

Summer Lightning

Being the account of Amelia's first Summer Term at the Songmark Aeronautical Academy For Young Ladies. After an eventful Easter Holiday, Amelia isn't looking forward to classrooms and exams, but that's her hard luck ...

May 8th, 1935

Dear Diary: one day is all we get to get back into the swing of Songmark, after our various adventures on the open wave. Awaking indoors for the first time in a month, it is quite a shock to be in a bed rather than a hammock. Indeed, a hammock would be more comfortable, as the temperature must have risen ten degrees since the end of last term.

But anyway – some of our friends have been here for days, having crossed the globe on the available seaplanes and leaving plenty of safety margin. Jasbir Sind arrived after breakfast on the scheduled flight via Humapore, after various adventures on the way – one of the volcanic islands in the Philippines decided to lose its temper, and she was diverted half-way across the Dutch East Indies to avoid it. Aircraft engines and clouds of rock dust decidedly do not mix.

Off to Church for the first time in a month, all dressed in our Sunday best, hastily unpacked from our steamer chests. Decidedly tight in certain places now – all our hard work on the fishing boats has gained us about an extra size around the shoulders, although the effect is not unflattering. The main waterways seem quite packed with shipping, five large tour boats pulled up at the dock and Casino Island crowded with sweltering visitors discovering their costumes are quite unsuited to the climate. We recognised some of the members of the dance school, dressed in their (minimal) Native best, innocently fishing from the Rainbow Bridge – and providing either local scenery or Culture Shock to a stream of visitors evidently fresh off the boat. Certainly, by some of the whispered reactions I overheard, they are much appreciated for their Natural charms, as well as envied as being the only comfortably costumed people in sight.

Alas, Jirry was nowhere to be seen – he is carrying film cameras and such around Main Island, and the supporting workers do not have the luxury of six-day weeks when filming schedules are tight. With film companies paying to come out here for a month or less, anyone building stage sets and the like has their paws full – the directors and stars may have their Sundays off, but demand everything be ready first thing Monday!

Reverend Bingham was in fine form, with an improvised parable about the stout lady and the deaf water-taxi driver that I doubt he would have written back home in Barseshire. But still, even Religion seems to change outside Europe – as with the clothing, it simply must, to fit the climate. Quite galling, one assumes, for the “Euro” Missionaries to be told to stick to Casino Island and to mind their own business elsewhere. Surely our Archbishop Crowley of Barseshire would take it very much amiss!

Back again for lunch, our tails and ears drooping at the sight of our new timetables. There is one consolation, this term we are mostly out of the classrooms. And a lot of it looks like extremely strenuous stuff, which Helen, Molly and myself should have a head start on after our less than relaxing Easter break.

We had the problem of deciding how to explain why Soppo Forsythe is no longer with us – fortunately our tutor Miss Devinski called our class together at lunchtime and delivered what seems to be the Official version. Soppo has officially returned to Europe since the climate on the Spontoons was proving unhealthy for her – which is perfectly true, as far as it goes. Had she been ten seconds slower in getting out to our Naval launch, I think it could have been quite severely fatal. Interestingly, Miss Devinski used almost exactly the same words on that subject as had Mr. Sapohatan, which gives me cause to wonder just how close our Tutors are with the local Government. Furthermore, the news of Soppo's departure seems to have reached Songmark before we were officially told ourselves – and the news of a much-coveted vacancy was out on the telegraph wires as fast as the operator could key it.

I had not really considered how one applies to join Songmark, my dear Father having arranged it for me while I was disconsolate about crashing poor Flying Flea #8 on his glasshouses. It seems there are various Agencies in most parts of the world who have the entry particulars to hand, and only pass on suitable applications to our Tutors.

Hurrah – Miss Devinski tells us our new chum will not only be from Home, but from a famous Public School. This should certainly raise the tone of the place, to have another chum with a proper education. Back at Saint Winifred's our teachers prided themselves on raising the right sort of people – qualifications are of course important, but building character is the key to it all. Helen and Molly disagree – but I simply showed them the newspaper, with the reports of what the Rain Island authorities found in the raid on Doctor Lowenthal's Cranium Island laboratory last week. Having impressive scientific knowledge and ability is hardly a good thing if used for what he was doing! Most of the villains in our friend Ethyl's “Weird Tails” pulp magazine are ultra-qualified, but of awfully low character.

