’s quarry. As Spontoon is such a tourist attraction, the Althing would not approve great gaping quarries spoiling the scenery (the old one was a Plantation-era working) so these days the quarries are more properly “stone mines” with inconspicuous entrances. Madeleine X was unusually forthcoming and mentioned that a lot of Southern Paris was built on the same principle from stone quarried directly underneath its foundations – which prompted some chaffing from the rest of us about French common-sense. Excavating the rock to build a house out of its own cellar hole is one thing, but quarrying under streets of tall, heavy and expensive town houses is another.

The Spontoones certainly put all their resources to good use! I suppose that on such a small island there is little alternative. Even the basalt dust from the quarries is collected and shipped out to farms, as well as to the “Bio-reactor” over in Vikingstown where apparently it boosts the compost nutrient levels. Professor Kurt has quite an operation going there, getting electrical power from crop wastes, fish trimmings and seaweed. Indeed as Prudence has often quoted, *“Where there’s muck there’s brass”*, meaning money. Doubly so if one’s raw materials are things that otherwise folk would have to pay to get rid of.

A hike in to Main Village and then another rude surprise – Miss Wildford cheerfully announced she had “forgotten her purse” and we had to swim back. A mile and a half across the central waters, fully clothed! Most of us had cuts and scrapes from the morning’s contests that sting awfully with salt water, and we were already tired. But without too much grumbling we got on with it, only glad it was almost May rather than January.

A long, cold swim regardless. Somehow Miss Blande had found enough change in her pocket to hire a water-taxi for herself and Miss Wildford, and indeed a couple more were following us with those red warning flags they use when clearing driftwood and suchlike from the seaplane ways. Swimmers in the water are inconspicuous from the air, and it would not improve our day to have a DO X land on our heads. Everybody made it on their own power, with no serious straggling, and indeed at a quite respectable speed considering the currents. Furs swim far more slowly than generally supposed; we hike with packs at four miles an hour over most terrain but it is a definite sprint to swim at two.

What a day! It was nineteen extremely tired third-years who staggered up from our landfall on the coast near the “Bicycle factory” leaving a saltwater trail. Li Han is at a disadvantage being the smallest, although Beryl is nearly as badly off. Still, even Missy K has to work hard getting through the surf. We were only glad it was not the West coast of Main Island where the waves come in straight off thousands of miles of the Pacific.

One thing Songmark teaches is not to raise one’s hopes too high as opposed to one’s ambitions. Nobody would have been amazed to sit down to a bowl of cold three-finger poi apiece then sent off on another run round the island. Not pleased, indeed, but not amazed. Helen murmured that our Tutors have to work hard now to find things to really test us and she is probably right.

Actually things turned out rather better – after a brisk shower to get the salt out of our fur (and clothes – the fact that we are dripping wet is of no concern to our Tutors as long as we are clean and brushed) we had a treat indeed. We became the test pilots, so to speak, for Rain Island’s new military menu! The fact that untested tinned rations are such an improvement on our usual fare probably says a lot about how our Tutors put their priorities in dividing up our Songmark fees. A maximum on hours in the air and a minimum of succulent roasts on the table. Or palm hearts, for any pure herbivores.

Of course, nothing comes without its price and we had to fill in detailed questionnaires about our supper. The idea is to ring the changes on five basic tinned “full meal” rations – one gets the idea they plan to eat them all week on duty and take weekends off. As to the main supper menus, they have:

1. Salmon and pasta. Rather tasty.
2. Beef and vegetable stew. Not yet called “Maconochie Junior”, but doubtless it will be. There was nothing really wrong with the recipe for Maconochie, without a sub-contractor pushing his luck and profit margins on skimmed ingredients or with the best will in the world, wartime supply shortages.
3. Pumpkin, bean and corn stew, “Three Sisters brand”. A taste of home for a lot of the Rain Islanders.
4. Vegetable Chilli, though the Rain Islanders could use a spelling lesson (The dictionary does NOT have “Chili” as a word.) A decidedly fiery mix and probably not the best one to dine on before anything involving sneaking around in the dark with sentries sniffing the air for scents.
5. Cheese and mashed potato “Sea Pie” – nobody much liked it. The vegetarians would not eat it, and it was about ten percent tastier than pastefish, fifteen percent better than a tin of poi. Enough said.

Actually, Molly had a good deal to say about the ration apart from wondering if she can produce a better one when Fish Log is out of season. Rain Island is quite a small place in terms of fertile farmland (one cannot eat pine trees) and her guess is they are spreading the menu because they have difficulty getting sufficient supplies of any one ingredient. There are only so many surplus pumpkins available for the factory making the “Three Sisters” stew. The cans are very honestly labelled – that menu and the salmon pasta both contain five percent kelp meal, which is something the Pacific coast has in abundance and is said to be highly nutritious.

One wonders if some of the produce of the Pennington family in the Aleutians ended up on our plates! It is a long way from their undersea “plantation” to Eastern Island.

Having only two cases of the Rain Island rations to review, the treat was reserved for third-years. We have eaten our share of the regular Songmark cuisine already, after all. Some of the junior years were looking on enviously as they tucked into their sweet potato mash. An army marches on its stomach as Napoleon famously said, and an Adventuress likewise. In the first year Alpha Rote has come up with an actually tasty and wholesome snack she is getting into commercial production, the “Songmark Bar”. Molly was rather envious about being beaten to it – but she had a year of working on foods here before Alpha arrived, and had her chance to think of it first.

Thinking of our junior years, it looks as if the Tutors have selected a talented bunch again. Not just in the regular active skills one might expect in an Adventuress – there is our second Texan feline Lucy Ulrich, who is a published author! I have even seen her name on the front cover of a pulp magazine on sale on Casino Island; though I have not actually read “*Astounding - so Astounding your mind just won’t cope with how Astounding they really are, Stories*” it certainly sounds interesting. Molly occasionally buys pulp magazines though some of them have educational value. In the latest issue of that realist adventuring journal “Soldier of Misfortune” they caution “*don’t join anything its own members call a “barmy army” no matter how relaxed their discipline, stylish their uniform or charismatic their leader may look on the newsreels.*” Salutary advice for any soon-to-graduate Adventuress.

Thursday 29th April, 1937

A day for the Tourist Board to rub their paws over – the first boat of the season arrived at Pier Six. Not one of the “Classic” tour boats which are expected in about a month, but a round the world cruise that is staying for a few days. The tourists are well-heeled but less well-padded than most who waddle off the dock in search of beach parties and hula dancing – which is just as well as the islands are still working hard on painting the souvenir stalls and fish and chip booths and are not ready to handle hundreds on the Crazy Golf and Slightly Disturbed Croquet courses.

We had a close-up view of the ship as we headed out to Casino Island for a morning at the main hospital. All of us are qualified as first-aiders and have been since the first year, but there are always new hints and tips to learn and things to practice. Medical science keeps moving along – in the hospital they now have a few precious

batches of the “sulpha drugs” we have read about, that are amazing against infection. They are very jealously guarded though – there are about a dozen treatments’ worth in stock, and a fur would have to be practically at death’s door to get any. Though not, of course, too far gone for the drugs to have a chance of helping. We were told of one Euro “beachcomber” out in the Kanim Islands who was brought in with blood poisoning from a foot-paw swollen the size of a football after treading on sea urchin spines – I wish that Brigit Mulvaney could have seen the rather unnerving photograph, she might have been less ungrateful for my treating the same injury back on our Albanian South Indies trip in August!

A Native Spontoonie would have known how to treat such things (or have family nearby who would) but away from the bright lights of Spontoon there are a lot of assorted Euros wandering the Nimitz Sea area. This gentleman was a Czech who had been conscripted by Austro-Hungary in 1914, captured by the Tsarist Russians in 1915, released in late 1917 to join a White Russian “Foreign Legion” in Siberia, had a decade serving in Vostok till he argued with the Authorities and after surviving all that almost perished after stepping on a sea urchin while walking along a “paradise island beach” far from the wars. Which just shows, a fur who tries to run away from danger can find it waiting for him anywhere.

A definitely educational morning. The second-years joined us after lunch for their own classes, and I was able to have a talk with Florence Farmington while we practiced diagnosing unpleasant things from the textbooks on the shelves. I mentioned having last seen her on Casino Island in a rather different fur pattern – and in rather different company. Some folk would say less respectable, except that we know Huntresses are as well respected here as doctors, and far more so than lawyers.

Florence blushed and admitted she had been spending much time with Gilda in the holidays. Most of it was indeed respectable, with Gilda showing her round odd parts of the Spontoon isles acting as a Guide (which she has indeed trained as). Florence changed her appearance for public walks as she is more worried about her own reputation, though I think it is rather late for that – besides, I doubt anyone here much cares. Not even Madeleine X would blow the whistle on whatever happens on Spontoon – as Songmark girls stick together, and the prospect of having a vengeful one on one’s tail is something to avoid. “Soppy” Forsythe denouncing me was another matter, in that she was (and presumably still is) a secret agent, and such things are her job. But Prudence and Beryl say that squirrel will be regretting it if she ever meets them back in England.

Still, it is just as well Molly does not know a lot of the ... details. It is rather too much information for me, but serves me right for asking. Florence says that whatever Gilda shows her and ... educates her in, there is one thing she keeps thinking about. Gilda understandably has separate rooms for her own bedroom and entertaining her visitors, and Florence keeps wondering what it would be like to simply be invited in, and to wake up in that bed.

I hate to think Molly might be right about Florence. I pointed out it is standard in any trade to never give absolutely everything (the crooner Mr. Thornton Throbby is quoted as saying “always leave ’em wanting one more song.”) Besides which, Gilda has said she wants to retire from being a Huntress and marry one day and probably will be keeping some things for herself to look forward to. Why Florence does not simply go to the Double Lotus like the rest of her dorm, now she knows what she likes, is a question I hardly liked to ask. According to Molly such tastes are as contagious as leprosy and as incurable – but that is just Molly for you. Molly is also of the opinion that an anti-tank rifle counts as a “self-defence precaution” even though we have seen no armoured vehicles nearer than Vostok.

A rapid farewell to Florence and the rest as I headed down to Pier Four along with Madeleine X and Sophie D’Artagnan. Our big day is tomorrow, where on Class 1 and 2 sailing boats we are tested for our Master’s Certificate! That certainly counts with our Tutors and indeed they are paying for it unlike my “training” as Kim-Anh on Saturdays. Or indeed Florence’s Saturday “lessons” only a few hundred yards away.

Out on the wide open waters! Captain Ruzkov is a traditionally stern, taciturn skipper except he is never slow to let a sailor know what they are doing wrong. But he sat back and seemed fairly relaxed as we headed up the central waters, tacked through the passage North of Eastern, came about and then tacked all the way South, keeping a good ten cables’ length from the reefs of Sacred Island. Madeleine turned her nose up at the sight of that island, but she is sensible enough not to try and “disprove the myths” by going there. Over the years I have heard tourists telling each other that the island is “really” off-limits because either (a) it is the island’s treasure-house (b) home of the eager harem of the High Priest (as if Spontoon had one) or (c) under the jungle cover the Spontoonies are growing huge quantities of opium or other illegal drugs. The Tourist Board neither confirm nor deny anything, on principle. Whatever makes the area sound mysterious is good for business, and the locals manage to discourage anyone going to investigate.

Our trip completed as we rounded the tip of South Fluke of South Island, then back up into the central waters in fine style, the sail as taut and crease-free as any of the hospital sheets we had seen earlier! With all sail set and the centreboard pulled up we must have been making fifteen knots running straight down the wind, a most respectable speed for a sailing vessel. I must have a word with that pair of English sisters who are working as pilots for the local hospital having arrived “on spec” to apply to Songmark having sailed their own ship all the way from home! From the Lake District and quite near Barrow-in-Furriiness, as it happens.

Although it is nothing like as strenuous as running round the sand dunes with a pack full of bricks, an afternoon hauling the ropes and straining at the helm in a lively breeze definitely boosts the appetite - as opposed to looking over grisly medical books all morning, which cut most of our appetites for lunch. Back to Songmark

for a jolly fine vegetable curry with sliced hard-boiled eggs for those who wanted it – a “Jalfrezi” as I recall its name from our Goanese cook Mrs. Chaundrapal back at Saint Winifred’s who served it most Thursday evenings before prep. Definitely something to ginger one up on a chilly day, and unlike most of the food there it was not based on suet.

Mealtimes are one of the rare occasions we get to flick through the newspapers, though indeed a rapid read is the best we usually manage and only Susan de Ruiz can do the crossword in the time available. There was one picture on the second page of the Spontoon Mirror with a dangerous mobster being led away by the police – being a formidable leonine gentleman he was not only paw-cuffed but sporting a regulation police adjustable multi-species muzzle. It seemed rather familiar.

I confess my eyes somewhat crossed recalling last year on Krupmark Island – there was what looked like a perfectly sound idea at the time for Judy to suggest one, although I did wonder about such things being available on the shelves. Definitely not the sort of thing I will be mentioning if I get to talk as a Saint Winifred’s “old girl” to the junior classes about how I became Lady Allworthy! I fear a description of all I was wearing on my “engagement” would hardly be thought of as an uplifting address to the lower school. Still, I have to admit I came to no lasting harm there unlike many folk who end up on Krupmark, or indeed Molly who would rather have done all I did than encounter Captain Granite as she did. She too escaped with no physical harm once she had rid herself of fleas picked up on the boat, but has never been quite the same again.

Various folk who have come into contact with Molly over her time here would probably think of any change being an improvement – rather like losing one’s faith in religion is not necessarily a bad thing if one started off as a devout member of the Thuggee cult.

Friday 30th April, 1937

A big day for three of us – our second exam for a commercial license! Whether our Tutors were being ironic or not I hardly know and care less, as along with Madeleine X and Sophie D’Artagnan I was presented with a full “flight breakfast” of ham and eggs. I hardly liked to eat it with the rest of Songmark sniffing the air and trying not to drool at the delicious scent as they dutifully dug through the usual breadfruit mash. Next year there will probably be a lot more applicants for the Sailing Master Certificates, if only for the breakfast.

Still, another thing we are taught is to make the most of all good fortune that comes our way – and indeed the breakfast was delicious and sets one up for the day. We certainly needed it and anyway it would have been less than a bite apiece had we shared it with the rest of our year. By half past eight the three of us were on Casino Island where Captain Ruzkov was awaiting us at the marina, one eye keenly on the ship’s chronometer.

It was a hard, hard day. Six hours each as Captain, then six as helms-fur and six as general deckhand, eighteen hours of hard labour as Captain Ruzkov had us do everything with the ship but take off! It certainly felt like we were “on the step” as we nearly flew like down the central waters with a Force Six wind behind us – which was exhilarating, but all too brief. Turning around in the teeth of the wind with barely half a fathom of water between the keel and the shifting sandbanks between Eastern and Main Island was hard, nerve-wracking work that needs a “nose for wind” some furs could try all their lives and not manage to acquire. I was glad of those years sailing in the Norfolk Broads in the school holidays, as Sophie D’Artagnan was of her summers helping on her Uncle’s oyster boats off Arcachon in the Bay of Biscay, and Madeleine of her sailing on the Seine!

It was just my luck to be the last to be Captain, when the light was going and the tide going out for the second time today. The physical work was nothing we are unused to, and indeed one can haul a rope when bone-weary far easier than laying a precise course calculating tides and winds to get us straight into the channels without having to make any last-minute corrections. Very much as they told us in our first year engineering workshop classes, “measure twice and cut once.”

At last it was over, and I had the thrill of captaining the forty-footer as it weaved past the stern of the docked cruise ship and came home to its berth in Casino Island’s Marina. Of course today was not the whole exam, Captain Ruzkov has been measuring our skills and “book-learning” for weeks – today was just the final test. And we all passed!

Dear Diary: if the worst comes to the worst and I cannot afford an aircraft ticket back to England I can work my passage on a ship in a rather better way than Molly did – there are always berths around the world for someone with a Mariner’s Certificate and now I have one! Not stamped in Macao either.

I felt decidedly like celebrating and yet tonight was hardly the time. Our Tutors let us know when we can head down to Mahanish’s or into Casino Island to Bow Thai, and I can scarcely slip off alone while Helen, Molly and Maria are still snout deep in their work. I had to get back and join them, plus if I vanished for an hour Madeleine X would be sure to squeal on me. She is a stickler for rules, and I cannot afford to lose a single point. As she has described the Tour De France cycle race, furs race for days and are sometimes defeated by seconds. It is possible to fail Songmark by one point, and we will never know which one till too late.

Back to our dorm for congratulations and hot cocoa brewed on Maria’s primus stove – in the circumstances, no champagne ever tasted as good!

Saturday May 1st, 1937

Dear Diary – a shocking day, especially so soon after yesterday’s triumph. All started as usual, with our trip along with Jasbir’s dorm and half the first year across to Casino Island for the dance class – most of Songmark was on the island with the second years playing Kilikiti against the High School here. An excellent dance morning, with the Sind sisters showing quite a level of skill for the crowd. They are as proud of being Indian as I am of being British (quite right too), and are never slow to demonstrate skills learned in the traditional dances of their country that can be readily adapted to hula. It is splendid to see Jasbir passing on the traditions! As with any school, in the last year one’s thoughts turn to how it will be when we are gone. Not all of it is as good as knowing Meera is carrying it on, though. Red dorm will be third-years, with all the skills and practice that entails. Yes. Well.

I must confess, it is getting rather strange to sit in the Missing Coconut and wonder how many times we will be here as Songmark students. For Jasbir’s dorm it will only be a paw-full more visits, if that. Still, they made the most of it, having done the traditional dash across the road to the sea to the tune of the first rapid-fire snapping of tourist cameras this year. The tour boat is leaving tonight for Hawaii, and evidently the Tourist Board has told them where and when to come for a good view – it would be rather a coincidence to randomly find twenty furs on the unfashionable side of the island with their cameras ready just as we finished our dance classes. The first-years were somewhat embarrassed, though we have become used to the idea that any pretty (or handsome) fur in a lei and grass skirt is a National Asset for the Spontoon tourist trade.

As last week, Helen took my other clothes back to Songmark (via an afternoon’s shopping) and I changed into Kim-Anh’s fur patterning and costume. It seems to go on much easier these days, and it is more than just practice. As Mr. Tikitavi said about his sculptures, the shape is there inside the rock and it is just a matter of removing the parts that hide it. It is a strange feeling. Kim-Anh has her own passport that was good enough to get me into the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands, and has established a past – if I could only speak Cantonese, Siamese or Portuguese it might be a more convincing one.

Anyway, five minutes later I was at Malou’s house greeting her and her kitten, and learning more about how Kim-Anh should look, move and stand. One can recognise a fur by their walk no matter how they are otherwise disguised, we are told, and indeed it is something I have practiced changing. It is surely very difficult to teach someone this kind of thing, but I have a good teacher. I have spent three years trying, amongst much else, to tell Molly and Helen that the way to sit in a high-backed chair is not to straddle the back and fold one’s arms on top of it, but to little avail. Molly generally quotes one of her favourite movie stars (in her homeland they take the place of philosophers) and growls “I yam what I yam.”

A break for green tea was most welcome – and then I had a surprise, the first of many today. Malou announced her husband would be home soon and she would be pleased to introduce us. She had told me much about her husband, a powerful dark furred equine from the Fillypines, and I think she enjoys watching my reaction. Malou says she is totally confident she has her mate’s heart, so much so that she never worries about dalliances with other girls. They happen, that is, but it never worries her – in fact, she says she is proud of her husband’s successes.

I was trying very hard to keep my composure, much to Malou’s amusement. She has pointed out that Kim-Anh is not Tailfast to anyone – and neither am I right now as Amelia. My ears were definitely blushing, contemplating the very species-specific Precautions I bought last week being put to use. The idea of not wasting twenty cowries’ worth of Precautions should absolutely not be a factor – but regardless I found myself having to quash that thought. It was quite alarming feeling myself relaxing that way.

Just then I heard the front door open, and rather braced myself to make a polite greeting followed by a hurried retreat, lest I stay and regret it in the long term. The sitting room door opened and Malou sprang to the welcoming arms of her mate – and I got something of a shock. I know the Fillypino mare Nikki very well, she being one of the few early Songmark graduates who stayed on in the area – and it turns out Malou was picking her words carefully when describing her husband!

As the saying goes, I made my excuses and left. That was embarrassing. Malou and Nikki found the whole thing highly amusing, and at least Nikki’s invitation was one I had no difficulty in politely turning down. Mind you, I have heard from Prudence and co that Nikki is of somewhat extreme tastes, and after paying that way for experience on Nikki’s aircraft last year even they swore never again. What with the Rotes, Tatiana and Millicent and now discovering Malou and Nikki, I must know half the Sapphic couples between Hawaii and Japan! I am still confident it is scarcely one in several hundred ladies have any such interests let alone ever do anything about it, but they are drawn to the same Adventuring lifestyle as a Songmark girl and Spontoon seems to be a centre for all sorts of Adventure. I did not ask about the real origin of Malou’s kitten, as I fear the answer would be ... disturbing and I had enough of that for one day.

I was in something of a dark mood as I got on the water taxi towards Meeting Island, early for my appointment with Judge Poynter. He has never seen me as Kim-Anh before, and I had planned to surprise him. The weather was suitable, with a sudden Spring squall blowing out of the West and clouds erupting around Mount Kiribatori to spill the heavy rain over Spontoon’s central waters. Generally a Songmark girl is out in the front of a water taxi, not sat in the middle of the canvas arch like a tourist caught out on the way back from the beach.

On the trip over I kept telling myself that most of my problems were not real ones, but only a matter of opinion – a lot of furs would love the prospect of becoming Lady Allworthy, and count the way I got it as a very

small price to pay. Nothing, indeed, that a real “gold-digger” would not have done with far less hope of getting the main prize. To get all the worldly inheritance of such a “husband” without actually having to live with Leon Allworthy is what many furs would call the best of all possible worlds, and to get the chance to raise the name of an ancient title from the mire is one any of my teachers at Saint Winifred’s would point out is a wonderful opportunity.

And yet – I had become used to the idea of being Mrs. Amelia Hoele’toemi, a blushing bride with a new longhouse alongside Helen as my sister-in-law, putting our three years of Songmark training to good use as we earn money for the family adventuring. I was worrying before about it being unfair on Jirry if I had returned home this July having taken all his interests up for over two years, when he could have been happy all that time with a nice Spontoonie girl who was not going to vanish on him. I can hardly be an absentee Spontoonie wife exiled in England any more than I can be an absentee landlady living here on the profits from Barrow-in-Furryness – though legal, neither setup is fair on so many other furs.

It is true enough that I have never met any of the furs working the farms and shipyards of the Allworthy estates, but they have heard about me – and after years of neglect are eagerly looking to me (or someone) to do their duty. I have put some work their way, and proved I can do so, which rather removes any excuses I might have made about being unfit to run the place. Unlike what Molly and Helen seem to have heard in school in their homeland, being a member of the aristocracy is not just about privilege and reward but duty and responsibility as well, and a crushing burden it often is for very little repayment (one may inherit an estate in theory worth millions but it is all “entailed” meaning one can never sell a square foot of it, and any Yankee soap-boiling magnate may have ten times the ready cash income and no leaky mansion house to pay the bills on.) I hardly know if Lord Leon gave the place a second thought except to regret his access to the money was frozen when he fled into exile, but realistically I have to doubt it.

I was scarcely hoping that Justice Poynter had any good news for me, as I crossed Meeting Island trying to stay under the umbrella - Kim-Anh’s outfit does not really go with our Songmark yellow oilskins. Judge Poynter always gives his housekeeper weekends off as everyone knows, but the sitting room curtains were drawn. Which is why I was surprised to hear voices inside the bungalow just as I was about to knock – unfriendly voices, though I could not make out at first what they were saying. Looking down I noticed splinters where the door had evidently been forced.

For a second I thought hard about running for the police, but the nearest station is by the dock and even if I persuaded a constable to run back straight away with me it would be ten minutes – and furs who break a Judge’s doors down are not likely to be there in to collect autographs. I was definitely on my own and unarmed, without even the various items most Songmark girls build into their uniforms and day clothes – but looking around the yard I spotted a broom leaning against the wall, and in another second was unarmed no longer. The broom head unbalances things so that had to go first; fortunately it was just wedged and not glued, and came off silently.

Just opening the front door might have been a bad idea, as someone could be watching from inside or rigged an intruder alarm behind it – a pile of tins is the usual improvised one we are taught. I happened to know the bathroom window has a loose catch though, and in a few seconds had hooked a claw through the gap and slid into the closed and unoccupied room. Silk has the advantage of being a very smooth and quiet material.

There is a fanlight above the bathroom door into the corridor, and standing on the bath stool I could open it silently to see and hear what was happening in the sitting-room just opposite. Indeed Judge Poynter had company behind the drawn curtains, and decidedly uninvited company at that.

What I saw was Judge Poynter standing in the middle of the room, with three furs facing him and away from me – a shaggy bovine, a red-haired canine with long ears like Brigit Mulvaney, and a reddish stoat. All three had recognisably local machetes in their paws (the stoat being evidently left-pawed). They were demanding he kneel and face them as a “lickspittle tyrant of the old Empire” – and from what else they said, I gathered he was not the first they had murdered for their professions. I had heard of this just the week before and indeed Judge Poynter has been in the news as an example of devotion to his post. The article had a quote from captured anti-imperialist saying “*we never kill the bad ones – they do our work for us.*”

Judge Poynter faced them squarely, and totally unafraid told them that he might be cut down, but would live or die on his feet against such furs. I have never seen anything so noble as the old gent standing there. It suddenly became very clear just what my best chances were, and how very few seconds I had to act.

The next few seconds might have been a blur on film, but I remember exactly what happened as if it was some deadly ballet. All three were facing away from me, so I had one second’s worth of surprise I had to use to the full. We are taught that when outnumbered the only tactic that works is to shorten the odds immediately. We are also taught various moves with strict provisos never to practice them on living furs, and why. The bovine had a pistol holstered on his hip, but seemed to be relishing using his blade instead. He was the first of the odds I had to reduce.

I pulled the bathroom door open and before anyone began to turn was in a move I have seen Molly use on dummies on the firing range with her bayonet – I had only the broom handle but with all my momentum and every muscle from my toes to my wrists lunged into a “stop thrust” up at the bovine, aiming just at the hollow where the neck meets the skull. Something gave way and he went down, falling on the table with a crash as his companions jumped out of the way and I sprang into the room, moving as fast as I have ever done. The canine

began to swing his machete up but I had the longer reach lunging with five feet of broom-handle and he took it straight to the solar plexus. I have not been taught to duel or fight fair against armed furs, and today was not the day to start.

Judge Poynter had not been idle either. As the stoat turned towards me Harold kicked the low table over, the edge slamming in behind the stoat's knees sending him sprawling. A broom-handle makes a decent quarterstaff and keeps one well away from danger – mine swung full circle and came down on the red-furred wrist with all the force I could put behind it. Mustelids are notoriously light-boned, and he dropped the weapon with a yelp and an oath in Gaelic. I followed that up with a crack across the side of his head a little below the ears where the bone is weakest, and he went down.

Just then the canine was getting up and Harold shouted a warning – I turned just in time to catch two pounds of blade recycled from lorry leaf-spring on the broom handle, with predictable results. That blow was halted but the wood was sheared almost through, cracking. I threw one two-foot length to Harold and realised I now had a sharp-tipped splintered staff, with less reach but new options. I thrust straight for the canine's eyes, only tearing a gouge in his brow but I think he read what was in my own eyes clearly enough. Unfortunately that acted as a spur and his next blow knocked the staff right out of my paws to clatter down the corridor well out of reach.

Before he had recovered and swung back for another blow I seized the first heavy item to paw, the venerable gasogene that had sat in the corner of the room for forty years providing Harold with fresh soda water, and swung the thirty pounds of water and acid filled metal-wrapped glass in an overhead arc connecting with the canine's head. They both broke. I was sorry for the gasogene, it was a lovely piece and had served so well and so very long.

For a second there was a silence, with only the tinkling of glass spinning away down the corridor and my own ragged breathing. I put my finger to my muzzle for silence, and did a quick check around the house for any more intruders. Finding none I picked up the telephone, noting with no great surprise that the line had been cut. I slipped outside the back door and did a wide circle through the streets, starting a hundred yards away and closing in. Meeting Island is sparsely inhabited at weekends, relatively few furs actually living there and many of them were off on Casino Island for shopping and the like.

It was fifty yards from Judge Poynter's house that I spotted him; there was an unfamiliar tall grey-furred canine of the wolfhound type sitting unobtrusively in the shadow under a mulberry tree with a picnic basket. But few tourists come here, and they tend not to have binoculars out unless there is something rather better in view than bungalows and rather uninspired administration buildings. I memorised his face as I walked by – and spotted the telephone booth at the end of the street. In a minute later I was on the phone to the Police station, gasping out a story of hearing shouts and screams from the Judge's house, and dreading something awful was happening in there – which would certainly have been true. When the desk sergeant asked me who I was and where, I put the telephone down and stepped clear of the booth. I knew there were few minutes left before the police arrived, but I needed the time to think.

Harold had never seen me as Kim-Anh, and I had entered a curtained room on a dim day with the light behind me nor had I opened my mouth except to hiss defiance. I was wearing oriental silk gloves and would have left no paw-prints on the broom-handle or elsewhere – and as to any other shed fur I left, that could have come from one of my earlier visits. The only person who might have seen me going into the bungalow was the grey wolfhound, and as he did not react when I walked past I doubt he had either unless he is extremely well trained.

Just then I spotted three constables on bicycles pedalling furiously towards the bungalow, and made my mind up. In four minutes I was back at the water taxi heading for Casino Island. The bank there keeps various bundles there for me and Kim-Anh under our respective names, and retrieving a lightweight change of clothes I was heading to a swimming pool from which changing room Amelia Bourne-Phipps once more walked out amongst the other tourists. The first thing was to send a postcard to Post Box Nine, as I needed to tell someone official and I was not sure how the constables would take it.

My duty done, I steeled myself to return to Meeting Island, as indeed I had an appointment to keep and folk would surely ask how it went. Not amazingly the bungalow was cordoned off with most of Spontoon's police force investigating, and after showing my face to be told no visitors were allowed, I turned round for Songmark. It was certainly a tense time of it, trying to read our textbooks on my own in the dorm while Helen and the rest were still having a fine time shopping on Casino Island.

My postcard must have found Mr. Sapohatan at home, wherever that maybe, for an hour after I returned to Songmark Miss Devinski called me down and with a steely expression announced I had a visitor while handing me a Pass only inscribed "until no longer required". It was encouraging that I was being given Passes rather than thrown out – but meeting Mr. Sapohatan is never a relaxing experience. He was waiting outside the gate exchanging pleasantries with Beryl and Adele, before greeting me politely and suggesting we take a walk along the beach. Song Soda has a soundproofed room, but strolling along the surf line is better yet.

I had been spending some of the time awaiting his visit with getting my thoughts and notes in order, and as we walked along towards the Southern tip of the island I gave my report as fully as I could. Mr. Sapohatan heard me out and we walked on in silence for a few minutes, till we reached the tip of the sand spit looking out towards South Island.

It is rare that we get told things by Mr. Sapohatan rather than reporting things to him, but today was an exception. He nodded neutrally and says my story fits exactly with what was recorded – it seems Harold had taken delivery of a new Dictaphone machine that week to evaluate its value in court, and when someone started to break the door in he swiftly set it to record out of sight in a half-open drawer. So we have every word of what happened, and yet (as I thought) not one word uttered by me.

Oh my. It seems I am rather more dangerous than I thought. The three Fenians had been identified by the Bosun of the tour boat they were travelling on as deckhands, and messrs. Malone, O'Malley and Flaherty were pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital – the bovine O'Malley apparently had a neck broken “as neatly as any hangman could have managed”, as Mr. Sapohatan put it. Mr. Sapohatan asked what I thought about that. I recalled Harold looking them in the eye unafraid to die if needed, and replied that had there been a dozen of them I would still have gone in there – and unlike in Hollywood film plots, it is jolly hard to knock a determined fur out without a real risk of making it permanent.

Mr. Sapohatan nodded neutrally, and mentioned that it was really a Police matter more than his own area. There will be a trial, but he noted that if the Police do not call me as a suspect he will not be the one to tell them. He notes that it being almost tourist season there were many folk who disliked the idea of a high-profile trial just when so many tourists are weighing up where is a nice place to go this Summer – but Judge Poynter insisted, being a stickler for proper legal process let the results be as they may. Secret Trials are the sort of thing furs complain about Vostok going in for, after all.

So – I said farewell and returned to Songmark feeling resolute rather than worried. Our Tutors did not roast Molly and me about the battle with the pirates last year, though indeed Miss Devinski had a lot to say about us getting in that situation in the first place (especially since Lars was involved, never mind that he was the one being attacked.) If Miss Devinski asks for a full report on my afternoon I will be bound to give her one – but if not, then “*if in doubt say now!*” as Prudence often says. Our Tutors have their own channels of information, and there are things they pointedly never ask our dorm. In fact the hole in what they ask us about is so clear-cut that I could think they know exactly what happens.

Maria and Molly were the first back and I thought hard about what to tell them. But I waited till Helen returned then suggested a shower to freshen up, and indeed my fur was somewhat scented of chlorine from five minutes in the indoor pool on Casino Island. Maria has more experience with such things – she says that in former years bath-houses were the place where sensitive information was exchanged, but nowadays with microphones the shower is a favourite spot – not that it would be a worry for us but Molly has mentioned spotting if furs are “wired for sound” far more easily if they are in the fur. We might not be but the building is another matter. I know that star-nosed mole in Crusader Dorm has reported rather more live wires in the walls of the Songmark buildings than the visible lighting circuits would suggest. Her species may look alarming but their snouts' electrical sense is very useful apart from making them walking lie-detectors.

Anyway, I told them how things had gone – the puzzling thing was I felt very little different afterwards. One hears of furs being sick to the stomach and the like – I wonder if this is something our Warrior Priestess training has helped me deal with? I can believe at least Helen and I am internally steeled for such things by now and Molly hardly needs it. She has speculated dreamily that if there is one thing better than letting tracer rounds rip at the target with something large and fully automatic, it is the instant of anticipation when one hears the breech block lock back and feel the potential of everything just ready to roll. Molly is very well-adjusted to what she does, which might itself be a bad idea.

I suppose now it is just a matter of waiting to see how things turn out and if I feel a heavy official paw on my collar. Molly says I was a fool to hand in the pass I got today when I returned from meeting Mr. Sapohatan, which was as near a blank cheque as makes no odds and could have been used indefinitely. Maria's comment was that Molly is never given such things as our Tutors well know how she would use them.

Back to our studies, trying to concentrate! Helen rarely talks much about her life before Songmark, but she has mentioned it was rather rough living in oil boom towns and mining towns while her Father waited for the phone to ring and tell him some fire-fighting was needed more than urgently. She mentioned a friend of her late Father was employed as a trouble-shooter for the oil companies, which was dirty work in more ways than one. This Mr. Harksby she rather liked, and says most of the time he was an easy-going gentleman until his duties demanded otherwise. Helen says it was “*like he kept all the rough stuff in a box – only took it out when he gotta use it, then he put it all away agin' and shut the lid.*”

This is possibly a very good way to handle such things.

Sunday May 2nd, 1937

A surprisingly relaxed morning – I had a good night's sleep, and we were untroubled by the heavy tread of police boots on the stairs at three in the morning come to drag me off and give me the third degree (which surprised Molly, not that she thinks the Spontoon police force are up to much.) Definitely the extra “lie-in” on a Sunday morning is appreciated; more so as we woke up with a leisurely ten minutes before breakfast and saw two of Red Dorm finishing off an late gate-guard shift. It had evidently poured down in the night, too. Of all the things we may miss when we leave here, losing our extra hour of asleep to late gate guard will not be one of them. Or gate guard at all, for that matter.

Maria was most sympathetic and pointed out that she only goes to Confession once per “incident” whereas I will be going over things with Mr. Sapohatan and Saimmi, plus possibly our Tutors and Jirry as well. Not that she has been as fanatical at attending Church as she was two years ago – indeed, it has been awhile. After breakfast we all headed out to South Island with fairly high spirits, noting the tourist cruise ship is still at its berth on Casino Island, though it was scheduled to leave last night. I imagine the local authorities are busy investigating for Evidence the effects of its three crew who will not need them any more – if the Police want to find me they are presumably in no hurry as they always know where to look.

Indeed, Saimmi seems to know everything that goes on, whether through Mr. Sapohatan or through her own abilities. She was waiting for me and Helen, but especially for me, as she said. Actually I think she takes the time to get to be with her family. Most High Priestesses since the resettling of Spontoon have been twice her age, and as they rarely marry (not that there is any law against it) she is probably rare in having parents and older siblings to keep in touch with. Certainly I recall Huakava said she was the last of her line, and we have heard her predecessor was about as old when taking up the post. We walked out to the shrine at the edge of the jungle, to have space and room to talk.

Saimmi had me talk through everything that happened, much as Mr. Sapohatan had done. She took awhile considering everything then nodded – Warrior Priestesses are meant to protect the innocent, and she had no hesitation on approving that. Definitely she approves of my dealing with three “outlanders” sent here to kill a Spontoonie! Though strictly speaking Harold is not a citizen, he has been here so long that everyone thinks of him as one. Except Harold himself who first came here as a staunch subject of Queen Victoria and in the finer ways he still is.

I went through one of the purification rituals Saimmi taught us weeks ago, as indeed Warrior Priestesses expect to need them. At least I held up well enough to do what I had to – approaching the start of an Adventuring career would have been a poor time to discover myself caving in with “lack of moral fibre” as so many did in the War. The ritual took over an hour, after which Saimmi carried on our education – our Tutors are not the only ones who have little enough time left to polish our educations.

That is another reason I have to get rid of the Allworthy title – if I am stuck looking after the estates, not only will Jirry be minus one bride, but Spontoon will be minus one Warrior Priestess - at least Helen is certain to return to Spontoon with or without me. Saffina is doing well, but if she will stay here or return to Ubangi-Chari is anyone’s guess. She is a Princess there, after all.

An excellent luncheon as ever, with Molly and Maria helping Mrs. H with the work. When one thinks of Molly cooking, the image that comes to mind is her spit-roasting something freshly killed on a bayonet over a camp fire. But she likes her food as much as the rest of us, and although I am the only one of my dorm who studied and liked Home Economics at school, we have all put aside any fears of “getting domesticated” in favour of learning to prepare a jolly good meal for ourselves and our friends. We have Mrs. H as a fine example, as even Helen admits there is nothing wrong with her lifestyle.

It cleared up considerably after luncheon, and we noticed for the first time that Summer is almost here! Certainly when the sun comes out the weather is warm enough for any tourist to happily sunbathe, though it is still rather unreliable. Molly noted that it would not be fun trotting round the dry sand beaches with our packs of wet sand today – which is a thought we are holding till tomorrow. “The evils of the day are sufficient unto themselves” as the saying goes, or as Helen puts it “don’t borrow trouble.” Certainly the weeds are springing up, and we helped pay for our lunch with an hour of work in the Hoele’toemi garden plot.

Working alongside Jirry was definitely a treat, although it would hardly make for dramatic Hollywood style action. He has certainly lost a few pounds, and as we worked he told me about the decidedly hard and risky trip with his Father and various other Spontoonies. They have been picking up supplies, from some surprising places – they called in at Vladivostok and various Vostok ports as well, which is rare for a single cargo ship to do. Generally any vessel whose customs stamp has one destination is not welcome at the other, what with fears of secret agents slipping in with the cargo. Spontoon being as neutral as anywhere in the Pacific, it is rather like an island Switzerland with a lot of trade routed through there that ends up in surprising destinations.

Something I did learn that presumably will not be featured in the Daily Elele, is that Jirry delivered components for a certain aircraft that he says I have seen two years before. I can hardly forget the amazingly manoeuvrable biplane fighters I found in the lava tube base on the Northern coast of Main Island! It is still embarrassing that I helped blow the base’s cover. I doubt they have another like it on Spontoon, and if they do, Euro governments knowing such places are built here will make them less secure as now everyone knows what to look for. Something one still reads in the Elele is the occasional fur loosely attached to some Embassy being found washed up evidently having gone cliff-scrambling or swimming without a guide. The Althing shake their heads sadly and officially remind outlander furs to always hire a qualified guide when exploring away from the tourist areas, and the Embassies just have to grit their collective teeth and wire home for a new “trade attaché” or whatever the official title may be for their agents.