Anyway, I am looking forward keenly to Beryl's arrival. It seems that both she and her family already have aeronautical connections, and are quite famous for it. Molly says she recognises the name (Beryl Parkesson) from somewhere, but that hardly seems likely. After all, her family trade (wines and spirits importers) is hardly what one associates with the top-ranking schools of Home!

And so to bed early – much easier to write in than a swaying hammock in a small boat, with the sea-spray blowing in around the canopy. Still – looking at our timetable, I could wish for another week out, with such agreeable company as the Noenoke family (and especially Tihan). A great pity that we were under a cloud of suspicion until the last week, when Soppy's abrupt departure paved the way to much friendlier relations with them!

May 9th, 1935

Up early – breakfast at seven every weekday this term, which saves us having to sit in classrooms through the heat of the day. Our Tutors and the second-years have told us what to expect of this term, which is a definite steam bath.

I cannot really say we were happy to be back - work in the engine sheds is swelteringly hot despite having all the doors open, and we are becoming reacquainted with the sensation of machine oil soaking our fur. Over the Holidays, our Tutors must have borrowed a truck load of hopeless engines from the scrap dealers – such a collection of ruined metal I've never seen since trying to repair Flying Flea #4 after its unhappy encounter with the church tower. Getting them actually firing was cheerfully admitted to be unlikely, but we were hard at work just getting the engines to turn over. Fortunately, I recalled a tip in "Practical Home Torpedo-Bomber User" of taking off the cylinder heads and pouring in smoking hot oil, to expand the cylinder block enough to turn the crankshaft. So full marks for our Dorm, as we begin as we mean to go on!

Maria arrived at lunchtime, when we were trying hard to clean up – alas, any soaps strong enough to shift old sump-oil, play havoc with one's fur condition. Maria looks cheerful and fit – having been out in the open air all holiday, though perhaps with not as much fur exposed to the sun as our Native costumes allowed. It seems that her dear Uncle has her best interests and education at heart as always – this time, he had a delegation awaiting her on the tarmac on her arrival in Italian territory. Quite a holiday – she never saw Rome, as she was whisked straight off on a non-stop tour of the most scenic and remotest flying-boat bases around the Italian Empire.

Certainly, everything had been thoughtfully arranged for her – the amphibian aircraft was awaiting her incoming flight with its engines running, and before she had time to put her bags down she was already heading for the coast. While we were exploring the far shores of the Spontoon archipelago, Maria was being shown the furthest Adriatic isles – all very rustic, according to her photographs.

Happily, our afternoon was given over to swimming classes, something that Molly, Helen and myself have had a lot of practice with recently (and three hours in the water certainly removes the last of the oil taint.) The best beaches of Eastern Island are on the East Coast, and very secluded – the twenty of us happily combining a cooling dip with some aircraft-spotting, as our beach was right at the far end of the runway. Not that we had much time to watch aircraft, as Miss Wildford was launching into the first day with vim and vigor, and kept us hard at work all afternoon.

We have three afternoons a week down for swimming, which should definitely make a difference. As Miss Wildford points out, it is about the only hard exercise one can do at this time of year without completely overheating – and most of the class were panting hard anyway, after the first hour.

It seems my dorm are not the only ones to return from a month away visibly altered. Missy K was showing off her new bathing costume – and indeed, none of her old ones would have fitted. Though certainly still rounded, she is looking less like a whale and more like a dolphin – she must have easily dropped two dress sizes since Spring term. One wonders what on earth she can have been doing – certainly, she won all the swimming races with ease. She is her usual self, however, and moans about having to break in a new dorm member to replace Soppy Forsythe, who she never actually had much time for when she was here. Still, she is down to running a dorm of two until this Beryl arrives from England – who should use her good education as a civilising influence on Missy K, I hope.

Not only us first-years have changed; Noota and Conchita have turned up with exceedingly short-trimmed fur, looking more like infantry recruits than young Academy ladies. Maria is looking at the style with a certainly calculating air, noting that some young Carabinieri of her homeland look quite similar.

One thing that has sadly stayed the same is the menu here. One gets used to dining on whole roast fresh-caught fish, as much as anyone would want to eat. Fish is on the menu tonight, true enough – one sad and lonely fillet cast ashore on a desolate atoll of steaming Poi. Watching Missy K tear into it like a steam-shovel was another familiar sight I could have done without. Still, four hours vigorous exercise left us with an appetite that demanded satisfaction. Oh well. Our Gypsy Moths' engines are built for 86-octane petrol, but can take 70-octane or neat alcohol in emergency, at the risk of damaging their internals. Dining on Poi, I know how they must feel.

Tuesday 10th May 1935

Back to self-defence classes in the afternoon! This term we are in what looks like an old longhouse a few hundred yards outside the Songmark fence, near the staff bungalows. The end walls are open, letting the prevailing breezes through, which is very welcome as the thermometer read ninety in the shade.

We started off with some refresher training, with falls and holds – Jasbir quite brilliantly demonstrated what to do against an assailant armed with a pointed stick. Our former tutors Mr. and Mrs. Fairburn-Sykes have sadly returned to Shanghai, where the local miscreants will surely be as sad to see them arrive as we were to see them leave.

Miss Blande taught us the more advanced second half of the lesson, with some rather more aggressive moves, which she cautions us would do real damage if applied with full energy. So we slowly “stepped through” the moves, much as we do when learning new dance steps, before putting it together at a realistic pace. Actually, our dance training is proving jolly handy in all sorts of ways – having practiced to improve one’s stamina and balance can be no bad thing whatever the sport.

Ever the realist, Miss Blande pointed out that in most circumstances, the best defence is a good turn of speed, in an unexpected direction – we are not encouraged to “mix it” except in real emergencies. Still, that explains why we were taught some of the less sporting moves, that Molly shows herself to be already proficient in. For once, her Family background is proving more useful than my own, as she was taught self-defence in quite uncompromising styles by her Father’s employees. The “body-smash” she showed the class is something she credits to Mr. “Knuckles” Maldonado, though our tutor assures us it is in the books under another name.

Helen was quite philosophical about our training, in the shower – in that half the time we are being taught to think exactly what we are doing and should be doing next, and the rest of the training emphasizes automatic action with no time to think. Not unlike how my cousins describe infantry training, I suppose – one learns the drills that work, and drop into them as the situation demands.

Madelene X has a lot to say about our “going Native”, even the little we have talked about with our classmates. Those of her family who are not in aeronautics, are Missionaries, and devote their lives to annoying the residents of Tahiti by enforcing Euro dress codes. The idea of us coming back with oiled fur and the other modifications, is not something she will let pass by without comment. Generally adverse.

11th May 1935

Oh dear. Just a few days ago I was congratulating myself on having Beryl arriving as our replacement. I fear I was rather premature – we may have received a replacement for Sippy, but not an improvement.

Miss Devinski called Missy K and myself to her office after breakfast, informing us to pick up our new comrade from the docks, her flight being due in at ten. Missy K will of course be her dorm leader (and even when Sippy was here, complained about being the only dorm of three rather than four) and I supposed I was sent along to provide a familiar type of face and an accent Beryl can understand. Missy K’s Spontoonie accent is rather strong, and she talks fast and slangily, not too concerned for our comfort. At least, that was my idea of why I was on the welcoming committee, though remembering our Tutor’s decidedly amused expression, I have my doubts.

From the travel schedule we were given, it seems Beryl left Home quite as abruptly as I did myself – she was all set to return for her final term when she diverted half way across the planet to Songmark. Missy K was muttering dark things in Spontoonie about being “stuck with another stuck-up Euro”, unaware that I now speak quite a bit of her language. Having asked our Tutors last term, I had been surprised to learn that there IS no official dictionary or phrasebook of their languages by Spontoonies themselves, only more-or-less-accurate ones written by outsiders to their culture. Of those, attempts such as the rough guide that Sippy had are neither comprehensive nor quite correct. Folk who want to learn enough Spontoonie have to be taught by the locals, who seem to make sure there is no pressing need for anyone to do so. Certainly, one hears the locals say things with a smile about some of the louder tourists, that they would hardly say in English.