It was rather a wrench to drag ourselves away, more so for me. I found my gaze dwelling on the raised area where there is room for another longhouse to be built. I have no ambition to be Lady of the Manor in Barrow-in-Furriness (the Lake District is the coldest and wettest part of the North of England, which is saying a lot) and responsible for the upkeep of some leaky manor-house that has probably not had a penny spent on it in my lifetime – when I could have a clean new thatched longhouse and agreeable company here. My ears went

right down and I had a cold sensation in the pit of my stomach imagining in ten years time Helen standing here pointing out to her striped cubs the bare patch where my longhouse was meant to be.

If I was the kind to worry about such things I would think that what Liberty Morgenstern calls the “*Aristo-Plutocratic Conspiracy*” had arranged everything behind my back. But I suppose that is just how Society keeps things moving smoothly – having found me as an acceptable Lady Allworthy everyone was keen to make my way easy. There is even a clause, I am told, where the title passes to “any and all acknowledged children” with absolutely no caveats about pedigree or anything! I have no idea whether it is unique or not, but it is dramatically unusual and shows just how much folk want me back in England.

Had things turned out otherwise after Macao I might have been thrown out of Songmark with a very non-pedigree mixed kitten from Mr. M’wede – but even that would not disqualify me or the child from the title, whatever people at home might think privately. As for “all acknowledged children” three years ago I would hardly have thought any could be unacknowledged – but one hears things about life far out on the Colonial frontier with girls of family as good as mine living out on farms and plantations with only natives around for hundreds of miles. It is rather unfair that none of their children get any sort of pedigree and are never sent back to Europe, but that is just the way Society works. No doubt it is a comfort to the colonial authorities that they will not be beating a flighty retreat back Home (and indeed, since the Great War there is about a ten percent shortfall of males in Europe – and not all the “surplus” girls would enjoy an evening here at the Double Lotus).

I think folk at home might have heard about Jerry, and wanted to be sure I could have no reason to be disqualified from a post they really want to be filled. They must want me very badly indeed. Then, Barrow-in-Furryness is what they call a strategic place, with shipyards that are booming again as the order books for naval vessels fill up, and like any garden it needs looking after to grow.

When we got back to the water-taxi slip we could see the big cruise ship heading out, delayed by less than a day and doubtless eager to get back on schedule once the Spontoon police had finished cross-examining the surviving crew. That is presumably that side of the investigation finished – as they say in the newspapers when they run detective serials, watch this space! I imagine any Siamese girls are being quizzed fairly carefully about their whereabouts. Hopefully Malou was with Nikki that afternoon for an alibi.

A frighteningly incongruous sight was awaiting us when we got back to Eastern Island, and yet most furs would have seen nothing strange. There was a pretty, demure and elegantly dressed young lady being helped out of a water taxi by a well-dressed and most handsome gent of almost her own rodent species. They could have posed for the front cover of Harpers’ magazine if they had a travel and tourism edition. As long as nobody recognises Beryl Parkesson and Piet van Hoogstraaten and knows the facts about that pair, the illusion would be complete. We have heard that Piet is always in top training, being captain of the local “Screaming Sculls” rowing team and probably high on the list of athletes to send representing Spontoon if anyone has started thinking about the next Olympics in Japan in 3 years time. Assuming nobody has “bumped him off” in the meantime as Molly puts it. Such an assassin would probably not live long with Beryl after him, assuming Beryl had not arranged it herself. Or even so – Molly has said that a professional assassin’s life is not a secure career, with employers keen to tidy up loose ends especially before payday.

Beryl really does look elegant in her summer dress, though certainly she can afford Rachorska designs. It is just how she got the money that makes one’s fur rise – at least “huntresses” such as Nuala Rachorska and Gilda are honest workers and law-abiding (plus tax-paying) Citizens here.

Back to Songmark, and more “cramming” for our exams! Although it was hard work of its kind, the Master’s Sailing Certificate was quite fun as it involves lots of fresh air and minutes at a time where one only needs to hold a course. There was plenty of textbook work to be sure, but it is made easier by having to instantly apply it – whenever I sail into an unfamiliar harbour, knowing which buoy marks the safe channel will be a definite comfort. And as to comfort – a ship’s berth may be basic but compared with the Songmark beds a hammock is luxury too!

Monday May 3rd, 1937

A damp day and one where it felt as if we got most of the rain on our fur. The whole morning was spent at the airfield, helping the mechanics there work on servicing various commercial aircraft. Airlines generally have their own maintenance staff for regular routes, but nobody is going to have a dedicated team waiting around here for one flight per day, which is what some routes fly this time of year. Working out on the open tarmac was hardly fun – it became a sort of mantra with us “at least it isn’t January.” And at least it is Spontoon rather than (say) Northern Vostok or worse still the Aleutians. But a Songmark girl needs to be able to work in whatever situation she finds herself!

At lunch we caught up with the newspapers, and the attack on Judge Poynter is all over the front page of the Elele (Native edition – not the one the tourists see.) The Police are “making enquiries” and the trial is set for Friday. Exactly how one tries dead assailants is probably something a lawyer could explain (I could ask Beryl who would probably know but I would probably regret it) although the other fur on trial is of course – me. Molly says I would be stupid to give myself up, at least before the trial finishes. Actually I was hardly contemplating it.

I just hope furs like Crusader Dorm do not get a scent of all this! They are fanatics about Justice rather than Law – and are fresh from a trip to Vostok where by repute they were feted as heroic furs having solved various crimes and exposed several plots making good use of their skills and outsiders' perspectives. Folk from outside a culture can sometimes spot things locals overlook as self-explanatory. Their local guide Svetlana has a formidable reputation, in that she got her Songmark bills paid by saving the Grand Duchess from an assassination attempt by two Reds. One she threw off a rooftop from four storeys up, and as for the other – she is a wolverine and they have one of the most formidable bites of any fur. One generally thinks of non-sentient animals biting throats out, let alone anyone who qualifies for education at an Aeronautical Boarding School for Young Ladies. At least I did not have to do that against the Judge's would-be assassins.

Back to Songmark to our workshop practicals. Certainly the islands get their money's worth out of us; we have a wide array of broken devices to have a look at, ranging from vacuum cleaners to radios. It might be a long way from aircraft in some ways (as Missy K grumbled), but switches are switches, likewise motors, bearings and the like. The fact they happen to be meant to sit in a kitchen rather than a fuselage is hardly important as long as we can fix them. A fur can be an awfully long way from an authorised repair shop here in the Pacific!

We even got to deliver our fixed items back to their various owners, which was a treat to get out in the fresh air again after spending the afternoon with the stink of burned insulation and machine oil in our snouts. Like most people I headed out to Casino Island carrying the repaired radio (a blown valve replaced) as it probably has most of the Euro machinery in the Spontoon group except for Moon Island where the military maintain their own equipment. Happily the rain held off long enough for me to get to the address near the High School as water and electrics hardly mix. Any fur on Main Island outside the larger villages would need a very long extension lead to connect to the nearest power socket!

Another treat I witnessed was the sight of a Native wedding party, heading cheerfully down from Luakinakina Park where various open-air ceremonies take place. Not everything happens on Sacred Island, after all. It was a fine sight – even more so when I recognised the happy couple. The groom is a field-mouse I have seen in the village by the delta where the Sacred Lake River comes out, and indeed I have seen the bride before as well. Last time she was on the beach being admired by several locals who appreciated her fine figure – and indeed it looks as if there will be both a marriage and a birth celebrated in that Spontoonie household hardly a month apart. One hopes the child matches the happy couples' species, though around here furs care less about that than "euros" do – even those who could have a pedigree rarely have the paperwork to prove it. Instead of a white dress the blushing bride wore a flower lei and fully oiled fur now with various markings combed in that I found myself looking at rather wistfully. Helen at least will be looking similar as a bride in July, though only as to the markings – presumably her shape will match by Winter Solstice.

It was certainly with a lot to think about, that I returned to Songmark! No police waiting outside the gatehouse for me either – so far so good. We discovered at teatime that no good deed ever goes unpunished, when our hopes were briefly raised at the sight of more of those Rain Coast experimental rations. They had taken our advice and dropped the rather nauseating cheese and potato "sea pie" from their can-a-day project but in "reward" for our reviewing Songmark was given the remaining case of unwanted Sea Pie sample tins! With that sort of reward one hardly needs punishment. Presumably they had heard we are almost out of 1918 vintage Maconochie and wanted to give us a "like for like" replacement emergency ration that nobody is likely to tuck into except in direst emergency. At least we could hand the cans over to the junior years and remind them they wanted to sample the rations last time – though they really wanted the salmon and the chilli.

A quiet evening with our books "cramming" hard. At least we could take a long break for a shower; one learns to make the most of the smallest luxuries here, like finding claw-holds on a rock face. It all gets us further forward, however small the distance. I described the Native wedding – at least, the mouse girl is now a native and her offspring will be legally born one. Molly says she met her last week on the beach while I was training with Malou, along with a lepine girl who seemed to be in much the same case.

It was rather strange, thinking about that. Molly pointed out that whatever happens I am stuck as Lady Allworthy no matter who I marry. Jirry can never be Lord Allworthy, neither will any other male as the title descends entirely through me (just as Queen Victoria married Prince Albert, but had he survived her he would never have been King Albert). She joked that I would be a very popular girl as my kittens will be heirs and heiresses no matter whose else they are, and whether I ever get married or not! Molly has the oddest ideas at times. Most times, to be honest.

Wednesday May 5th, 1937

What a day. Two days of it exactly – we have been out in the Kanim Islands helping the Spontoon Ministry of Works install telephones. The Kanims are generally listed as part of the Spontoon Independencies, and local furs travel between them without passports or papers – but they are not really a tourist area, in terms of hotels and entertainments. Which made it surprising that just as on Spontoon's South and Main Islands the telephone cables are carefully buried a yard deep in the coral rock, avoiding lines of 20th century telephone poles spoiling the view. Actually, we discovered that was not the reason, as one of the workers from the Ministry recounted tales of a major storm 8 years ago that blew half the lines down (the Kanims are generally flattish with little shelter from the elements. Except germanium and hafnium, as Molly says. Molly is getting very odd.) Although

it costs more in terms of labour to put the lines underground, they are not as vulnerable there. Besides, on Spontoon every piece of structural timber comes from places like Vostok or Tillamook, and foreign exchange can be better spent elsewhere.

Anyway, it was a lot of hard work – although we were not digging the ditches, which had already been done as an “off-season” Public Works job by locals who are now heading out to shake grass skirts on Casino Island for the summer. We had to handle the electricians, hunting down “shorts” in the cable and generally work out how to get the signals flowing. Two days of serious work, and a few of us were very grateful the lines only use fifty volts as we found out where some of the electrical “shorts” were the hard way.

There were compensations though; two days of excellent weather and our Tutors decidedly in the background. In fact only Miss Blande was there to loosely keep an eye on us, having told us the Clerk of Works would test the system afterwards and our marks would be based on his report. I doubt she was at a loose end though, as she vanished off with a gentleman friend we have met before, a canine gentleman of Great Dane type.

I must say, the islanders made us very welcome. There was plenty of room in the village longhouses as some of them had already vanished off to Spontoon for the tourist season, and the ones remaining were happy to see a fresh snout who was not a camera-snapping tourist obsessed with how quaint everything was. Quite an excellent luau, with the traditional fire-pit cooking baked fish (not pastefish either!) Most of us joined the dancing, and quite a lot of palm wine went down much appreciated. Unlike most week-days at Songmark we could sample it as we felt reasonably safe from being roused at two in the morning for an emergency fire drill or being told we were heading out on Dawn Patrol in our Tiger Moths.

So, two fine days working in the sunshine and getting three villages wired for telephones. The central exchange was jolly interesting, being a very solid concrete structure sunk deep into the ground on the highest point of the island. One could walk ten paces away from it and not know it was there, when the trenches carrying the cables were filled in and grassed over. It is rather like the one we have seen on South Island. “Typhoon proofing” is one thing, but any typhoon that needs three feet of heavily reinforced concrete to resist against it will leave nobody around to need a telephone.

Of course, any similarity between that and the hardened telephone exchanges furs are installing around the Maginot Line and other such places is entirely coincidental. Spontoon is a luscious peach of an island, as all the tourist brochures promise. And anyone biting hard into a peach without knowing about the stone inside is likely to break their teeth on it.

Thursday May 6th, 1937

We are certainly getting around the islands this week! Before the tourists arrive en masse, the film studios are getting busy with making the most of the good weather. There were two studios asking for help, one shooting a standard Jungle Adventure on South Island, a director I have never heard of, and one that most of us volunteered to work with. The other filming on Main Island is Miss Margot Melson, a lepine lady whom I have met before and is what they call well-known for being famous.

Naturally Prudence’s dorm jumped at the chance, having appeared as extras in two of her films already and wishing she could have arrived at Easter when they would have volunteered for this one. I tagged along myself, as did Helen and Maria who are always puzzled at such things. Naturally Molly would run a mile to avoid it.

The Spontoon Islands have been the backdrop for a few other films than the obvious South Seas adventures, over the years. They have been the Pirates’ Caribbean, the Mayan jungles and various science-fiction backdrops as required. I think the sight of half a dozen Roman Legionaries might actually be new, though. Miss Melson explained the plot has an Amazon heroine who is captured from her remote island past the fringe of their Empire and becomes a lady Gladiator (would that be “Gladiatrix”?) before escaping.

The star is Miss Hermanita, a suitably exotic panther girl of about our age who was throwing herself into her role with skill and energy. It is fortunate that the armour the Roman soldiers are wearing is mild steel and industrial padding rather than standard “properties department” painted celluloid, as she was laying into them full force with a war-club! If the Directors’ films were not all automatically blacklisted by the Hays Office they should certainly win awards for acting, as anyone could see Miss Hermanita was giving her all to avoid capture (and the extras had a bonus scheme generously awarding the one who subdued her, which should help pay for the genuine bruises they took in the process despite the armour. Melson Productions stress realistic reactions and improvisation rather than slavishly sticking to a script.) Miss Hermanita’s Amazon costume is quite cool for the climate, and unlike what one hears of the historical Amazons she is still ... fully equipped. Very much so, in fact.

Definitely, the Spontoon filming industry does things differently. No wonder Miss Melson keeps coming back here, apart from the warm reception she gets. As Ada says, it would not go down well in Peoria, but she has no intention of going there. We were helping shift the equipment from the beach-side camp to the tourist “temple” near the volcano that has played quite a few film roles over the years. Naturally, it is completely fraudulent and about as genuine as the sheet-metal spacecraft from last year’s film “Hula warriors of Venus” we saw being cut up for scrap at Superior Engineering last month. Although the structure looks nothing like a

classical Roman temple, it is explained as being that of one of the exotic cults they adopted, as some furs still worship the Magna Mater in the remoter woods of Barsetshire.

Actually one can learn quite a bit about filming from watching how a true professional goes about it. Or at least we think so, but this being Songmark we are likely to find out just how wrong we are, if our Tutors hand us a camera tomorrow! Watching an expert at work always makes things look easy.

Much to Prudence's disappointment, we could not stay for the after-filming socialising. Miss Melson's parties are famous, as she certainly believes in "work hard play hard" – we were all invited but our Tutors declined on our behalf. Back to the grindstone, working on our navigation exercises. Carmen and Belle had their ears and tails really drooping, thinking of what they might be doing instead. Still, they have the weekend to look forward to for that; at least in our final term our Tutors spare us gratuitous weekend work.

Maria has been looking in the Songmark library at the public journals former third-years left behind them. Miss Devinski tries hard to be unpredictable in terms of the challenges she throws at us, so studying what our predecessors did in their final terms will not be a certain guide to what is still ahead of us. But no year yet has been thrown anything as physical as our Aleutians trip, or the endurance test of our helping the Spontoon Militia for four days solid last Spring with about six hours sleep. Possibly such things take too much time to recover from, and time is precious. Besides, we have already done that and been marked on it, for good or ill.

It is getting decidedly warm now, and every Songmark dorm building has all its windows wide open to catch the evening breeze. Molly claims she can smell the chilli cooking at Mahanish's, which is probably wishful thinking as it is half a mile and more away – though the wind is in the right direction and she certainly has the best scenting ability of any of us. Pointing out that she can dine there for luncheon and teatime Saturday and Sunday did not cheer her up – she has a large and indigestible textbook to cope with right now.

Friday May 7th, 1937

Another scorching day, the hottest yet! But it was on with the full Songmark formal outfit including the blazer as Miss Devinski sends me off to Meeting Island to attend the court hearing. Other folk were allowed to go if they wanted, but in the end only Beryl and Irma joined me. Beryl looks as sweet and demure a Young Lady as anyone might want on the cover of the Songmark Prospectus, which just shows that appearances are deceptive. Mind you, I suppose I can hardly complain as I am still hoping my disguise as Kim-Anh was wholly deceptive.

We had to wait awhile for the court to open the public gallery, as presumably they had things inside to argue over. Beryl spent the time chuckling over "*Fifty great Untrue tales of the air*", a paperback she picked up at the kiosk on Eastern Island. The kiosk is stocked for the season with various Pacific Island tales for the tourists, some of which are equally bogus and less honest about telling you so.

Not surprisingly the court was packed out with quite an angry crowd. Judge Poynter is something of a national fixture here, and even though he has almost wholly retired everyone knows him as a fair and honest fur, and their grandparents did as well. Burning down the Casino would hardly enrage the locals more than having him assassinated especially by three furs he never met before let alone prosecuted. It was rather a surprise to see him in the witness stand rather than behind the bench, but of course he can hardly try his own case and one of his colleagues, an avian gentleman was presiding in the court. Harold was very neatly dressed in a tropical weave tweed suit, and was the very image of a fine old country gentleman.

The proceedings started off with Harold's testimony; simple enough as basically he was at home when the door was kicked in. The next "witness" was the Dictaphone, the recording of which was amplified and played on the speakers in the court. Beryl whispered that it is a common fault of criminals to gloat and explain their foolproof plans to show their cleverness, even though it is nothing of the kind. In the circumstances I could only be grateful – otherwise I would have been just too late.

The prosecution had managed to trace the three intruders' movements since arriving on Spontoon and going on shore leave; they had bought the machetes in Eriksson's Outdoors on Casino Island, along with climbing rope and assorted small clothing including gloves plus a waterproof tarpaulin presumably for afterwards. Carrying blood-dripping machetes around the streets is likely to cause comment, this not being Krupmark. Where the leader's revolver came from was unknown, and probably he had it with him on the ship.

Nobody had any clear idea of how they identified and tracked down Judge Harold Poynter. True, there was that article awhile ago in the newspaper about him, but that did not list his address or even which island of the group he lived on. Neither had anyone made enquiries at the Casino Island Post Office or other places a stranger might have found it out from. Unless it was sheer chance, it would have needed a local contact to know that Harold spends Saturday afternoons at home and that his housekeeper takes the weekend off. I thought about that big grey wolfhound I had seen watching the house, and indeed I had never seen him as a local before. Wolfhounds are large and distinctive, and there are not many who are Native Spontoonies.

I would not liked to have had the job of defence counsel when the court judged the Dictaphone recording as "admissible evidence" and the prosecution produced signed testimony from the tour ship's Captain and Bosun that they had heard it played and the voices on it really were the deckhands Malone, O'Malley and Flaherty they had identified later in the morgue. Fortunately for the court they had wanted Harold to know exactly why he was going to die, and boasted about having done the same to a District Commissioner in Rangoon and a mission doctor in Trincomalee, Ceylon. Those cases are naturally outside Spontoon's jurisdiction, but the

court will be sending the confessions to the relevant authorities to see if they can clear the cases up. As the prosecution pointed out, as long as they did not get greedy and only attacked at a small fraction of their landfalls, they were well-placed for a “getaway” every time. If I had not been there, the next person in that house might well have been Harold’s housekeeper first thing Monday morning, by which time the tour ship would have been half-way to Tillamook and nobody even counting who had been ashore. Ships’ crews typically do not have passports and do not go through Customs or Immigration like the regular tourists and travellers.

Once the recording had played out and the Defence council retreated with “no further questions” it was my turn – at least, Harold’s description of Kim-Anh’s arrival and the rather hectic forty seconds afterwards. Actually what Harold described was a “slightly built but agile feline girl, unknown to me” and indeed he did spot Kim-Anh’s Siamese fur markings as I left the dim curtained room and went out into the better lit corridor. It was a good thing I had said nothing, as Harold has a reputation for hating anything in the way of a cover-up and would be sure to have identified my voice and tell the court whose it was.