Beryl’s flight was on time, a splendidly painted Saunders-Roeder Sea Spirit in commercial Mixtexasian markings. Of the twenty new arrivals, nineteen were obvious tourists, laden with cameras and the deafeningly loud shirts that Hawaii sells strictly for export only. Beryl stood out – though a decidedly small-framed mouse, she cleared the way to Customs with a large polo-mallet in a style that I somehow knew I had seen before. As indeed I had. My new comrade was wearing a sun hat with her old school insignia proudly displayed – one that I had seen before on many a stricken hockey field, triumphantly waved from the top of a pile of groaning casualties.

Dear Diary – Beryl certainly comes from a famous Public School, or should one say an Infamous one. My new classmate is a survivor of that forcing-ground for the hardier and thornier breed of English Rose, Saint T’s! * Although she seemed quite friendly and well-spoken, I could not prevent a shiver going down my tail at the memory of her classmates, a yelling, snarling swarm of unwashed savagery whose manicures are based on claw sharpening rather than trimming.

Beryl is travelling light, with everything accompanying her in the aircraft. Her two pieces of hold baggage looked at first to be naval kitbags, but despite the markings having been removed, I would wager a week’s allowance on them being official Royal Mail sacks. Missy K hoisted one on each shoulder with ease

(she really looks Quite formidable since trimming down a little) and I offered to carry the croquet mallet. Beryl declined, explaining she had promised her Sports Mistress to lose no opportunity to practice and improve her game, no matter where her wanderings took her. Indeed, she also carries a set of steel balls in a sort of canvas sling, as well as a set of exceedingly sharp pointed steel croquet hoops in a scabbard at her belt. Handy for swiftly hammering in and setting up anywhere, she assures me, such as parquet floors and polished wooden dance halls with plenty of room to swing a mallet.

(Later) I had to break the news to my dorm, letting them know just what to expect. Molly gave a whoop, looking highly delighted – she explained she had at last remembered where she had heard the name. Beryl's Father was the inspiration for the song "The Man Who Broke The Bank At Monte Carlo" – though unlike in the song, the bank that broke was the one he worked for, whose reserve funds he had "borrowed" for the weekend to gamble with. Not content with that, he went on to later fame as "The Biplane Bandit", which career brought him into contact with Molly's social circle.

Alas for my hopes of the new arrival bringing in some culture! The "culture" her former school possesses is about the same as that grown on jelly plates in microbiology lessons – let us hope it does not prove *too* infectious.

- Editor's note: detailed research to date has failed to conclusively prove just which school Amelia is referring to. Possibly Saint Theresa's, but probably not.

12th May 1935

Back to Casino Island for the first dance class of term, though we have been keeping in practice. In fact, this term we have decided to go for it full-throttle, and get up an hour early every morning for some hard exercise – regardless of whatever else we are doing in the day. Maria grumbles somewhat at the new timetable, but can see the sense in it.

Interestingly, Maria has announced that she is taking a keener interest in local politics this term. I was quite agreeably surprised in our first term, that she has not turned out a soap-box politician keen to push her Party line on the rest of us. In fact, she has been keeping her eyes and ears open and her mouth generally shut – by now, she is rather surer of her political footing.

One thing that she mentioned this morning, was that she is raising herself as a "Female Bull", an odd phrase that I was not too sure translated properly into English. Helen pressed her for an explanation – it indeed sounds the sort of thing that Prudence's dorm enjoy, but it actually has quite a different meaning (and indeed, Maria is very interested in gentlemen such as Jirry's eldest brother). There is a tradition of her female relatives taking up leading roles – quite natural for some people but nothing we need a separate word for. A Female Bull, she tells me, is not expected to emphasise the more tender aspects of life – they may certainly marry, but are quite liable to be the breadwinner.