The rest of the evidence was medical; a distinguished Skunk gentleman we have seen at the hospital, describing just what I had done to three furs with a broom handle and a gasogene. One broken neck (the bull), one simply fractured skull (that was the stoat) and one canine whose skull was broken in such a way that when he saw the X-ray the doctor just stopped counting at two dozen fragments. That gasogene was heavy, built like a two gallon champagne bottle and I put everything I had into the swing.

If anything I only felt embarrassed – as the prosecution and defence quibbled over whether it was physically possible for one slight feline as described to have done all that against three armed furs without even taking a scratch or shedding fur as evidence. It seems it is not unprecedented by all accounts – but most of the cases on record have involved specially trained Burmese Dacoits, Peshwari Thuggee or other furs brought up from birth in “fiendish Oriental fighting arts” and trained in drug-boosted or religious frenzy as the prosecutor put it. The fact that Harold thought he saw a Siamese girl, and that the trio’s previous target had been in Rangoon, was made much of. Besides, folk who checked the Dictaphone recording carefully spotted there were only two people in the room breathing at the end, Harold and just one other.

The Jury was out for hardly ten minutes before coming in with a unanimous verdict – “*justified furricide by fursons unknown*”. The court found this a very popular verdict, and I cheered along with the rest. That lets me off the hook, at least with the police. What our Tutors will think about it I hardly know, but I doubt it will really reflect badly on Songmark with the few folk who know the facts.

As we left I could hear various reporters canvassing the public for their opinions. The best idea I heard was that some loyal Burmese friend of the murdered Rangoon Commissioner, possibly a reformed dacoit, had tracked his killers down and by coincidence found them just in time to inflict “fiendish Oriental vengeance”. That puts the ball a long way down the court from Miss Bourne-Phipps of Bassetshire! We have not enlisted any Burmese Dacoits in class as far as I know, but I doubt our Tutors would reject them for that reason. Songmark accepted Beryl from Saint T’s and Svetlana from Vostok, after all.

Harold was pretty much mobbed by well-wishers outside the court afterwards but I managed to confirm meeting him tomorrow, to carry on where we were discussing my Allworthy problem. In fact, I might do rather more than that.

Although our Passes could have kept us out all day had the trial lasted that long, not even Beryl suggested doing anything but heading straight back although we did stop at the Sunset Grill by the water-taxi slips on the way to Songmark for a rather superior lunch. Chicken omelette with local herbs was a wonderful treat, and not something the Songmark cooks do. We would have lunched on Meeting Island had the timing been otherwise, and our Tutors would have been happy enough with that.

Beryl was musing about there being a reward out for any evidence leading to further convictions in the Poynter case. I was decidedly glad to have been found innocent (in absence) of any crime. That wolfhound is the one obvious loose end to be tidied, and indeed I mentioned him to Mr. Sapohatan who may be passing it to the Police. Still, there was something familiar about him. I am sure I have seen a picture of him or someone very like him recently, but we read a lot of newspapers in a month and it could have been anywhere. One thing I do not have time to do is sit down for a day or two in what Maria calls the newspaper “morgue” of back issues at the Spontoon Mirror and the Daily Elele scanning for what might or might not be there.

Just in case our Tutors thought we had had a too-relaxing morning in the peanut gallery of the court, they thoughtfully laid on an afternoon’s hard exercise swimming for the whole year. Certainly it was the right day for a swim and not one for running round the sand dunes with packs on – in fact it was very welcome to get out of the full dress outfit with blazer and into our bathing suits. It is a rare occasion that we actually do something tourists would do, in the conditions they would like to do it. Three hours in the water was hard work as ever but nobody was passing out with heat exhaustion. We have read that some of the Ave Argentum have been literally run till they drop, then thrown out for “failure of resolve.”

Back to Songmark to wash the salt out of our fur and a very welcome meal. It seems the first potatoes of the year are in season on Main Island (grown on the flanks of Mount Kiribatori) and although they generally all go to the hotel and tourist trade that has not quite taken off yet. So we get an exotic luxury meal – mashed potatoes! At least it is a luxury compared to poi, and as for exotic – it is the first time the cooks have served it here this year. Which just goes to show how one fur’s exotic is another’s boringly mundane product. Molly was

speculating whether if Euros have drinks like Malibu and Copa Cabanas, Spontoonies will someday drink Pittsburghs or Toledos.

Back to our dorms, where I took the chance to explain how the day in court went. It will be in tomorrow's editions of the Daily Elele, but probably only in the Spontoonie language edition. I am not sure what the Tourist Board would like the least, publicising that the islands have international assassins visiting their shores or that there is a local sufficiency of vengeful Burmese Dacoits to deal with them!

Saturday May 8th, 1937

Another bright day, though with far more of a breeze which made everything far more pleasant. As expected, the place was buzzing at breakfast time with seniors translating the local; editions of the Elele into English for the junior years. Most third-years are fairly fluent by now, though Madeleine X only knows (or at least uses) the verbs in the declamatory mode. A regular attempted murder foiled by the Police is one thing, but the heroine of the piece being what the pulps call an "International Fur of Mystery" who has wholly evaded police searches really got tongues and tails wagging. My ears were burning. I can imagine any Burmese Dacoit girls encountered on boats heading away from Spontoon getting spontaneous ovations and always wondering why.

One result is – just the opposite of what I had hoped, Kim-Anh will not be able to get much fresh air on her fur for the rest of term while everyone is waiting to interview her as soon as she comes out of hiding. Her identity would hardly hold up to police scrutiny, after all. So no more fur-dyed trips to Malou on Saturdays – and anyway I am not sure I could face Malou for awhile. How could I possibly make such a mistake as to her "husband"? Even if we had never met till last week, anyone who lives in a house would leave substantial scent behind them – and though I have not got the best scent ability in the year, I can definitely recognise male musk. With equines I have had ... practical experience after all, so it is not as if he was some exotic unfamiliar species.

Kim-Anh's silk dress is going to take some cleaning as well, though I have removed the obvious bloodstains off it. That is something they rarely tell you about in genteel police dramas, though some of the handy tips and tricks column from Molly's Criminal World magazine have proven very effective. It is some comfort that of all their readers there is at least one who is putting the tips to honest use. The standard Songmark outfit is a mid-brown khaki which blends in well enough with such stains, as indeed after encountering the thorn bushes of Main Island the first-years find out.

Second week of May already in our final term! In two months it will all be over! That is a frightening thought. After a busy hour clothes shopping we made the most of our morning on Casino Island as ever, with the usual dance classes in the streaming sunshine. Everyone was working hard, with the "off-island" Natives about to start doing this for the paying public any time now, and many of the Spontoonies about to vanish into respectable Euro outfits as cooks, bell-hops and suchlike for the summer. There is a rather hollow feeling in one's stomach thinking of the Hoopy Jaloopy festival at the end of the tourist season when those costumes will go back into storage – and though we all have hopes and plans, nobody knows where they will be by then.

Still, when one is determined to enjoy oneself it generally works. My dorm and Jasbir's demonstrated a synchronised hula that Mrs. Motorabhe declared she would display on the stage of the Coconut Shell for the paying public against any competition the islands could provide. Great praise indeed. And hard work as ever – as we get fitter we push our limits, finishing up just as tired as any first-year though for more reward. Definitely when we ran across the road to the sea to cool off, there must have been a scent-trail of musk trailing the class that no Parisian perfume factory could (or would be allowed to) match! It was interesting to watch the expressions of the dozen or so tourists busy with their cameras when the musk reached them, even though we were all out in the open air. Film actors would be counted skilled if they could make their ears and tails go rigid quite like that.

The Missing Coconut serves an excellent luncheon, and not at tourist prices either. Coconut is not missing from its menu, and a very fine crab and coconut salad proved most refreshing. Then it was time to put the new outfit on – not indeed a Rachorska design (those are commissioned and if I want one to take to Europe I had best get ordering it now) but a modern and elegant dress in rayon that certainly looks very like silk. It included everything from foundation garments outward, all in rayon and very sheer.

It made rather a change from the past few Saturdays dressed as Kim-Anh – in fact the dress was the least part of it, and the fur dye not very much more. Malou trained me to walk and move as someone different, which is a much harder thing. My ears went up as I realised this might be my first outing as Lady Allworthy since Macao – this Summer I will be making first impressions and should start to think about what she will wear. Three years of Songmark are I suppose rather like three years in the army; one almost forgets what "civilian" clothes are like. Anyway, I drew no more than average attention in the street, being dressed much like a well-to-do tourist of the independent traveller type. For a second my tail drooped imagining the outfit if Mr. Sapohatan needed us to blend in with the other end of the tourist scale, the ones who frequent the amusement park and "Pirate Cove". Horn-rim sunglasses, a Hawaiian shirt that a shipwreck survivor could attract rescuers with from miles away and probably a straw hat with a Spontoonie language inscription that uniquely its wearer could actually read. What it might say, is another matter.

By the time I had stopped shuddering at that image I was at the ferry slip for Meeting Island, and carefully choosing a covered water taxi that would keep the salt water off the dress. In my Songmark outfit I

would be happily sitting in the bows getting cooled by the spray, but it is like comparing an enamel mug with a crystal glass champagne flute. One is designed to keep working after hard knocks and the other is decidedly not. Still, at least it was a nice day to use the parasol that matches the rest of the outfit, being as sunny as one would wish. Opening up the parasol, I thought rather of Beryl's customised version that has two pounds of chain concealed in the handle. Three years ago I would have either laughed or been shocked at the idea, but remembering last week I have a sneaking suspicion she might have the right idea. Gentlemen in Society are known to carry sword-sticks, after all.

When I got to Meeting Island I noticed there is a constable on duty at the end of the street Judge Poynter lives on; rather a case of closing the stable door too late but I suppose the Interior Ministry have to be seen to react somehow. At any rate, although it was one of the constables I saw responding last week, he did not recognise me and a minute later I was knocking at Harold's door. He has a new broom in the yard, not surprisingly.

Harold was almost at the door when I arrived, having evidently been awaiting me, and greeted me most courteously as ever. I must say, the locals have been busy. The front room was nicely redecorated with a new carpet, and everything sparkling clean. I missed the gasogene, which is not something easily replaceable; antique shops might have one but there are none around here unless the tourist trade in freshly carved "ancient" tikis and war-clubs counts. Still, it perished in a worthy cause unlike the canine I hit with it.

Having been in the court I could be expected to know all the details of last week, so could talk about it without much fear of giving myself away. Harold made light of the experience and pointed out a judge made enemies in forty years and learns not to lose any sleep about that. It was a very peaceful scene this week, with tea and scones awaiting me as we relaxed on the old but nicely polished leather settee.

As to my problems with the Allworthy inheritance, Harold sadly told me that all attempts at finding any more suitable candidates had failed. Some of the distant relatives have been tracked down; the ones that are not confirmed dead are in prison or lunatic asylums. A fine family to marry into! The only consolation is that I can hardly do any worse. The exception is one who vanished into China six years ago now – it is a turbulent place and he is not expected to be seen again. Only after seven years will he be proclaimed as presumed dead, but I can hardly raise my hopes at a last-minute return from some Tibetan monastery or whatever having heard news of the search from a twentieth-hand copy of the Times. Stranger things have happened but the bookmakers rarely lose money on them.

As we finished off the tea I noticed Harold's nose twitching, and my ears blushed somewhat. Of course I had been working flat-out all morning, and even after a swim and shower my body is pumping out a lot of fresh musk and would be for at least another hour no matter what I do. Indoors it does tend to build up, and the more one thinks about it the more it happens. I found myself remembering last week, seeing Harold standing like a rock unafraid in the face of his enemies, and noticed my scent was if anything increasing at the thought.

Harold rather apologised that he could do very little for me with my inheritance problem – I reassured him that if it could be done he would have been the one to help me. He has even heard from Mrs. Hoele'toemi, who has worried that I will end up leaving the islands and her family. Of course Mrs. H was the one who first told me about Harold and his history, as indeed he has been serving here all her life and oddly enough has more Spontoon experience than she has. It is a stirring story of honourable devotion to duty, but rather a lonely one.

I had noticed that I was suddenly no longer at the far end of the settee, but right next to Harold though I really have no recollection of moving there. He asked politely if there was anything further he could help me with – and though it might be rather unladylike, I told him exactly what.

No doubt the constable on the street has been keeping an eye on the house, and he would be reassured to spot that it was Harold this time who drew the curtains and that all was well. Indeed, all was extremely well.

Oh my. I had not expected Harold to be as well-preserved as he looks. But I was wrong, and very happily so. The only difficulties were those of his species, and after becoming Mrs. Allworthy that was rather less than it would have been. In fact it was easier than the other way round had I been the canine and he the feline – there are some aspects of feline males that grate on more than the sensibilities of any girl not made to match.

It was a most memorable afternoon for both of us; happily this time of month I should have no worries about it being memorable in the longer term. Not that Mrs. Oelabe would probably throw me out for that now, whatever else the Tutors do about my marks. Alas, some parts of my brand new outfit were ruined, though it was all in a good cause. The antimacassars on the chairs will never be the same again either, as one tends to forget oneself with the claws at times.

Harold was the perfect gentleman, and asked me immediately if I wished to marry him after what we had done. I declined as gently as I could – though I am not Tailfast I still hope to be married to Jerry on South Island one way or another. I was only glad to have done something for Harold who has been to such trouble on my behalf, with no thought of any reward. Native girls have a more flexible attitude to such things than Euros, providing they are not Tailfast. The chance would be a fine thing.

Actually, Harold said there was one ... feature of me that he was surprised and not a little shocked by. I still keep my fur trimmed back to the skin in one place, as does Molly – in her case it is a souvenir or rather a reminder of her being captured that first time. Harold has battled slavery in the Pacific area all his career and read many confidential police and medical reports from elsewhere, and says it is something done traditionally by Oriental slavers to identify captives in a way they cannot remove, and without doing them any expensive

damage. Seeing such a feature on Lady Allworthy would indeed be a shock! I explained where the idea had come from, and admitted I had got used to the idea despite the constant maintenance needed. To be honest it seems so long ago now that I had stopped thinking about it one way or the other. At least nobody has found it off-putting. I recall indeed one occasion with Molly and Lars, when he jokingly pronounced us a matching set.

An hour later the curtains were open again and if the Constable had looked in he would have seen a serene Lady Allworthy and perfectly well-dressed Judge Poynter refreshing themselves with more tea. Catching my reflection in the old mahogany-framed mirror, I looked hard but with all my training could not detect any trace. After all, I might walk past Father Dominicus and his whole school on the way back.

It was an odd kind of thrill leaving the house remembering the same time last week and the rather different circumstances. I had been half expecting Harold to have spotted me as Kim-Anh when he saw me again in the same place, but if he did he was diplomatic enough not to mention it. After all, Kim-Anh was found not guilty of anything and departed without a stain on her character (I wish I could say the same for her silk dress. It was a good thing it was patterned red to start with.)

By four o'clock I was back on Casino Island, where the place was very busy. From what I heard, not one but two of the larger tour-boats are already on the way having sailed from Hawaii last night. Tourist Season is about to start in earnest when they arrive and the Spontoonies are moving into high gear. Anyone who is not in the Tourist trade is busily making the most of a final weekend before the flood of camera-snapping and gum-chewing "Honoured guests" start waddling around the beaches declaring how quaint it all is. I must confess, if I ever do get the chance to settle on Spontoon, ideally Summer will find me somewhere the tour-boat crowds will not. Sacred Island is the best bet, and if I qualify as a Warrior Priestess I can go there.

If the clothes shop were surprised I was back so soon for certain replacement items, they raised not an eyebrow or whisker about it. It is not just her aircraft that a prudent girl makes sure she has sufficient replacement parts in stock for, after all. Just to be on the safe side I bought extras. After all, I plan on being back on Meeting Island next week.

Back to Songmark, carrying the news of the full Tourist Season on its way rather earlier than last year. I shared a water taxi with Eva Schiller, who is heading back to Germany for the holidays. I wished her a Happy Birthday, which she appreciated. She has had things today she appreciated less; it seems I am not the only one who receives embarrassing gifts although Eva's is not as hard to pass on as Barrow-in-Furryness. At breakfast time both Liberty Morgenstern and Beryl proved unexpectedly generous. Liberty gave her most predacious smile and handed over a rare second-edition of "*Das Kapital*" by Karl Marx in the original German, and Beryl presented a copy of "*Learn to speak Yiddish in twenty days!*" while under our Tutors' gaze Eva had to practice looking suitably grateful. I doubt she will be taking her presents back home. As she pointed out, in German the word "gift" actually means "poison."

Not to be out-done, when I mentioned my dorm have been invited back to Italy by Maria, Eva invited us to Germany where her own Uncle's name has much weight. It appears he is well-known in political circles and not just in Antarctic circles. I am not sure if we will take up that invitation, but it is always useful to have options. Germany might be on the route to Italy as I have been thinking about my school chum Mabel in Switzerland whom it would be super to see again. Unfortunately, just as now would be the best time to make such travel arrangements it is quite impossible with the Songmark final tests and exams taking up all our time and energy. If we only start making arrangements the day after graduation, the airmail letters to arrange visits in Europe might be only flying out on the same aircraft we are.

Thinking of old school chums, there was a letter from dear Gwendolyn, only the second she has written to me. Just in time, considering the uncertainties of our next few months. She is still working as a nurse in a jungle Mission far out in the Even Newer Hebrides, and has much to say. She is still scandalised by the Natives and their customs, even after two years. One hears that the famous Adventuress Laura Shieling came from that part of the world forty years ago, being orphaned by fever and brought up in the jungle learning the traditions of the Trobriand Islanders before her return to "Civilisation" where she swiftly found a world of drawing-rooms and vicarage garden parties was not to her taste. She is an acknowledged inspiration to Songmark, though Miss Devinski has not recommended us to copy her to the extent of carrying guncotton charges in the bustle of our skirts (even if fickle fashion ever brings bustles back again. Stranger things have happened.)

I was surprised to see Florence Farmington back already, and indeed she has run out of Passes for meeting her friend on Casino Island. I am not amazed – it seems Miss Devinski issued them for Educational needs, and I would have thought Gilda would by now have demonstrated everything Florence needs to know. In fact, Florence says our Tutor has indicated that it would be cheaper to marry Gilda and have done with it. Not what Florence had in mind, at least I doubt it. The whole idea was that Florence was going to return to her boyfriend in America afterwards, without leaving any broken hearts behind as she might if she had joined the rest of her dorm at the Double Lotus. I hope the broken heart involved is not hers, as I would hardly thought of Gilda as the sort of bride to write home about despite her profession being legal here.

Back to our dorm to discover Molly, Maria and Helen have had a lively afternoon without me. There was an Embassy function Maria was invited to; she is invited to many but rarely has the time or inclination to attend. Today she went along, mostly to get up to speed with what is happening outside the Nimitz Sea area. Though I have never been to one of the Embassy functions I have heard a lot about them – an interesting clash of politics and personalities, rather like the rest of the social whirl actually but with more chance of armies and assassins

being called for the morning after. Helen and Molly might not have the social training to rub by with the diplomatic corps, but they are jolly good backup for Maria.

It seems today the backup was almost needed. Last time Helen used the skills Saimmi has taught us on a Mr. Pettachi, the bovine gentleman who has been taking such an interest in Maria. Of course foreign Embassies are hotbeds of political ambition with highly placed and unscrupulous furs keen on pulling down their rivals, and Maria is recognised here as something of a secret weapon for Il Puce. Back in Italy by all accounts she has been almost forgotten, being three years away from Rome. Before her Uncle came to power, that time would have seen the rise and fall of ten or a dozen Italian governments! None of them would have got anything done, Maria says, let alone paving the way to the ideal of the triumphant Third Rome (Herr Hitler pinched the idea for his Reich, as he pinched many of Il Puce's ideas). The Embassy here have been following Maria's progress though, and spotted her potential threat to them if and when she returns.

Having Helen on the job at an Embassy is something most diplomats are not expecting. She says there is an unwritten rule against star-nosed moles becoming career diplomats, but a Warrior Priestess is less conspicuous and in a different way equally revealing. This Signor Pettachi had evidently wanted Maria for himself as a sort of married sporting trophy, but has realised she has become far too powerful and confident for that. Maria noticed his ambitions years ago and was more amused than anything, but now she is less amused. Being already something of a Diplomat she has not yet been persuaded by Molly's suggestions of which of his bones to break although she has kept her options open on that score.