Anyway, Maria is deep in a copy of the "Daily Elele", looking at the published meeting dates of the local government on Meeting Island, the Althing. They have a press and public gallery for some meetings, which she is keen on having a look at. Saturdays are our time for shopping, as we can just spare time on the way to the dance school to pick up books and newspapers.

Hurrah for the Dance School! We had a splendid and strenuous time, happily returning to Authentic local costume, which is far more comfortable in the heat. No separate bathing costumes are needed; after classes the whole group ran straight down across the beach into the surf for a splendidly refreshing swim. This seems to be quite popular with the tourists too – at any rate, I noticed one of the Dance School staff making a brisk trade in very overpriced camera film as we dashed down the hill to the beach, costume rather swinging in the breeze.

Dear Diary – despite having authentic Costume, I think I will rearrange my head-fur in a more Native style. One never knows who sees pictures tourists send home, and although one grows accustomed to the minimal local dress, having someone recognise me in it could prove – embarrassing.

On the way back to the docks we fell in with our third-year chums Noota and Daphne, who have been working in the evenings with our old innkeepers the Tanoaho family at their scrap warehouse. We have hardly spoken to them yet, and it seems they have had quite as exciting an Easter as our own, prospecting on Cranium Island. Noota shows some rather bleached fur, a little ruefully, and tells us they are practicing refining some of the ores they brought back, being chemically similar to Radium should they ever find any. The Tanoaho's warehouse is full of pitchblende ore, and they are refining it into a sort of yellow cake, handy for pottery glaze if nothing else. The metal is far too difficult to extract in pure form, but from all accounts is heavy enough to make very effective novelty paperweights. Unfortunately, Daphne's films were stored in the cargo hold next to the ore, and seem to have been quite spoilt with fogging.

The Cranium Island expedition sounds like it was fun, with a two-week jungle trek, an awful lot of exploration and the thrill of discovering several rich seams of various exotic ores. Perhaps next year we might join a similar expedition – the sort of thing various explorers actively request Songmark girls for. (Although

our own Easter was quite profitable enough – we were “paid” in our room and board, fish being far more useful than Uranium any day.)

Thinking of events in the holidays, I found something unexpected in our letter tray when we returned – a postcard from London (Whitehall postmark, no return address.) Although it was unsigned, I recognised Sopy Forsythe’s writing – something of a “Wish you were here” card, mentioning she knows how to reward true loyalties, and her Department will see that I get what I deserve. Nice of her to think of us!

13th May 1935

A whole week back already – and the Summer term seems much pleasanter than I had feared. After returning from Church, Maria sought out Miss Devinski and begged Passes off her for Wednesday evening, and a trip to Meeting Island to see the local Government in action. Surprisingly, the passes were approved – with the proviso that we hand in a two-page report (each) on what we saw and our thoughts on it.

One reason Maria is consulting me on local politics is our discovery that the Daily Elele prints two editions – there is one printed in the local Spontoonie language, which is not advertised, and seems to be mostly privately delivered. Although it covers the same stories mostly, it puts what I think is a very different slant on matters. For instance, the film section seems to be written not by regular theatre critics but by the locals who work on the films, shooting and developing (there are quite extensive editing studios on Casino Island.)

I well recall how we happily avoided bumping into Little Shirley Shrine shooting her latest epic two weeks ago – before the studios in California have the final edit in their paws, it is being reviewed here – and rather candidly. The first line I translate as, “*When Little Shirley danced and sang in “Stand Up And Yip!”, a nation reeling from the Depression staggered a step closer to utter collapse...*” The rest of the review is somewhat less enthusiastic.

Maria is attempting to draw up charts of the local government, who seem to be rather highly organised for an anarcho-syndicalist “State”. She seems rather puzzled how the place actually works, in that they have well-publicised elections but no actual political parties. Indeed, she is trying to make sense of it relative to her Uncle’s way of governing, which is heading to the purer version of “One Citizen one Vote” – he being the Citizen. I rather doubt the two systems are really talking in the same language.

It feels very strange to be defending the local system against Maria, I must say. After all, Spontoon being an ally of the Rain Island State, which broke away from our Empire in such bizarre circumstances, one should morally disapprove of it. Still – unexpected benefits may spring from unlikely sources – back home, had Lord M not been assassinated by Anarchists in the street, his party might well have lost the election.

One wonders just how stable an Anarchist government is; the local one seems to have been more or less in its present form for forty years, but the world outside is changing, including presumably the Althing. All things come to an end in time.

Early to bed, having checked our timetables and spotted some very strenuous lessons tomorrow. By the sound of bodies slammed against walls, enraged mouse squeals and Missy K’s Spontoonie oaths from across the corridor, they are having a leadership contest of their own.

Maria was much amused, and recounted tales that her Uncle has told of one of his friends – whose political Party keeps getting pestered with candidates wanting promotions. Apparently they write into headquarters saying things like “*I would make a much better local leader than the present one, and the men are all behind me.*” To which the reply is always “*So what are you asking us for? If you’re the best and the men are with you, TAKE control – and let us know when you have.*” Definitely a case of Social Darwinism in action, saving the fuss of electioneering.

14th May 1935

A rather – unusual start to the week. We were all booked for medical checkups in the morning, and indeed our Tutors have to be assured that we are all sound in wind and limb before taking us out for the summer term timetable (I noticed both Beryl and Missy K were looking definitely the worse for wear, though neither were reporting any bones broken.) Apart from our usual Matron Mrs. Oelabe, there was a lady doctor over from Casino Island, whom I had not met before.

Miss Devinski called me over discreetly to her office, and asked if I would be interested in having a rather fuller checkup than usual this time. She passed over a note that she had received from Jerry’s mother, asking if I was in the fullest of health – and Miss Devinski rather candidly elaborated what one of the Native phrases meant. Oh my. I remember Jerry’s Mother being highly approving of me, and then there was that little misunderstanding in the Christmas holidays as to my adding to the Hoele’toemi family. Mrs. Hoele’toemi seems to have quite got it into her head that sooner or later I will be presenting her with grandchildren.

I fear my ears blushed somewhat brightly. But though I assured my Tutor (much to her relief) that I had no plans in that direction, it would be nice to be assured that I could if I wanted to. Miss Devinski

mentioned that three of our Third years and one of my year would be doing the same, though she named no names.

However – I was not surprised to hear Missy K in our Matron's office ahead of me – she has a somewhat loud voice when emotional, and although she spoke in Spontoonie, I could not miss her mentioning having a longhouse all ready if needed. I recall seeing her fiancé at the Dance class, and blushed at Helen's description of the finer qualities of such mink gentlemen. Further, in answering some question that I did not quite catch, Missy K retorted that she and her fiancé were Tailfast already – "Tailfast" being the literal translation. Then the door slammed open and my classmate stormed out, though not before I noticed her tucking into her bag what looked like a ring made of braided fur in two contrasting colours. Fascinating!

Actually, things were less embarrassing than I had feared; I seem to be in good shape for all eventualities – and the doctor, Mrs. Unity Monotega, put me quite at my ease. I found time to ask some questions that had been puzzling me for some time, since I noticed what the Native girls on the fishing boat carried in their travel bags. Although by necessity they traveled light, most of them packed a dense soft sponge and a small tub of what looked like toothpaste, but I was told was finely ground lime.

Doctor Monotega explained in rather comprehensive detail, that it was a Traditional method of taking Precautions, but not one that I should rely on alone – and gave me some rather graphic advice should I feel inclined to follow that Tradition. She showed me some fascinating medical pamphlets, noted that the technique will do with feline gentlemen but not certain other types, and described why. Amazing what one learns! Thinking of new information, I felt like asking about Missy K's braided ring of fur, but naturally she might not discuss another patient with me.

After luncheon, we walked round the mile and more to the North end of the island, with the Radio LONO transmitters towering above us on the hilltop. There is a band of low inland cliffs that hardly features on the map – more like a quarry bank, scarcely twenty feet high at most but well over a hundred yards long. We spent the day climbing, starting on the smaller boulders, Miss Wildford and Miss Pelton coaching us and sympathizing very slightly when we fell off.