Still, it hardly seems he will get the chance now as indeed Maria will be elsewhere fairly soon. As will we all. I have written off to Father telling him to expect us in July, details to follow, as a party of at least four. Father is on a wandering commission on the South Coast helping fill the gaps in the sound-mirror array that keeps an ear on what the French Air Force may be doing. They are our allies indeed, but are much troubled with Reds in the form of their "*Front Populaire*" and are a nation always prone to revolutions and Monsieur Blum's government is somewhat aligned with the Reds as it is. Military engineering projects cannot go up overnight, yet friendly Governments can go down much faster.

For a change, no poi for a weekend evening meal as new potatoes are still in season until the tour boats get here. We have watched the transport aircraft arriving with chilled cargoes of prime meats for the hotel cold storage rooms, as certainly the menu at the tourist hotels is as "Euro" as any tourist could wish. Madeleine X has never got used to our locally sourced diet, and complains that Father Dominicus' school has never yet served poi. Which is odd, as they are into doing penance and a mostly poi diet would be a severe yet not unhealthy one for most European girls.

Sunday May 9th, 1937

Another scorching day, and one where we were very grateful not to be double-timing it across the sand dunes or baking inside an aircraft fuselage sitting out on the runway. Our remaining Songmark calendar is looking rather slender now, as in eight weeks we will have finished the course proper and be starting our farewell week – indeed, some of us will already have gone. Hopefully all as graduates.

Jasbir and Li Han have been offered a job helping out with an archaeological expedition after they graduate, which is nice. I always thought Jasbir would be heading straight back to her home state of Utterly Pradesh to take up her official position, but it seems she has more flexibility than that. She may be a Maharani, but she is not directly in line to the local throne after all. Jasbir tells me her Father may be getting one of the new Imperial ranks, possibly being made a Margrave. The original term came from a warden of the frontier Mark, or Marches, and has been revived entirely for the new Colonial aristocracy who are by definition on the frontier. The fact that they can be immediately distinguished from home nobility by the name helps.

Molly headed out to Song Sodas where she says she has a meeting arranged, rather a mysterious one. She has no idea how long it will last, but hoped to catch up with us later. At worst, luncheon at Mahanish's would be no bad thing and there is plenty for her to do on Eastern Island without reporting in for cleaning duty. As Miss Devinski approved the meeting, whatever it is, Molly is excused the floor-scrubbing she is still hit with unless she comes to a "place of worship" on Sunday. Joining Beryl at the Temple of Continual Reward is no longer an alternative.

Off to South Island, with a distant view of a large cruise liner approaching from the South. Hawaii is that direction, and a couple of hundred eager tourists are loading up their cameras onboard while a score of dusky tropical maidens (some of them freshly fur-dyed for the season) are waiting to dance for them. South Island should be spared today, as tour-boats dock at Casino Island and generally take in the local sights before heading out to the wilder parts of the islands. So the Crazy Golf and the Casinos should expect to fill up well before anyone wanders down to Haio Beach, which is a mercy. There is the smell of fresh paint in the village from the hot-dog and Popatohi stalls that can be setting up on the beach in half an hour when furs at the water-taxi slips telephone the crowds are on the way.

A fine meeting with the Hoele'toemis, though Jirry had been called away to work with his Father at their "import-export" enterprise, possibly getting things out of public view before hundreds of tourists arrived poking cameras everywhere. Saimmi took us through our Warrior Priestess training, and quizzed Helen on her work yesterday at the Italian Embassy. It seems this Signor Pettachi is known as one of the more outspoken critics of

the Spontoonies being “run by witches” and Saimmi has basically issued a license against him. What in most other parts of the world would be called a Hunting License. Of course she would not get directly involved except in emergency, but says she will be interested to see what Helen and I come up with. A General orders missions but leaves it to the troops to carry them out, after all.

An excellent luncheon, which we helped prepare as ever. It is quite an honour cooking for Saimmi as Spontoon’s High Priestess, especially as she has a high opinion of our culinary skills. She is rather ambivalent about my problems as Lady Allworthy – on the one paw she is sympathetic to the trouble it is causing between Jirry and myself, but on the other, as a religious leader a Lady Allworthy of my Spontoonie sympathies and knowledge sitting in the House of Lords would be no bad thing. I could do more on the wider stage than being Mrs. Amelia Hoele’toemi, proud owner of a new longhouse, a loving husband and a hut full of kittens. Doing both simultaneously is quite impossible, as the British Parliament is not run by postal votes.

While Helen and Marti vanished off to the guest longhouse for the afternoon and Saimmi had to be about her duties, Maria and I followed Moeli down to the beach while it is still tourist-free. Indeed, the second tour boat could just be seen on the horizon. Moeli’s kitten is due next month and she was telling me the special precautions she would be taking. She has a remote beach-side hut reserved with the assistance of two friends and a local midwife on the unvisited Western side of Main Island, and her husband’s family of the Natives of No Island will be attending the birth. Her kitten naturally will not be delivered in the Casino Island hospital where they have visiting Euros and especially doctors.

It was a very fine and relaxing afternoon, with Maria and myself invited to groom her oiled fur. My ears drooped as I tried to imagine the next time I would be wearing oiled fur, and can hardly think when that will be. Not at my Tailfasting next month, as that is off unless something radical happens to my inheritance problem. I might attend as witness to Helen’s, though. In fact, I asked Moeli if it was unfair of me to hold Jirry to our promise – there are plenty of Spontoonie girls who certainly have the right to be jealous of me! Though I could never call the past two years any sort of wasted time, if I cannot join the Hoele’toemi family there are certainly Spontoonie girls who would, from their point of view.

Moeli considered for a long time, and suggested I set a time limit – if I am not back in Spontoon free to be Tailfast by the Winter Solstice, to assume I never will be. My ears went right down but I agreed it was the only fair thing to do. Moeli guided my paws to hold her exceedingly round tummy for a minute, and promised that on her part she would be very glad to be my Sister-in-law and her kitten needs an Aunt now that Saimmi’s duties take her elsewhere most of the time.

I must say, it was a very strange feeling holding Moeli that way – her child (a daughter she says, as she asked Saimmi months ago) feels very lively and seems impatient to see the sun and feel the waves. Had Macao turned out differently I would be in a similar case myself. The exact appearance of Moeli’s child would surprise most people, as would mine have – but a kitten is a kitten, even when it’s not. Oddly enough, the special waivers I seem to have been given as Lady Allworthy seem to hardly care if the heir to the estates is pedigree, or even legitimate – as long as there is one from a different bloodline to Lord Leon, and preferably soon!

Although an hour’s relaxation on the beach was wonderful, and now we can hardly look forward to any more of the same, all too soon we had to be saying farewell and head back to the water taxi slips facing Casino and Eastern Islands. There we saw two rather unexpected sights. One was a water-taxi heading towards us heavily laden with Hawaiian-shirted tourists (they must have sent their baggage to the Hotel straight from the customs shed and come here first) and the other was Molly emerging from the small bar next to the Pie-Shop of the Sacred Steak and Kidney. By the way she was staggering I thought she was unwell – until we got closer and scented her breath. She was extremely drunk.

Oh dear. Though our Tutors look the other way at the occasional glass of wine or Nootnops Blue when we are well away from flying, there are strict rules about being never being obviously drunk in public – and Molly was still wearing her best Songmark uniform, with a boatload of camera-snapping tourists a minute away. This has never happened to any of us before – and indeed we are still here. Fortunately Helen and Maria took charge; they grabbed her by an arm apiece and frog-marched her out of tourist view round to the back street behind the Topotabo Hotel and that little Native restaurant where we have seen the Formation Swimming Team refresh themselves (none of them were in today, which was a mercy) and Helen asked for a large pot of black coffee from the waitress and an explanation from Molly.

Oh dear, again. Molly’s meeting in Song Sodas happened to be with someone she absolutely did not want to meet, discussing a subject she did not want to remember. It seems Captain Granite has a younger sister named Karla, a vixen of conventional and respectable habits (with a husband on the island, and indeed a kit on the way) who came to hand over the adoption papers to her “niece”. I had not realised that Molly being adopted was what she calls “a done deal”, as both Macau and Boston have already signed, sealed and made final the paperwork!

If there is one thing worse for Molly than having to live with that, it is being asked how she managed to seduce Granite and turn her heart away from evil. True, Molly was released deliberately, and from what she has shown me of Granite’s diary the Captain was planning to end her criminal career for her sake. I think this poor Karla got an awful shock with what Molly told her. Molly says Karla had been hoping to hear how as her sister’s “one great love” she turned her life around, and was heading to return to a more normal life. I can certainly imagine Molly happily persuading a friend to take up piracy, but not the other way around.

Anyway, Molly stormed out over here in a foul mood arriving around two o'clock and realising she was too late to join us for lunch; she had been in the bar all afternoon. For a bootlegger's daughter she really drinks very little, having been brought up noticing the effects of the family product on the customers. The local pineapple brandy is probably a lot more wholesome than the relabelled stove-fuel the Procyk Combine were distilling out of whatever came to paw, but it has a fearsome reputation even so.

Having poured most of the coffee down Molly, Helen grimly took her best jacket off, entrusted it to the restaurant and announced "Project Pump-out." I soon found out what that meant, and liked it not much less than Molly! Helen grabbed a thin rattan and with its aid in a few minutes we were all jogging at top speed along the beach, Molly's yells of protest occasionally enlivened by Helen adding persuasion to her tail. In a half a mile Molly had to stop – although she lost all the coffee, at least she lost a good deal of the brandy in the process. Another mile jogging to the tip of North Fluke and back brought us back near the main beach near the Topotabo where we left most of the costume on the beach and "persuaded" Molly to go for a hard swim to clean up and cool off.

An hour later after another pot of strong black coffee at the restaurant we escorted a pale-nosed and shivering doe back onto the water-taxi. Helen is furious with her – of all the ways to get herself thrown out after three years hard work, she said that must be the stupidest. Just when Father Dominicus has set every available nose on the island sniffing us for scandal, too (we know as some of them are Double Agents and are covering both sides of the fence.) It must have been an awful shock indeed for Molly to discover that whatever she may think or do about it, she is legally now Molly Cabot – ironically, about as prestigious family as Boston has to offer. She remembers signing a paper while on the Three Moons, but thought anything signed under duress would never be valid. I would think so myself, but it seems in Macao they agree with whoever pays the legal fees. The Cabots have access to well-paid lawyers who have arranged the adoption from their side – even though her Father is alive he has legally speaking deserted her, so Molly Cabot is her name like it or not.

Molly said there had been a painting evidently based on a photograph taken of her when she was asleep in Granite's bed. It had been a portrait with her in a wedding dress, also produced in Macao and sent back to Boston before Granite's final voyage. Granite's real name was Elizabeth Cabot, it seems, but Molly does not like to say the name and Helen had to practically twist a doe tail to get it out of her.

All in all, a decidedly stressful day! Fortunately it was Li Han and Irma Bundt on gate guard, and they waved us straight in (had it been Red Dorm there would have been trouble) for us to shepherd Molly into a hot shower before packing her straight up to bed. None of our Tutors were close enough to observe much, and thankfully we are not scheduled to fly tomorrow.

Having put an errand doe out of harm's way for awhile, it remained a very pleasant evening and we still had hours till lights-out. I sat with Helen and Maria on the strange mound in the centre of the compound. Definitely we will have to do something for Molly, we decided – and that probably means visiting Boston on our way to Europe after we finish here. After today, none of us felt like saying "after we all graduate." Maria had originally planned the trip back via the great-circle route she has used before, taking the Caproni Ca-60 over the North Pole and straight down the Greenland Strait passing Disko Island with its quaint folk dances. That will hardly fit with visiting Boston.

Helen's ears and tail were right down, as she reminded us that the FBI are still looking out for Molly after all this time – it is not so long since Miss Devinski sent an Agent on his way with a flea in his ear after he had come to demand extradition. The fact that many of the Procyk bootlegging charges were in her name is unaffected by Molly having been a young fawn at the time. Prosecuting her for something she owned on paper when she was seven years old might sound impossible, but she assures me Mr. Hoover can make it stick. After we leave Songmark we will no longer have the legal protection of being honorary Spontoonies, and if he grabs her Mr. Hoover can lock Molly onto a chain-gang and throw away the key. Another problem to worry us, just when we should be giving our studies one hundred percent!

I had one useful thought; although Boston lawyers have changed Molly's name, possibly the police chiefs in Washington have not been told. She now has the right to a new passport – and at any rate it is worth a try. This puts Molly in just the same predicament as I have become all too familiar with when I could not clear my name without going back to England, where the Police were waiting for me. The Cabots are determined to have her as a daughter, despite her refusing point-blank to have anything to do with the memory of her daughter. From Molly's point of view they are adding insult to injury, just when she was trying to forget both.

At least I can get back to England now without being arrested. Mr. Sapohatan has told me the old espionage charges Sippy Forsythe laid against me have been quietly buried when I became Lady Allworthy. It would be a nasty twist if they are still on file ready to be dusted off should I ever leave Barrow-in-Furryness in the lurch and revert to being plain Amelia Bourne-Phipps again! Stranger things have happened, and usually to me.

Tuesday May 11th, 1937

Another two solid days with no time to write – we have been out with the Spontoon Guides, helping them with "Nature trails". That is, putting our tracking skills to good use on every surface from sand beaches to sheer rock on Main Island. Miss Blande gave us her best poker-playing expression as she explained that Guides need to

know this in case any of their charges wander off unexpectedly and get lost. Yes. Well. Having seen the way the Spontoon Guides train, the idea of a tour-boat tourist wandering off without his Guide knowing about it is as likely as a watermelon getting lost on a saucer. I remember Vostok where that native Sasquatch lady found us after two days' tracking even though we had done all the standard tricks in the book to avoid that happening.

It is one thing to track someone through an empty landscape where every broken twig and crushed leaf points to the quarry, but the hardest task is when a dozen other furs have been wandering around for their own reasons. Spotting not just that there is a trail, but whose, is a task to set a Songmark third-year! It was exceedingly tricky, and not the sort of thing one could put down in a textbook. Which is presumably how we were tracked on Vostok, the Native girl not having read the books we had learned our evading from. Still, in the past two days we learned quite a bit.

Nightfall found us a long way from anywhere (as far as anywhere on Main Island gets) on the West-facing coast with very few trails. It is easy to see why there are no villages on this side, as the land slopes straight down to the sea with poor landing for canoes and little room to put a garden plot unless one confines one's crops to vines and climbing beans. Miss Blande simply told us she would meet us there in the morning, and left us to it.

Actually, by now such things hardly surprise us. Few things do – possibly being taken to Casino Island and booked into luxurious rooms at the Grand or the Marleybone Hotel would, but not being left to shift for ourselves in a wilderness area at zero notice. We all carry two ever-full waterbottles, and this time Molly's has nothing but water in it. Half an hour later we were on the beach digging for shellfish while Ada tried her luck with a fish spear in the rock pools. Shellfish is what she calls "treff" and she is not meant to eat it unless she really is in danger of starving which as ever a two-day survival exercise is not. Still, she says she is relaxed about her religion's diet rules compared with Hannah Meyer, of whom she says "if she was any more Observant, she'd need her own observatory."

Definitely a relaxing evening – in that we have fires to tend, clams to roast in the embers and shelters to put up but compared with cramming textbooks or jogging round the dry dunes that is luxury. Ada only found one small fish that came up to her specifications, but traded a dozen large clams for one of those new "Songmark bars" that Helen was carrying. She is as good at hunting shellfish as any of us, whether or not she can eat them; our Tutors mark us on our abilities after all. It was a pleasant time once we had food and a cheerful fire going. Strictly speaking Miss Blande had not told us to stay exactly where she left us, but nobody wanted to risk losing marks heading over the main ridge of the island in search of a meal at the nearest village.

The second day was much the same, tracking and being tracked. Scent is more useful in the woods where it tends to linger rather than being blown away. Most of the scent traces are not from the furs themselves (a tracker counts herself lucky if the target has been eating chilli or popatohi for lunch) but from the disturbed vegetation, turned-up soil and such. Brushing out one's visible tracks is all very convincing in the films and might work in snow or on a sandy beach, but on most surfaces that just leaves a bigger disturbed area scenting of freshly churned soil. Still, we are advised that perfumed soaps, grooming oil or especially smoking can be detected a hundred yards off in a wood by most furs, and many who are brought up with Native traditions can reliably scent it three times that far away. That explains why the Guides keep beating us at the task, although not all of them are canines who have reputedly the best noses.

Back to Songmark for a more substantial hot meal and shower, both much appreciated!

Wednesday May 12th, 1937

A day of surprises – and indeed shocks. Fortunately not for us. Father Dominicus's school is in exceeding hot water with the Althing! The first we heard about it was the front headlines in the Spontoon Mirror, which managed to get this as a "scoop" before the Daily Elele (or at least it did not wait around long enough to verify its stories. The Mirror is reputed to have screaming headlines as its priority and if they turn out to be wrong, issue a small-font retraction at the bottom of page seventeen the following day.)

It seems that Father Dominicus was rather too keen on supporting public health and decency – specifically ours. The bald facts were that he had gone to the Police as a Concerned Citizen, carrying a sample of opium that had been obtained from a Songmark girl's pocket. It all looked damning indeed for us – especially when the police called one of our class in and with a star-nosed mole present got the true facts. At which point the Spontoon Mirror's tale took an unusual twist.

In the first place, the sample was perfectly legitimately loaned by the hospital, being carried over here all signed for to familiarise the second-years with the scent and appearance of illicit drugs. After all, a Songmark graduate may take all sorts of transport jobs and if the fur who wrote the cargo manifest claims it is really "native incense" we need to know if they are fibbing. We have seen all sorts of materials one really does not want to get stopped at Customs with, and the police and hospital acknowledge we have never lost a grain of it loaned to our custody. One of Father Dominicus' girls heard about it – and Masie Thynne, Beryl's old school chum, was despatched to "remove it from illicit circulation". This involved picking a Songmark blazer pocket whilst on a shared water taxi, and substituting an ounce of similarly coloured modelling clay so nobody noticed too soon.

So – things seem to have rather seriously backfired. Masie was brought in and testified Father Dominicus had personally issued the orders. With a Police registered star-nosed mole questioning her, she could hardly deny it. It looks as if a rather devastating plot has backfired. I note Irma Bundt is looking rather pleased

with herself, and indeed her dorm admitted for the first time they were tasked with working on the problem. Molly's comment was that we may have laid a landmine covered with a glittering prize – but the Ave Argentum did not have to jump on it.

Well! We shall definitely be following that story with interest. Our day left us too busy to do much speculating though; the Spontoon motor bicycle association kindly loaned us their machines again and we had a loud and fast-paced morning. This time it was on Eastern rather than Main Island; presumably now the tour-boat tourists are here and Guides are escorting them round specially built unspoiled native villages, the Spontoonies there have hidden their gramophones, taken down their radio aerials for the season and requested nobody race around their freshly surfaced Native gravel roads on loud and powerful motor bicycles. Not a very thatched-hut and hula-dancing tourist experience, I have to admit, but Eastern Island is fair game.

This spring Molly has been practicing cycling hard in her own time (and falling off hard on occasions) generally at the far end of the runway where there are few passers-by and plenty of concrete perimeter tracks with little traffic on them. It is embarrassing for a full-grown doe to be seen falling off a bicycle. Still, she has persevered and today she had her first go on a motor bicycle. Definitely more to her taste, being extravagantly loud and fast. She stayed on it too, which is just as well.

I hardly think there is a mode of transport we have not tried, between us. Madeleine X has ridden in that motorised “monowheel” one of her country-furs rocks and rolls around Casino Island in, and Sophie D'artagnan reports she has tried stilts that the folk in the “Landes” region of South-west France use to get around the marshes. Li Han has flown here from her homeland in commercial airships, my dorm added skis, tracked vehicles and sledges to the list in Antarctica, and Jasbir has ridden four-legged camels and elephants back in Utterly Pradesh. Her sister Meera is very keen on the local “Goddard club” whose rockets are regularly soaring out over Moon Island (it is a military reservation anyway and the Tourist Ministry has not complained as far as we know) so one day she might step aboard a developed version of her test vehicles. The junior years have high standards to follow, as in Antarctica my dorm ticked off the last continent on Earth to be visited by Songmark girls. Finding new continents will need a rather long journey, unless one believes in the big entrance portals near the Poles leading to inner worlds.

Interestingly, Meera says they may be getting quite a lead on rocketry as the Germans have gone very quiet about it. Ten years ago they were red-hot for the idea with articles in all the journals; we have seen “The Girl in the Moon” at the Casino Island picture-house for which the film makers commissioned actual rocketeers for special effects and realistic ideas but nowadays one hardly hears a thing from them. She is in touch still with her old school of Roedean on the English South Coast, where she spent her fifth and sixth-form days as a leading light of the similar “Congreve Club”. They have already launched rockets across the Solent to the Isle of Wight (three miles over the water) and hope to be sending airmail the twenty-three miles to France one day soon.

Having a reliable rocket-post would be quite an achievement, something able to deliver in minutes regardless of fog or howling gales that keep aircraft grounded and ships trapped in their harbours. Getting the system to work reliably would be troublesome especially in strong winds – a rocket to travel thirty miles carrying a full fifty-pound mailbag would be biggish and the greenhouse-owners of the Pas de Calais might have a few unpleasant surprises before its inventors can guarantee accurate postal deliveries.

As no two of the motor-bicycles loaned by the Club were identical, the whole day could be spent swapping round so everyone had a go at them all and indeed we did. Strictly speaking they were not all club machines – at least I doubt anyone races machines with side-cars unless they have a separate event. Still, they are rather useful machines as partly enclosed side-cars let an observer use free paw to read a map or use binoculars whilst moving, a feat exceedingly difficult for a pillion rider as we all discovered last term.

It is quite a thrill, getting accustomed to motor bicycles in a Spontoon summer. It would be less so in mud and pouring rain, but on a hot day the cooling wind in one's fur at speed is most refreshing and it is surprisingly hard exercise wrestling the heavier machines around the bends at speed. If only folk could make a decent silencer! Difficult things to produce according to most of the mechanic's journals we have read. Molly has designed a silencer for the T-Gewehr but not built it – her most promising design is the size of a gallon jar, would last about two shots, prevent her fitting her beloved bayonet and still not work very well.

An excellent evening – we had textbooks to revise (current directories of world airports and their services as it may not be many months until some of us will need to know the nearest spot in Africa or South America there is an agency with the engine spare parts we urgently need) but there is no hard and fast rule about having to do it in the classroom. A cooling breeze off the central waters had most of the third-years revising whilst out on the grass outside the dorm – quite a pastoral sight.

Beryl is the only one of us who has the evening edition of the Daily Elele delivered, and for ten cowries apiece loaned it out to anyone who was interested enough in the continuing tale of Father Dominicus vs. Songmark. Jasbir and Sophie said the money was well invested just to hear what the Interior Ministry had to say to the Althing in today's session. Attempted Entrapment is not a listed criminal offence in the Spontoon laws, Beryl says, which is just as well. Sophie D'artagnan nodded pleasantly and noted in a rather abstract way that only on the fourth attempt did the “Reverend Father” take the baited hook. Of course, such hooks had to be far from obvious and it might be the first attempts were never even noticed, let alone refused. Actually Beryl claims the trick was not entrapment at all, legally, and can quote cases in Spontoonie law that we could check up on if we cared to. I know Harold has half a room of neatly indexed records.

To be fair to Beryl, she does sometimes tell the truth. Just last week she was quizzed by that Crusader Dorm about it – and claimed it is a religious obligation to tell at least one convincing lie and one disbelieved truth every day. Their walking lie-detector Isabella conceded that was something she believed – but when she asked if the statement itself was the lie or the truth, Beryl just smiled and said “no comment”, leaving our only star-nosed mole trembling in shell-shock from what Beryl calls a “logic bomb.”

Thursday May 13th, 1937

Just when the tourists had booked all the deck-chairs on South Island – the rains came down again. At least they did not come in as a dreary grey English style drizzle but a rather spectacular, exotic tropical downpour complete with thunderstorms. Helen says tourists from Nevada and Arizona are probably out in it taking pictures as pleased as anything.

Naturally, our Tutors had us out in it. Nothing devastatingly difficult but we had an exercise in emergency shelter building. Having been issued with a random collection of old tarpaulins and string such as might be found half-forgotten in the untidy back of someone else’s aircraft, we went out with a stack of old dry cardboard boxes and were tasked with putting them in shelter before they were soaked to pulp. Not a job where we had time to sit back and consider the problem, nor to try a few different approaches.

Actually, Maria managed to win us the top marks. Everyone else was scrambling to find something to use as tent poles (thoughtfully not included by our Tutors) but she realised she would literally stand in for one – at least long enough for us to put the shelter up around her and winning us a breathing space long enough to find something more permanent.

One certainly learns to appreciate the smallest scraps of relaxation in the Songmark third year. Many folk would curse their luck being stuck in a tent with the torrential rain hammering deafeningly on the fabric just over our ears. But having finished ours first, half an hour’s rest in shelter before having to pack everything up and head back was very sweet.

If cardboard would not have survived outside for long this morning, newspaper certainly would have been worse off – so it was lunchtime before we got to read the Native edition of the Daily Elele. The Althing was scheduled to debate this month anyway whether to extend Father Dominicus’ license to teach here for another year – certain events brought the debate forward a week and decidedly swung the vote against him. The Elele mentions the casting vote in favour last year had been that of the disgraced ex-Police Chief Pickering, and refrains from (much) further comment.

Actually I feel quite sorry for the Ave Argentum, nearly a hundred girls who were uprooted once already what with the Spanish war raging and exiled half way round the world to get here. At least it looks like the school is surviving to carry on elsewhere, even if not around the Nimitz Sea. Hopefully somewhere like Mixteca with a more compatible local religion and society will offer them a place, and at least they have until September to find a new home. On Meeting Island there is now a second Spanish Embassy, claiming to support the “worker’s government” that is indeed the only place one can get a permit to visit the Republican part of Spain from. Getting the right papers is literally a matter of life and death – from what we read in that war five times as many furs perish in front of firing squads than on battlefields.

Molly gave a fiendish grin, popped her knuckles and commented that now is where the fun starts – the opposition have no reason now to hold back (she says) and the gloves are bound to come off. If this Masie Thynne has gloves like her former classmate Beryl, that will be an improvement – I would not have thought one could fit two pounds of steel mesh and packed lead shot in a pair of elegant white evening gloves without spoiling their looks, but evidently the girls of Saint T’s know some very special artistes in the realm of haute-couture - or would that be bas-couture? Beryl has said she favours fashion houses neither in Paris or Milan but somewhere in between. The criminal quarter of Marseilles is a place she has spoken of longingly on quite a few occasions.

After a hot shower and lunch (rather nice salted fish, taro leaf and rice) we further consoled ourselves that today was a good day to be in the classroom. It is rare that our dear Tutors let us waste unpleasant weather sitting indoors, but evidently there is a lot of class work still to get through and this morning was our ration of getting drenched to the skin. Truly Songmark builds moral character despite not concentrating on it as my old school did; at least it promoted Unselfishness as Helen growled that anyone was welcome to have her ration. It is much the same when we are in the field; whoever is carrying the biggest tins of food unselfishly insists on contributing them to the next meal.

Maria has interesting news from Italy, with the first real test in the desert of the improved tankette fleet. Well, about twenty of them at least. The Italians took the radical idea she suggested of getting independent engineers from various countries; mostly Vostok but Britain, Germany and America were asked to see what could be done about the existing two thousand tankettes that are becoming an embarrassment. The usual result was an engineer derisively pointing and breaking up with laughter, but about a dozen finished re-workings resulted. They have a full technology exchange with Vostok (being at the opposite sides of the planet the two nations are, in the worst case, at least safe from each other) and some of the lightweight armour ideas are interesting. Without totally replacing the tracks, suspension, engine and transmission any increase in weight robs the vehicle of its sole surviving assets, speed and mobility. Maria says Vostok have a patent armour system of

thin outer plates of extremely hard though brittle steel bonded to a thick, tough but lightweight plate of magnesium alloy that is far more capable than the weight per square foot of either material alone.

The CV33 is decidedly a vehicle for mouse and shrew crew-furs rather than bears, equines and similar.

Maria says the most successful rebuilds were the ones with all the additions on the outside to liberate much-needed room formerly used by the twin machine-guns; the eight-pack of Vostok aircraft rockets on top of the Modello R(37) and the Italian aircraft cannon on the top on a unique ball mounting rather than in a turret on the Modello K(37) have been approved for production right away. Furs say many hard things about Il Puce, but once he makes a decision he gets things moving without sending anything off to committee. Maria says that works very well on the occasions he is right, but means “the wheels come off” at record speed when he is not.

Friday May 14th, 1937

After the rain, the sun came out as if to catch up for lost time. The tourists will be taking snapshots of each other standing on absolutely steaming pavements with swirling steam rising tail-high in the blazing sunshine. We were very glad to be in full Summer uniform as we headed over to Casino Island to the hospital, escorting some second-years there for a first-aid course. If I had to wear the full Songmark formal blazer today I think they would find it empty on the pavement in the middle of a feline-shaped evaporating puddle!

Our own classes were rather heavy on severe and violent injuries, mostly working from textbooks as thankfully there was nobody carried in with compound or complex fractures this morning. Some of the photographs were definitely unnerving – one of a foot-paw crushed by a falling engine block will definitely stay with me (and make me triple-check the chain hoist every time I use one, which is no bad thing.) Some of the first-years were complaining about the weight of the steel lined and toe-capped Songmark boots last term; a quick look at that photograph should change their opinions.

The other alarming sight was on the return trip with the second-years, naturally including Florence Farmington’s dorm. The tourist “custom” displays were in full swing with a fine selection of native gentleman dancers, particularly the Pacific’s only collection of limbo dancers. The tourists kept seeing newsreels with tropical beaches, palm trees and the like with limbo dancers and the fact that it was filmed in the Caribbean evidently escaped them when they asked the Tourist Board some years ago where the Spontoon limbo dancing was held. A most – athletic display indeed, and one we halted downwind to watch for a good five minutes.

I must admit, the folk of the Nimitz Sea have seen all the right films and practiced extremely hard. There was a young otter gentleman who certainly must have the Tourist Board happy as he literally bent over backwards to entertain. Unlike most sports, at such dances what one might call the lowest score wins. My eyes were somewhat crossed I must admit, and my tail decidedly twitching. The mood was broken when Molly elbowed me in the ribs and gestured towards Florence and her dorm. Of the second years I would expect three of them to have their tails flat down in disinterest, but not Florence. And yet she did. It hiked up considerably when the next Native dance troupe arrived, an all girl group including two quite stunningly built red vixens who could be Gilda’s cousins for all I know. Theirs was a more traditional Pacific dance, one we know well – “the palm sway”. From what I have heard, this end of the season the more innocuous dances are done, at least from the Spontoonie point of view. By the end of August the satirical hulas get danced, not that the Euro crowds could recognise “the dance of the sunburned tourist.” Which is probably just as well.

Only the best actors can order their tails just where they want them, and none can command them to lock sideways (not that such could be shown on stage or film, except for places that show Miss Melson’s productions) any more than they can genuinely sneeze on demand. Though even Madeleine X, who has the well-deserved reputation of “starched shorts” was unconsciously flagging a touch at the sight of the limbo dancers, Florence did not. Molly’s look at her and at me spoke volumes. It is hard to believe Molly being right about a fur’s basic chemistry being changed like that, but I suppose there is a first time for everything.

I have enough to worry about without Florence, who seems to have got exactly what she asked for and is not currently complaining. A Songmark girl learns to look after her own affairs, in every sense of the word.

(Later) An hour’s hard swimming and diving off Eastern Island was the usual way our Tutors keep us on our toes and panting with exhaustion after a too-sedentary morning. I expect some of the furs training for last year’s Olympics had no more exercise than we are having – a final polish, so to speak.

Thinking of polishing, our Tutors asked me to give the first-year class an hour-long talk on social traditions, at the least the ones I know. Songmark girls may be up to their tail-roots in mud on some occasions and dripping with engine oil on others, but it is a useful skill to be able to get along in polite society. I know Meera has no trouble that way and indeed the sleuth Nancy Rote is from a good family, but many of the others have not had my advantages. Rosa Marquetta the anarcho-surrealist at least held off heckling till I called for questions. Hers were actually quite well thought of – various customs do seem to exist “because they are the custom”. From an engineering viewpoint, I have to agree the table fork really should be used as a scoop rather than concave side downward.

I suppose our Tutors have learned to economise on hiring external teachers by taking advantage of the various talents the students already have between them. Though Isabella cannot teach anyone her electrical senses, she is jolly good with a bolas (her father is a Chief of Police and brought in various gauchos from Argentina as special police, who taught her) and was taking the class after me. From learning the right order in

which to use cutlery to learning how to bring down a fleeing fur with a bolas – certainly Songmark finds ways to spread the skills around. On some occasions they make us work hard to get them; I recall Jasbir being officially told she was not allowed to dance for the tourists at the Coconut Shell. In any other school one might say that was just the staff covering themselves in case of scandal, but I know Jasbir worked hard on learning fur dye and other theatrical effects to avoid being recognised by the general public. Having done that, I believe our Tutors let her go ahead; I would not bet a rusty cowrie that they really never knew about her stage career. A perfectly respectable one, as it happens. Whatever the Sind sisters may do on Gull Island happens in Holiday time and is not strictly our Tutors' responsibility.

Back for a treat – the second-years were given a project of Industrial Espionage in a way that would probably not get them jailed if caught; to find the secret of the chilli at Mahanish's and reverse-engineer it for Songmark this supertime. A bold attempt, and one I would award ninety percent for authenticity and a hundred for enthusiasm! Songmark's icebox ran out of ice tonight, but personally I needed none of it. Water is no real use anyway, as I learned in my first year at Saint Winifred's what one needs is something like bread that soaks up the oil that carries the chilli heat. Washing oil off with cold water is proverbially difficult.

Saturday May 15th, 1937

A fine day indeed, in every sense of the word. The sun was out full strength but a fresh breeze kept it from being too baking hot, and the Spontoones are raking in money hand over paw as the well-oiled tourist traps spring into action. From the dining room here we can catch a sight of the central waters, with a dozen hired sailing boats already out by eight. I am legally qualified now to take a tourist party out for hire, and indeed it is highly recommended that furs hire a local Guide. The ones who insist on saving money by doing without one often find out how expensive rescue tows are when they get stuck on the sandbanks on a falling tide. The fact that the hire boats have rigid deep draft keels rather than removable centreboards like local fishing vessels is probably "just one of those coincidences."

Anyway, while we were already on the water-taxi heading towards Casino Island we could see the amusements all running full throttle – there were crowds on the Rainbow Bridge where young Spontoones dive for coins, and Pirate's Cove was as busy as old Tortuga when the fleet returned home from a successful bit of Spanish-Main raiding. From the crowds of sportswear clad figures swinging clubs the proprietors of the Crazy Golf, Slightly Disturbed Croquet and similar attractions were making up for many a profitless Winter day.

We have been told by Miss Devinski to make the most of this weekend; next week we will be back on Albert Island, the nearest expanse of jungle mostly unknown to us, being hunted mercilessly by Spontoone Guides and "certain other forces" probably from Rain Island. There is a limit to what we can learn these days on Main Island; we already know every trail there and many of us have biscuit-tin caches of food and equipment scattered around it that will no doubt delight and puzzle archaeologists for centuries to come. Albert Island is near enough to rapidly travel to (taking two days' sailing aboard the Liki Tiki last year was more to do with giving the newly reconfigured ship a good working-up than actually getting there on a direct course) and far enough away that probably none of us have prepared the ground with caches beforehand – and springing the details on us at short notice means there is no time to do so now. We will also be clear of the Spontoone tourist season; we will probably need to take active measures against our pursuers and the Tourist Board would not thank us for setting vine or pit traps around the place this time of year when valuable tourists are wandering off the beaten track.

I must say, the prospect of a return to Albert Island rather makes me shiver. I at least know the areas to steer clear of, and which would be good to lay a false trail into. The only hazard in the main jungle is a particularly nasty breed of Hawaiian nettle that can sting clear through fur with dire results – one of the Spontoone girls in the party encountered some one dark night whilst answering a call of nature, and was stung just where one least wants it. Twenty years of carefully maintaining the untouched Spontoone jungles have mostly eliminated the plant here apart from Sacred Island.

Today we put our worries aside for later inspection and happily threw ourselves into the dance contests. These were held on the beach, where the staff of the Missing Coconut had started early and laid on a traditional fire-pit with roast fish and vegetables. Taro leaves are a very good wrapping for fish then sealed in clay and baked in the embers, and many of the tourists were tucking into them even before we started our show at ten. One understands how they get that shape.

It was a fine sight to see the first-years joining in happily with the dancing, notably Meera and her dorm. She has a fine bunch, not as driven as Crusader Dorm but equally adventurous in some ways. A good solid public school education has left her well placed for Songmark dorm life although there are a few things she certainly did not learn at Roedean, a most respectable school. Jasbir has not talked much about her introducing her sister to her vulpine friends on Gull Island, but evidently they all had a very fine and energetic Easter Holiday.

As far as the tourists were concerned we were all Spontoone girls, which legally speaking is true for another seven weeks. At least we were wearing the costume and doing the dances, and the Spontoones are rather a mixed bunch of species anyway, so I suppose it is hard to tell unless Molly or Helen open their mouths. I fear they are already too old to easily take elocution lessons, and try as she might Molly speaks in broad Chicago

tones whatever language she learns and Helen's drawl is decidedly Texas rather than Tahiti even when speaking grammatically flawless Spontoonie.

I used to worry about furs taking home recognisable holiday snapshots of me and possibly printing them in travel books. Since becoming Lady Allworthy (for however many weeks or months that may be) that has quite vanished. I could be quite scandalous and still look like the highest of the saints in comparison to Lord Leon and Lady Susan! Then again, I hardly have to worry about keeping an unspoiled reputation as I am legally speaking a widow already. I hardly know what to think of becoming a widow before I was even engaged let alone married from my point of view. Then again, Molly had a similar shock of being adopted at her age and into such a family. The difference with her is, the rest of the surviving Cabot family seem to be perfectly respectable (I have checked with Jane Ferris in the second year, who is from Boston and says Molly could hardly have done better if she tried). No doubt professional gold-diggers around the world are howling in frustration and grinding their teeth at our totally unplanned and unappreciated "good luck."

Anyway, we all waved happily for the cameras and evaded a few wandering paws with good grace – the Tourist Board might complain about grabby visitors getting their fingers broken. Then a fine half-hour swim to cool off, as indeed we had been dancing full speed under the full sun rather than the usual shade in the dance school. An excellent morning! Luncheon was most welcome, eaten on the beach in our dance costumes. One useful thing about grass skirts is there is no laundry bill to worry about if one drops greasy fish in one's lap; the whole item goes into the compost bin when one changes back to Euro fashion.

Thinking of fish, Molly had to head out to put her affairs in order so to speak with her "Fish log" enterprise as she will probably be busy every weekend till we graduate then the future is very uncertain. At least she now has a healthy bank account and reports that the Spontoonie banks are gaining a solid reputation. It is very strange that tourists are coming here to drop off suitcases of money rather than trusting the traditional banks in their own town – though indeed I have heard foreigners pay very little tax on money deposited here and furs such as Molly's Father rarely like to explain to their home Government where the money came from. Perhaps this offshore banking idea may catch on after all. Molly says that "Casino winnings" are a good catch-all explanation for windfalls handed in to banks, and the banks have a policy of not asking questions that might discourage business.

While Maria and Helen headed across the island to the Italian Embassy to "turn up the heat" on this Mr. Pettachi, I stepped onto the Meeting Island water taxi in a definitely buoyant mood. Things are looking up, and the Albert Island trip promises to be demanding but not impossible. It is like putting a final polish on us I suppose – just as one starts grinding an edge with a coarse stone that cuts most of the metal into shape, we started in the first year with a lot of rough edges to grind down and the process would be as painful to steel as it was to us. With furs such as Molly and Beryl I fear the process hardly worked, and yet they are certainly good at what they do.

I was somewhat early for my meeting with Harold, so circled in from water taxi slips looking out for suspicious characters. I am sure the Spontoon Constabulary and less official furs are keeping a sharp eye and long ears perked for trouble anyway – but there is that grey-furred wolfhound I saw here two weeks ago still unaccounted-for, and I am sure he was involved somehow. Although for obvious reasons I could not tell the Police about him, I gave Mr. Sapohatan as full a description as I could, and he will probably have passed it on.

Anyway, there was nothing suspicious to be seen and indeed Meeting Island is remarkably quiet at the weekend. To be honest there is little to come here for when the Althing and administration buildings are closed – there is one nice restaurant (Luchow's) usually open and a couple of soup and sandwich booths for the office lunchtime trade that are shut at weekends. The embassy staff are generally off duty too, with the exception of places like the Soviet Union's embassy and the New Haven one who are proud of ceaseless labour.

I looked around Harold's street, spotting the ever-present street cleaners who are always to be found in the unlikeliest times and places. Although I will probably never know, I expect they are looking out for a certain grey wolfhound as well as discarded durian peelings.

Harold was very pleased to see me, and showed off his new (ancient) arrival – a veritable gasogene, to replace the one I broke. I doubt many can have been manufactured this century, and spare parts must be a problem. Finding one in working order proved quite a challenge, but this one was tracked down in the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands and arrived yesterday. We toasted each other soberly in fresh soda water, which is indeed about all the furs in the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands could do under their former teetotal governor.

Interestingly, it seems their new governor who recently arrived on HMS Pinafore in all pomp and dignity has been found to be an impostor! He was a very convincing one, the very image of the modern Major-General who escaped from his captors and rather spoiled the plot to secretly harbour pirates in New Penzance. The new and genuine arrival is proving popular all round except amongst furs who peddle bathtub gin, swimming-pool scotch and other unlicensed and generally unhealthy products. We see little about British colonies in the newspapers here, who spend more page area on the ins and outs of Tillamook and Rain Island.

I must say, just as last week the tea and scones were super and not the kind of thing served at Songmark. After many years' service, Harold's housekeeper has perfected her English baking although indeed when Harold first arrived here it was as much the local style as anything Polynesian. It is amazing what becomes exotic in three years; the prospect of sitting down in a couple of months at a Lyon's corner tea room in England with

neatly uniformed maids (“nippys” as they are called – a word I realise I have not thought of in years) now seems far stranger than eating clay-baked fish and taro root from a beachside firepit as I did for luncheon.

Harold was in a good mood as he noted everything in the house was back in place, with a new broom, carpet, door and gasogene. He cast a shrewd eye over me and asked if Songmark trained its students in self-defence with gasogenes. My ears blushed somewhat as I reassured him they did not – although I have defended myself in class against folk armed with chairs, pipe wrenches and naturally the traditional pointed stick. Of course Harold suspects it was me, how could he fail to? I was expected to arrive exactly when I did two weeks ago, and there are not that many felines of my size and shape who have the advantage of a very physical Songmark education and who would not simply run for the police. I looked him in the eye and said that according to the newspapers he was rescued by vengeful though probably reformed Burmese Dacoits who will use whatever comes to paw. Which is true as far as the newspaper story goes.

Still, he did say in court he was rescued by “a feline unknown” and indeed he has not seen me as Kim-Anh so could bring no solid evidence about a mysterious feline who is rather dangerous with a broomstick when needed. My using a broomstick was a jolly strange coincidence considering I am in training to be a “native witch” on Sundays, though the Spontoonie traditions are radically different. He is the first to know that speculations are not what a court needs; it was the Police’s job to work out who was who and while he was in the court last time he could only give solid facts and not allegations.

Our Tutors told us to make the most of this weekend, and indeed I did. So did Harold – though he noted that it had taken some days to fully recover from last Saturday, at his age. Certainly a most gallant gentleman, and anyway I am agile and energetic enough for both of us. In a few weeks we will probably be far off in the final stages of our course, with hardly time to draw breath let alone do anything more enjoyable.

A very pleasant afternoon, which left his leather sofa nicely polished. It is a pity Harold never married, as he would have made a very pleasing husband to someone of Laura Shieling’s generation. Most folk in his position at least have the services of a discreet native “housekeeper” though I have met Harold’s and she has hinted she does nothing more than clean and cook, rather to her disappointment. Then, a fur tends to stick with the standards they were brought up with and there were few socially suitable partners for Harold out here since the close of the plantation era when most of the respectable founding families moved away to carry on colonial life in New Zealand or the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands.

In a way it is a relief that Harold can do nothing much more for me with my Lady Allworthy problem; I have been taking up a lot of his time and efforts recently though indeed he says he is practically in retirement as a judge and has time on his paws. Not that judges in Britain have a particular retirement age, and indeed many serve till a great age. My ears rather blushed thinking of the services he was gallantly providing Lady Allworthy. I suppose that is one of the advantages of my having the title – plain Amelia Bourne-Phipps is less impressive to someone of Harold’s station in life. What one could call my overall value is multiplied about fifty times, I should think. In Vostok they are introducing an idea of “National value” based on one’s use to the Nation, whereby everyone has an actual score (Svetlana’s will increase markedly when she graduates Songmark.)

I looked around the room in the bright sunlight, for some reason impressing everything on my memory as if the Tutors would be asking me to sketch exactly where everything was; a common Songmark exercise that teaches a girl to really use her eyes. There was a painting of a very pretty spaniel girl in Victorian costume holding a flower; I had seen it every time of course but never looked it very closely. It seemed to be smiling, which would be nothing strange had its painter finished it that way – but the smile was something that the skills Saimmi has taught me registered rather than my eyes. For some reason I found myself smiling back, and bowed.

A fond farewell after necessary Precautions then back to Eastern Island, a definite spring in my step! I think it highly unlikely that Harold could leave me with any embarrassing “inheritance” though Mrs. Oelabe cautions unlikely things do sometimes happen, and to take care at all times. It would not be an awful thing to happen, in any case. Harold has keen wits and is of good family, and was surely a stunningly handsome gentleman in his younger days. All these are things that run in families, as I have argued with Molly a few times. She was almost horrified at my announcing that whatever the circumstances, my kitten is my kitten and is welcome. Of course some circumstances are massively preferable to others, but still.

On the way I picked up a copy of the Daily Elele and spotted on the back page that yet more tour boats are expected in this week, one from Rain Island and one from Japan. The season seems to be getting earlier year by year, much to the delight of the hotels that used to be empty in May and bursting at the seams in August. Despite many of the more energetic Japanese being busy “exploring” China with rifle and bayonet there are plenty of civilians who are keen on more peaceful explorations though I am sure Mr. Sapohatan will be busy keeping an eye on them and exactly where they are pointing their cameras. Certainly some tourists are carrying suspiciously long lenses on their cameras, which may or may not be intended for snapping rare and distant seabirds.

Prudence and Carmen were on gate guard, and winked as they spotted my buoyant mood. They say they are happy enough with doing the afternoon shift as our Tutors have written them an overnight pass and tonight is the farewell party as Miss Melson finishes up her current filming and prepares to head back. Her parties are famous, not to say notorious. I am not sure how authentic the current film plot with female gladiators might be, but I am sure it is filmed with energy and zeal enough to make up for any historical errors. Not that most furs know about the classical era anyway except for other film classics set there. Cecil “Beady” Milne has been known

to build full scale chariot-racing film sets that owe more to art deco than classical Rome. It seems that all one needs to do is build a set with a few pillars (architectural style uncertain) and have a few furs in bed-sheet togas and chariots to call it a “stunningly authentic historical epic”. Florence’s dorm is joining them, including Florence herself. From what Prudence has said, Miss Melson is about the only film producer where suitable starlets almost fight for a place on the infamous “casting couch” one hears whispered about so much in Hollywood tales.

There was a letter today for me with a British stamp I had not seen before, commemorating our good king Edward the Eighth’s coronation. The letter is from Father who is still on our South Coast pointing sound mirrors across the English Channel, working with the Imperial Defence Commission. He congratulated me on my successes, and noted that he has confidence in me and was sure anything I had to do along the way was all covered by “the exigencies of the Service” which is the phrase used to in the manuals describe all sorts of military hardships. Certainly Father did not get to climb the military hierarchy to be a General in such a practical branch as the Royal Engineers without realising not everything a fur does in their career they want printed in the newspapers, whether it reflects badly on them or not.

Anyway, Father says we will all be welcome, me and my whole “platoon” as he puts it. Last week Molly was muttering about those three maids from Macao probably turning up unannounced just when we had our bags packed – it is true we did get them passports, our address and an emergency plan to meet in Tillamook, which is somewhere we will probably go through on the way to Europe if we follow Maria’s route home on an Italian Ca60 over the Pole. I certainly hope not – although on the other paw, it would be getting three devoted maids very inexpensively who are unlikely to inconveniently vanish to raise families. Possibly too devoted for my tastes, let alone Molly’s. She says it is a certainty that the runner duck girl will have been “converted” by now.

Whilst in the post room I noticed Beryl leafing through a stack of correspondence; most of hers is commercial and connected with her money-making schemes, but one of them she opened with glee, and I noticed the stamp was the same as on Father’s letter. Spotting my gaze she gave an unnervingly innocent smile and passed me a snapshot that had my tail and whiskers standing out like a wire brush.

On the face of it there was nothing too alarming, just two nice-looking murine girls in school sporting uniform, carrying their croquet mallets “on the slope” as one might with a rifle. Then Beryl explained who they were, and this I can believe. Oh my. I thought I knew about Beryl, indeed rather more than is comfortable to think about. But she has never mentioned her little sisters, the identical twins Coral and Pearl who are graduating from Saint T’s this Summer. She gave a happy sigh and announced they were all meeting up in Monte Carlo, to spend Summer working in the family business. Considering her Father is the one they call “the Biplane Bandit” (though Beryl says he has upgraded to a faster monoplane last year) I think Interpol had best cancel any leave its operatives had planned.

At least she has not said they are applying to Songmark – but as she has never mentioned them at all, that hardly means much and if they are their applications are already in our Tutors’ office, preferably in “the round file”. She mused that they have been highly successful at school, having only been defeated in their joint quest for the well-paid and respected rank of School Bully by a canine with overwhelming natural advantages in the role, a Poodlador *. They had already defeated a Sixth-form Finnish wolverine and a Pit Bull girl from a Yorkshire mining town to get that far in the contests, Beryl says.

Whatever the younger Parkesson girls may do, it will not be my problem. Having coped with Beryl these years our Tutors certainly know what to expect and indeed identical twins have been accepted before now. I remember Ethyl and Methyl in the senior year when we arrived – but unlike them, with Coral and Pearl I doubt one will always be wondering which of the pair is the good one.

Back to more revising of textbooks, lying on the grass outside in the shade of the dorm. We have a test on Monday as we are told our Albert Island trip will be a “holiday” which to our Tutors means anything we cannot take textbooks with us. The Alaskan trip was a holiday according to that measure. Certainly a Songmark graduate works hard to earn her Certificate.

* Editor’s note: a pup with Labrador and Poodle parents is generally born as a “Labradoodle”, a (half) breed generally regarded as the soppiest dog on the planet. Presumably there is a small chance of it being quite the reverse, probably a Poodlador. For some Snarks they are Boojums, you see.

Sunday May 16th, 1937

Another fine day and another tour boat coming over the horizon, just visible past the Southern tip of Main Island after breakfast. The Spontoonies must be rubbing their paws in glee, and getting ready the grass skirts and questionable postcards.

Out to South Island, five of us including Saffina who has been busy with Jasbir’s dorm on a project we still know little of, except that it has finished. Saffina has said she did not mind being a live decoy in a worthy cause. I am not sure what exactly she did, but I imagine Father Dominicus is one of the furs who would hold her in special hatred. Her Mother being a Euro missionary’s daughter marrying a native African Prince and converting to his three-thousand year old religion is not the sort of thing that is not supposed to happen

according to conventional viewpoints, especially if they are of different species. Various furs have opined that Saffina has no right to exist.

Anyway, she is a jolly fine second-year and I could wish we had more like her, replacing Red Dorm for a start. We were all well received by Mrs. Hoele'toemi then Saimmi arrived, looking worried. She gave Helen and Saffina some familiar spiritual exercises to do then signalled to talk with me privately.

Oh my. Saimmi has looked into her fires and spotted trouble coming for us – especially Molly and myself. We will have to be very careful on Albert Island, I think. Saimmi showed me a ritual that basically fixes an image of the inner me, my true self, away from any of the spiritual knocks that may damage it. She says she wishes she could do as much for Molly and the rest, but of them only Helen would be able to perform the ritual.

When Helen and Saffina joined us, Saimmi demonstrated another useful ritual whereby any Warrior Priestess can find another whether they are awake or not. It took us all morning to learn, then we rested for a very welcome luncheon with Mrs. H assisted by Molly and Maria in the kitchen. Not that a longhouse has a separate kitchen, exactly. Fresh-caught fish and sweet potatoes, baked in taro leaves; an excellent luncheon. For a change, Saimmi took us back afterwards and “drilled” us jolly hard in the new rituals, making absolutely sure we had them perfect. I have not seen her this worried since December when we prepared to head off with Priestess Oharu to recover the Krupmark Island cursed fragment. Considering the awful risks that trip involved, I rather wonder just what she has seen for us in her fires. If she thought it would be useful to explain directly, she would tell us.

Still, at least Molly and Maria had a relaxing afternoon helping Marti Hoele'toemi down on Haio Beach itself, crewing the “tourist” canoes. In practical terms the best fishing is around dawn in these waters, but the tourists are not up that early and they need to see stalwart Natives paddling through the surf to photograph for their album. There was quite a considerable surf today, and some Spontoones were on those ten-foot wooden boards showing that rare and probably dying sport of surf-riding. I can hardly imagine any Euros taking it up. Beryl claims she has practiced it back at Saint T's, some locations of which have been on or near the coast (the school buildings have a habit of getting “accidentally” burned down, so that institution's exact address varies over the years) or at least I think that is what she means although she calls the sport “water-boarding.”

We said farewell to Mrs. H, who hugged me and Molly very thoroughly, something she rarely does. I think Saimmi has been sharing her concerns about us. I wonder just what Albert Island has in store this time? Then back across the island to the water-taxis, feeling rather sombre.

It was a good thing Molly was not in a volatile mood, having been pretty much worn out with all the paddling today. Just by the water taxis we saw a Spontoonie we know well, and Florence knows rather better. Gilda was wearing a very nice lava-lava wrap and a flower in her head-fur, and nothing much else – unlike the rather large bear in full tourist rig with roll-up shorts, newly bought straw hat and a flower lei.

It is a good thing Florence is not here too. Of course she knows what Gilda does for a living, but I think she would not like to see her obviously taking a stout and perspiring tourist out for an evening stroll in the jungle. My ears dipped in sympathy – naturally most of Gilda's customers are furs who she would not date on her own time, so to speak. Girls who actually want a Hunting License must put up with a lot, and I feel more sympathetic than shocked. No wonder Gilda encouraged Florence so much; a pretty and athletic Songmark girl must have been such a welcome contrast to her usual Tourist Season customers.

My ears were blushing somewhat as I recalled that unsigned License for Kim-Anh still in Nuala Rachorska's office safe. I could have asked Nuala to destroy it, but someone paid for it – I never have discovered whom. Someone evidently thought I would have liked to have one, and it would be like burning an unwanted Christmas present; simply not done. Still – looking at Gilda's “date” I had to admit there is no appeal at all in such a life, as Kim-Anh or otherwise. I should ask Nuala for the paper after I graduate; it is not going to get signed and there is no point in her hanging onto it forever. Few furs know who Kim-Anh is anyway, and since she tackled Harold's assailants she can hardly appear again on Spontoon.

Back to Songmark, and a chorus of groans greeted the cooks serving one-finger poi for supper. Molly and Maria ate it dutifully, having had a strenuous afternoon rowing for the cameras. Poi is at least filling and not so bad if one adds some of Helen's Cajun Extra-hot Sauce (“*Would boil a bayou dry!*” according to the label on the bottle). They report that Beryl's partner in crime Piet was on one of the other boats, keeping his Native paddling technique in practice no doubt. Molly knows him better than I do, having often been to the Temple of Continual Reward, and says he is looking forward to travelling round the world with Beryl after she graduates. I imagine they will not need to send our Tutors any postcards of their trip; the newspaper headlines in “True Crime Weekly” will chart their progress all too clearly.

An evening with our books and memorising maps of Albert Island; all four of us have wished over the years for a photographic memory like Susan de Ruiz has. In lieu of which we have to work hard at it. Hard work is something a Songmark girl gets used to.

Monday May 17th, 1937

Definitely a day of preparations – unlike in the Aleutians we are travelling light tonight as a lot of our task will be running and hiding which is not helped by a full pack. Our Tutors used to offer advice, but today it was just Miss Cardroy taking notes on what we took from the equipment stores. My dorm decided on two waterbottles

apiece, two pounds of dried fruit and nuts and a dozen Songmark bars between us. Very light rations and we expect to be hungry at the end of it – but foraging for food takes time and leaves evidence. We have tracked furs before by the trail of stripped berry bushes and dug-up wild roots.

Just before luncheon a card arrived for Molly. It seems the American Embassy has her replacement passport, and invited her to collect it. This is a tricky one. Molly is officially wanted by their police and FBI, and if she sets a hoof inside their Embassy compound they can seize and deport her as embassies run under the laws of their home countries. Furthermore she wants nothing to do with the Cabot family, and even if she could pick it up she does not want it.

It is always a struggle persuading Molly to do anything; one would think she was the bovine as “bullish” describes her better than it does Maria. But over lunchtime Helen and I talked her round. We are scored at Songmark for facing up to and dealing with facts, however unpleasant, and it is a legal fact that her name has been changed to Molly Cabot. She might as well have the passport, especially since the Cabot name might not be listed everywhere as being hers, and Mr. Hoover’s eager G-Men just possibly might overlook the name change for awhile until the news spreads. Helen went off with her to Casino Island and they were back inside an hour; Molly wrote her an authorisation to pick up the passport and Helen went into the Embassy to pick it up.

I could tell Molly was still seething when she returned; of course she had to sign her name “Molly Cabot” on the passport and Helen’s authorisation, which she was loathe to do. I am sure she would have refused point blank had I not become Lady Allworthy under not dissimilar conditions and about as unwelcome, and she has seen how I dealt with the problem. Getting out of a bad situation, our Tutors have often told us, first needs one to acknowledge that one is in it. Hiding one’s head under the pillows will not score any points around here.

(Later) Well, we have packed and re-packed our kit half a dozen times, thrown half of it out and agonised about how little we can get by with – and how much we can carry while running at speed through three-yard jungle. Jasbir’s dorm has put together a sort of waistcoat each, covered in strapped-down pockets with internal drawcords pulling it tight to one’s figure in which one can carry several pounds of kit without it swinging around one’s ribs like a battering ram. It has no external straps or loops, as we know from bitter experience how they tangle in branches and thorns especially when one is in a hurry and/or trying to keep quiet.

I must say, what with Saimmi’s predictions and our previous experiences on Albert Island I am not looking forward to this trip – it is vastly safer than Krupmark or Cranium Island, in fact tourists go there for a “wilder” experience with real (ex)cannibals and no luxury hotels, but still my tail is down at the thought. Maria is cheerful, noting that the climate is nice unlike the Aleutians, the Natives friendly unlike Krupmark, and unlike our previous trip we will not have the Sturdey boys to run after. Molly growled that she would run after them if there were no witnesses, and hopes their family has quicksand or sea-cliff insurance on them.

Still, play up and play the game! There will be only a few more trips like this one before we graduate, and we have got through them all so far. “What does not kill us, makes us strong” as my old school motto had it. When I repeated that, Helen immediately reminded me of the crippled Gunboat Wars survivors in their secluded hospital on Meeting Island, and indeed Henrietta who lives below the mound on Songmark or at least her body does.

Helen is certainly on course for top marks at Songmark if being hard-headed and pragmatic is all the Tutors go by. I hear Ioseph Starling is the current world record-holder on those lines, and fursonally I am not keen on competing. Beryl is another hot contender, I must admit – today she surprisingly declared “the meek Shall inherit the Earth” – but quite spoiled it by adding “when nobody else wants any.”

Friday 21st May, 1937 (back-dated)

We are back, at last! And quite a trip it has been. No time to keep a diary, nor spare weight to carry one. Our waterproof field notebooks are compact but they weigh as much as a Songmark bar and food was more of a priority.

On Tuesday we made a pre-dawn start and were at the Eastern Island docks just as the stars were fading; there was a supply ship heading to Albert Island and our Tutors thriftily put us on it rather than charter that big Lockheed Lamprey they took us to the Aleutians in. The hold was full of ancient Native artefacts (smelling suspiciously of fresh-cut wood and new glue) that the Albert Islanders will reluctantly part with to the season’s tourists “at great personal sacrifice”, as well as food and drink for them. Even the “Euro” provisions are rather slanted towards what folk expect to find on a desert island; Molly says gin and fine brandy are too much of an indoor thing, but as everyone knows pirates drink extra-strength spiced rum. She recognises the bottles from her former family business, being “El Presidente” brand spiced rum from the little republic of Tropic and about as authentically South Seas as the Spontoon limbo dancers.

The ship was rather small to hold us and the cargo, in fact there was only room on deck for half of us with the rest taking turns to sit in the hold. No passenger cabins, and the only spare crew cabin Miss Blande collared. There were three Albert Islanders returning home, and we took the chance to quiz them in Spontoonie about what has been happening there the past year. It has been a quiet time of things although they were highly amused when the Spontoon cinema sent a portable projector over last Winter with some of the film we helped shoot in the “Liki-Tiki”. By carefully cutting the footage of us sailing in through the coral reefs with stock footage of rapids, the overall impression was a sailing ship hurtling through a white-water tidal race!

Considering the Albert Islanders try hard to preserve their reputation as a remote and inaccessible island, I can imagine they were rather pleased with the resulting film.

One quite realised why folk gave up on sailing ships. Rather than two days' hard work tacking every ten minutes, we arrived at those dangerous reefs in mid-afternoon. Another half hour had us anchored by the decidedly rickety-looking jetty (actually very well cross-braced and perfectly sound, but built with lots of irregular bits that give the impression they are about to fall down) the far side of which was occupied by a destroyer flying the Rain Islands flag and a syndicate number. We keep being reminded that the main Spontoon group is not the only place around here that needs defending; the Rain Island Naval Syndicates look after the whole Independencies to a lesser extent. Still, Spontoon with its tourist wealth understandably gets most of the attention. Quite probably any small Casino or Hotel on Casino Island carries twice the currency as the whole of Albert Island, and here it is spread over many a remote village rather than one handy strong-room.

It was a fine hot day and the Natives came out to greet us, though not in their war-paint and finery as they had for the film cameras. The old spotted leopard chief is still in charge, and recognised some of us from last year. Some of us were disappointed they were not awaiting us with a luau and feast on the beach, but this time it is local Songmark business and not a highly lucrative film crew to bleed for funds. Although it is wrong to wish ill on folk, I hope they squeezed the Sturdeys for every farthing.

Far from a feast and a relaxing evening, we were lined up while thirty very professional-looking Rain Island furs in uniforms without insignia took a long look over us. I notice that Rain Island sometimes fields troops without rank badges or insignia, just wearing totally plain fatigue uniforms. They had with them half a dozen Albert Islanders, who sized us up as if measuring us for new clothes.

Helen's fur was standing on end as she whispered this was going to be harder than anyone had guessed – we were going to be chased by experienced troops with the aid of Native trackers working on their home territory! Certainly there were a lot of drooping tails and ears amongst my year when that sunk in. Being up against furs who have been trained all their lives in the local tradition and could follow a trail before they learned to read will be jolly difficult.

Miss Blande clapped her paws and explained the rules – very simply, we were working in our dorms, and had half an hour's grace before the pursuers came after us. Anyone not caught by sunrise could return to the village for six hours of rest, a good meal and suchlike before being chased again. Any dorm caught returns here and starts again, without the rewards. We had ten minutes' planning time before the first hunt began.

Molly's first idea was to sprint up the firm wet beach round the corner of the hill, as far and as fast as possible before cutting into the jungle. Tracking is slower work than running, and every minute we spent at top speed we would widen the gap. By the time our pursuers began tracking us in the jungle it would be getting dark and we would be at an advantage. The trouble would be we would be absolutely reeking of musk after three hour's running and a Native would easily track us in full darkness through three-yard jungle having spotted where we crossed from the beach.

A quick "Chinese Parliament" came up with a modified version and we all agreed. As soon as Miss Blande gave the word we did indeed sprint out at top speed up the wave-washed sand which at least had the advantage of immediately erasing our tracks and scent, plus the sea spray cooling us to an extent. The pursuers would be watching for us leaving the surf line to head inland particularly where rocky spurs cut across the beach making it harder to track paw-prints. Hard for someone like us indeed, though I remember that Sasquatch lady on Vostok who tracked Maria and me over bare rocks for two days.

After an hour's run we stopped and rested for a few minutes, then drank a water-bottle apiece. After which we left the beach – not into the jungle, but swimming out into the lagoon. The surf was breaking over the reef showing that there was something solid to hang on to, and with our ropes hooked to the loops of our climbing shorts we "belayed" ourselves to a big coral boss. It is easy to spot swimmers in calm open water, but our heads were harder to see two hundred yards out amongst the coral stumps and swirling white water.

Forty minutes later we spotted our pursuers heading up the beach, three separate bands of them moving at an easy lope. Two hundred yards offshore we hardly needed to be quiet with the surf breaking around us, but still I found myself holding my breath as the trackers stopped and looked around every half minute. It was a great relief when they moved on, in a few minutes vanishing around the bend in the coast.

Of course, there was no guarantee that a party of them would not double back and re-check the beach as indeed things look different viewed from the other direction. But we could not stay out on the reef all night, even in these waters; I was already shivering so after ten minutes we cautiously swam back to the beach and began a much more cautious return towards the dock. There were two teams unaccounted-for who had not passed us; although it felt as if the edge of the jungle was full of unfriendly eyes we pressed on hoping they had gone deep into the interior of the island. Every minute an evading fur is moving increases the area they might be in by a considerable amount; as the time we have been away doubles the search area becomes much greater (area of a circle being Pi times Radius squared, as I recall from the first-year maths at Saint Winifreds).

By the time we were within a mile of the docks it was getting dark, and we had to decide whether to head into the jungle while there was some daylight or not to risk crossing that beach. Being dripping wet was rather a liability when trying to avoid leaving traces. I noticed by the way the driftwood was floating in the lagoon that there was about a knot of current heading our way, and suggested we hitch a ride. The surf had calmed down quite considerably and the lagoon water was calm; any vigorous swimming would be conspicuous from the shore

and we had to assume anyone who saw us would give the alarm. Miss Blande had never said the rest of the Natives were considered friendly.

Half an hour in the water brought us back to the dock, and I noticed with some relief that the Rain Island naval vessel had departed, presumably off on patrol. Keen lookouts with binoculars would be bad news for four Songmark girls trying to perfect their driftwood impressions. The top of the jetty was bare and offered no chance of concealment, but the irregular structure of pillars and cross-bracings underneath was another matter. A quiet clamber up an access ladder hid us under the shadows of the planked deck above, almost invisible – and if we were dripping wet, so too was everything else with the sea twenty feet below our tails.

There remained the matter of how to pass the night; at least in the jungle one can lie down on a leaf bed although the insects prove troublesome. Here we could cling to the supports all night but that would be a very poor option and would leave us exhausted by morning. It was Maria who came up with the answer – on the top she spotted a ship's hawser coiled with perhaps a hundred feet of half-inch Manila rope lying in the shadows, where it would probably not be missed till dawn. Stringing that back and forth between two horizontal bracing struts gave us a real “cat's cradle” big enough for a bovine and a cervine as well as two cats! We clipped ourselves into the harness loops on our climbing shorts guarding against possible falling out of bed, and relaxed for the evening. There was little point in keeping watch as this exercise would end when we were spotted rather than captured; the only use of a sentry would have been to warn us in time to get away, and if anyone decided to check under the jetty with flashlights they would see us anyway.

A damp evening but not especially chilly – actually I managed a few hours of sleep, though with all four of us pressed together if one wakes up and moves the rest tend to awaken. I was glad to see the sky brighten though, and by the time the sun came up we had coiled our bed up and replaced it where we found it. Tidiness with other furs' equipment is never a bad thing, and besides we might have wanted to use that trick on a later night so leaving our “nest” around would rather give the game away.

Just to be on the safe side, we waited until the sun was actually up and shining before presenting ourselves in the village square. Now is not the time to get caught on technicalities between “dawn” and “sunrise”, and our Tutors have set trick questions like that before. Anyway, we were the first ones back uncaught though Jasbir's dorm came in from inland half an hour later; they had taken to the tree canopy and passed a night rather like ours. Irma Bundt makes an unlikely tree-dweller, but she is agile for her weight and skilled at doing unlikely things. I recall last year on the military manoeuvres she dug a burrow, despite it being untypical for bovines.

Miss Blande appeared with stopwatch and clipboard in paw, and congratulated us all – the other dorms had been spotted at least once apiece, and were on their second or third chase. We had six precious hours of whatever “facilities” the village could afford till our next ordeal!

It looked as if Jasbir, Sophie, Irma and Li Han had passed a sleepless night in their treetop roost as they headed straight into a proffered Native hut, pulled the woven rattan window blinds down and by the snores (a problem Irma shares with Maria, alas) were fast asleep in minutes. We had other priorities – by that time we were out of our salt-soaked uniforms sponging each other's fur out with a big tub of hot water. The locals have much the same standards of dress as Spontoon Main Island, and hardly looked twice although Maria and Molly were rare species on this island. Sleeping in salt-soaked fur will rapidly drive anyone insane with itching, besides leaving us looking as if we have been dragged through a hedge backwards.

After a decent breakfast of fish and mashed yams (conserving our portable food) and extremely welcome hot tea we spread most of our clothing out in the sun to dry and found a shady spot to top up on sleep ourselves. It never hurts to get in some extra, especially when one has no idea of what the next days and nights have in store. Miss Blande did not ask us how we had passed our night, but as ever she said she would look forward to reading our reports. “Complete and comprehensive” are words she did not use, but by now we know what our Tutors want.

By the time we woke up at noon everyone else was back, mostly looking rather the worse for wear. I felt slightly guilty recalling our fairly comfortable hideaway under the pier and five hours unbroken sleep to top that off, but “to the victor the spoils” as they say, and had they had our luck and planning they would have done as well. Still, apparently they will get the chance to catch up as the remaining three days were a single big exercise, with no holds barred and the local villagers promised a bounty (paid by the Rain Islanders) to join in the search!

If our ears and tails had dipped on hearing the rules the day before, I think they were all limp and flat as last week's salad when we heard about the next stage. The jetty is used by the locals all the time, and though we stayed out of casual sight before, then they had no cause to go looking for us. The good thing was, we had an hour to think of plans then two hours to get ourselves thoroughly lost.

One possibility suggested that was instantly squashed was heading for the Taboo areas where the locals would not go, and where they have no more local knowledge than we have. We saw all too much of that cursed area last time, to our great cost. Even the folk who were not on the trip last Spring have heard quite sufficient about it from those who went hunting the Sturdey boys (not with four-bore rifle, to Molly's disappointment). I would rather get captured the first afternoon than win the exercise in those swamps. Typhus is not measles; having it once does not protect against getting it again and the Pacific Marsh Typhus is a killer. If anyone qualified as young and healthy that Spontoonie girl Hinewehi did, and they buried her the week after we left the

swamps. She would have had more low-level exposure to local diseases than us, and should have been resistant to some extent. Doctors and nurses very rarely catch diseases from their patients for that very reason, after all.

Although generally we try not to repeat ourselves, heading up the beach has the advantages of getting us a long way from the pursuers at high speed, and without leaving a trail all the way as we would if we dived straight into the jungle. One cannot pass through jungle without leaving traces, even bent leaves being enough for a top tracker to follow. So as for the previous day we started off at a jog heading up the coast, with Prudence's dorm following us. It seems they had tried the "underwater trick" beloved of Hollywood, with short reeds to breathe in a murky pool. Alas, against a top tracker their trail was spotted going into the pool and none coming out, proving they were still in there somewhere. Carmen had tried to lay a false trail coming out then walking backwards in her own pawprints to the pool, but to no avail and they were poked out with bamboo poles.

In two hours we had covered about sixteen miles, which is no record but about right for a fur carrying a pack with several days of expected hard work ahead. Prudence waved farewell and they headed inland along a rocky spur – we followed them to the jungle edge, then retraced our steps back along the bare rock. The rock spur finished looking over a deep pool with about twenty feet of sheer cliff. Looking at each other we realised that if there is something better for hiding a trail than rock it is water – and better than that, air. Being the lightest of us I took the dive first and as my paws just touched the sandy bottom I waved the rest in. We were careful not to leave any impression on the bottom; in calm clear water the imprints of Maria's and Molly's hooves might have been visible until the next high tide.

Then – along the wave-washed beach to the next spur, and into the jungle at last. Fortunately we found a game trail, as without machetes the three-yard jungle would have been totally impossible. There were great tangled stands of "wait-awhile" thorn bushes with thorns like barbed fish-hooks, and the glossy bright green leaves of Hawaiian nettle were everywhere. When we found a stream we followed it up, unavoidably slipping and sliding but at least not leaving much of a trail.

By nightfall we were climbing up the central mountain of the island, and I remembered the vegetation rather thinned out towards the top. So while we had some light we cut ourselves leaves to weave into an overnight shelter. Such low shelters are remarkably inconspicuous if put against the right background especially in poor light, and we had practiced.

What with Albert Island being the size it is, there was little point in just keeping going or we would have just come out into the villages and farms on the far shore by dawn. As before, there was no point in keeping a watch as by the time a lookout spotted a tracking party they would be too close for us to get away from unseen. Our plan was to lay the longest trail in daylight and hope it had grown cold enough by the time it was found to make it hard to follow at night. Every hour makes it easier for us, as even furs who can read a bent blade of grass need light to see it.

So – a fairly restful night's sleep, waking at dawn with the bird-jewelled canopy of the forest above us and no grinning Albert Islanders pointing snapshot cameras at us for evidence to win the bounty. A breakfast of one Songmark bar apiece (I could have eaten half a dozen) then we dismantled our shelter and threw the torn leaves into the stream. There are logjams of fallen trees and choking vegetation every fifty yards or so, and they would not get far.

Had our pursuers been following our trail they would have already caught up with us, as Helen pointed out. We know enough about such things to know that the next step after losing a trail is a standard area search sweeping the ground, and that was the next thing to prepare for. More speed would not help us on this, as we needed concealment. There were no handy lava tubes around, and anyway such things are obvious places to look if one knows the territory as the islanders surely do. On a map if there are caves or mines marked we know to steer clear when selecting hideouts as the opposition presumably have the same maps. Unmarked caves are best.

We decided the idea of getting underground was not a bad one and though we had no shovels or entrenching tools we had our pocket knives and with fallen branches whittled digging-sticks that can do fairly well. The biggest patch of "wait-awhile" thorns in the area looked like a place no sane Native would poke around in, so we managed to dig into the hollow centre of the clump. It was rather inspired by some of the sketches in Father's field fortification manuals of an observation post in "no-fur's land" in 1918, with a simple but serviceable pole floor keeping us off the mud.

Then, basically, we hid for two days. Molly was rather restless by the second day and was in favour of more of a running pursuit across the island, but we voted her down. If you outrun searchers from one direction one is liable to run full-tilt into the paws of the next party coming the other way. Her idea of salting the local trails with traps was also voted down as that would be a dead giveaway we had been in the area when we wanted furs to think we were miles away. As it was, three parties came within hearing range of us; we were quiet and not moving much so our sound and scent was minimal and the thorn bushes had a rather pungent perfume of their own which masked us further. Not having a fire even at night was rather a pain, as it meant nothing but cold and scanty food washed down with a bare minimum of water fetched at first light from a stream two hundred yards down the trail. Still, it was warm enough, shaded enough with the high thorn bushes around us and the rain held off which was just as well considering we had not so much as a ragged tarpaulin between us.

This morning we were very pleased to give our legs a stretch after three days "lying-up" and to trot down a clear trail to the coast munching the last of our fruit and nuts and grateful to drink as much water as we

wanted from the jungle streams. Another two hours along the beach and we were back at the main village, being the last party back and one of only two who stayed uncaptured! Missy K's dorm was the other; that of course includes Beryl who has a flair for this sort of thing. I recall last year when we were all meant to be guarding Main Island from invaders, she dug a concealed burrow and "guarded" that dutifully.

Back onto the boat, sadly missing out yet again on any Native luau and general partying. Still, the supply boat has its schedule and unlike our voyage on the Liki -Tiki we are not the crew or owners, so it is not up to us when we had to get back to Songmark. Everyone spent the trip back writing up their reports on books which like my diary we had left safely onboard in Miss Blande's cabin. Six hours can get a lot of writing done, and we had drafts of our reports ready detailing exactly what we did and why. This is one trip where our dorm surely scores top marks, never having been captured!

I must say, I was surprised to leave the island safe and sound, having been expecting hideous danger and endless trouble. Saimmi's predictions have never been wrong before. It was hard work all right but we came through it with flying colours, without even a Hawaiian Nettle sting. There were the usual cuts and scratches; one hardly digs a den under a wait-awhile thicket without discovering all about its barbed, hooked thorns. Unless we discover they carry something highly contagious or slowly toxic, we have got away from whatever Saimmi saw in her fires for me. Still, she is the first to admit she is not infallible - unlike the Pope, as Maria has dryly pointed out on several occasions.

By evening we were arriving at Pier Two on Casino Island, just too late to get to Songmark for supper. Various girls were giving mock sighs as they lamented all the lovely three-fingered poi and pastefish they were missing out on. This is generally a bad idea; our Tutors have a wicked sense of humour on occasion and Miss Blande could have telephoned ahead from the dock to have the cooks get some ready for us specially (at which point we would learn the junior years had dined on roast chicken, though in that case we would have heard the cheers as the ship rounded South Island.)

Actually our luck was in; although Miss Blande did indeed telephone some cooks from the dock it was not to Songmark. We had reservations ordered at the Sunset Grill at that time of evening, giving us half an hour to dash to Songmark, change into our best uniform and walk back to the restaurant at a dignified speed. Anyone not dressed and scenting respectably, Miss Blande told us, had a cold can of that surplus Rain Island cheese and mashed potato emergency ration to look forward to for supper instead.

Despite some of us having spent four days being chased through the jungle, as soon as the water taxis hit the beach we hit the ground running and probably shaved a few seconds off our record getting to the front gate. Saffina was on guard there with that Australian mouse from Florence's dorm - they probably gained a point by slamming the gate in front of our muzzles and demanding our Passes back before they let us in one at a time, albeit not wasting any time about it. Certainly it must have been one of the fastest showers, grooming and "quick change" acts on record, as two minutes before the deadline the entire Songmark third year walked into the foyer of the Sunset Grill as quietly and respectably as any Church procession and smelling as sweetly.

Mixed grill! Chops and bacon and minute steak! I had forgotten such food existed, and indeed on Spontoon it only exists for the tourists along with the well-paid pilots and such who bring them. Helen whispered that Lady Allworthy can have it three meals a day whenever she desires, back in Barrow-in-Furriness. That gave me pause to think, though barely for a second. I well remember Lord Leon's figure, and that Lord Allworthy did not spend his time sprinting along beach sand with a pack on. It is a sobering thought that even loaded with equipment till I could hardly stand, I have never weighed as much as he did in his bare fur. And he was not that much taller than me.

Still, I pushed that thought to one side for awhile and refused to let anything spoil my appreciation of the best Songmark-bought meal since last time we were all in Bow Thai. There were baskets of bread and bowls of fried potatoes plus various deliciously cooked vegetables - I started off hungrily but after half an hour or so gradually slowed to a halt. We have read of this before, but never experienced it as badly as this. After days and days of eating nothing but concentrated, scanty food (nuts, dried fruit, Songmark bars) one's stomach actually shrinks! I got through the meat and some of the potatoes but was left staring helplessly at the rest of the food we would so dearly have loved to have had in the previous days, even the plain bread.

I was far from the only one to have the problem; they say "enough is as good as a feast" but being faced with a feast it is galling not to be able to make the most of it. Still, if that is all the trouble Saimmi saw for us this week we will have got off very lightly!

Back to Songmark in an excellent mood. We have the testing exercise behind us now, the whole relaxing weekend ahead of us, the weather forecast is for fine sunshine and there is much to be enjoyed. It seems I had visitors while we were away; Miss Devinski left a note saying they turned up just as we were about to start the three-day exercise and though she radioed straight away to Miss Blande, we had already vanished and were doing our best not to be found by the best trackers Rain Island and Albert Island could field. I wonder who it might be? Ah well, it seems they will be returning tomorrow morning and we shall find out then.

Until then, Dear Diary, good night - just for a change everything seems to be going our way!

(Amelia's Diary continues, with interruptions for certain reasons, in the next chapter. It is suitably titled "Crash Landings.")