Although I am quite good at tree climbing, this was rather different, and decidedly fun! Missy K was on the rock next to me, but despite being powerfully built, she is quite the wrong shape to press close to a rock face. Li Han and Sophie D'artagnan fairly ran up everything in sight, much to our tutors' applause. We will be getting on to ropes and such later on, but are starting with the basics - one cannot rely on equipment to stay out of trouble, wits and technique are things you are sure to be always carrying when needed.

16th May 1935

Quite an evening – after a morning of strenuous navigation exercises and an afternoon of swimming, we headed out, with Passes in hand to Meeting Island. Only our second real trip there since we met Jirry's aunt at the sanitarium and learned the facts about the Gunboat Wars that are not written in the tourist brochures.

Meeting Island is something like twice the area of Casino Island, but far less built-up. The top of the island seems flat, as only from the air one can spot the ancient volcanic crater where the hospital and its strange annex are hidden in the trees. The headquarters of the Althing is a modern-looking stone building, built in the proportions of a native longhouse, its doors guarded by two huge Tiki sculptures frowning down on visitors.

Actually, it is quite pleasant inside, with a press and public gallery looking over the main debating chamber. The meeting's subjects are printed in the Spontoonie edition of the Daily Elele, as well as being posted on the wall – alas, tonight we only had the thrilling subject of Casino Island's growing sanitation problem, and how it affects the beaches in Tourist season.

Helen has mentioned attending meetings at local Government buildings back in Texas (her Father being called on to testify on committees on oilfield safety) and recounts how they always start by singing the National Anthem. I confess I have not noticed Spontoon having one – and suggested "Althings Bright and Beautiful".

Although the minutes of the meetings are posted in the corridors outside, the actual discussions were all in the local language – it was rather tricky to give Maria any sort of running commentary, as there was no time to look any of the words up. I still have Soppo's phrasebook, as she left it with us and seems unlikely to need it again. I listened hard for details of the "Waterworks Project" – but of course there are ways of talking about such things in public view, that I would have to be far more fluent to spot. And anyway, I am decidedly NOT going to be telling Maria what I know about the South Islands works.

We were almost the only folk in Euro clothing in the viewing gallery, with just a couple of reporters including the one who did such a highly coloured account of our Dance contest. She spotted us and was over in a flash, notebook in hand, eager for a follow-up. Alas, we had little to tell Miss Aha, except that we have been challenged by a team from South Island – friends of the Netball team that Prudence Akroyd and her dorm are on such good terms with. Not the hottest news story, but on an island chain this size one supposes there is little local news to be had some days.

Back to Songmark just before the gates closed, and on to write up our reports – the price of passes, alas. Our short-wave radios keep us in touch with the rest of the world, despite the time difference – the actually European “Euros” here must wait till nearly midnight to catch the lunchtime news from Home, with the sounds of Big Ben and that nice Mister Joyce reading the BBC news from London. I have been trying to help Helen with her accent by having her repeat what she hears exactly (she has noticed folk can spot her West Texas drawl in two seconds flat, which might be a giveaway in some situations). Alas – just as our instructors in the metalwork shops tell us, alloying two very different ingredients can have very surprising results. Helen trying to speak polite English, comes out as something almost but not quite – Australian!

18th May 1935

Hooray! After our afternoon swim, who should drop by but Jirry and some of his friends – an occasion for a visit to Song Sodas, under the watchful eye of the staff. I had definitely missed him – and now with the tourist season and the Summer term in full swing, there is little enough free time for either of us.

By his account, the local members of the film team have been really earning their pay, with Little Shirley Shrine throwing temper tantrums at every possible moment – except when there is a camera around, when she looks angelic as her film posters. Still, she is from a show business family, and the film crew are assured that her first word was not “Mama” but “Agent!”

Relaxing with dear Jirry for the first time in two weeks, I could not help but think of the Native families I had met on South Island – the pups and kittens of Little Shirley’s age being certainly loud and energetic, but almost uniformly cheerful and good-natured. Even more impressive, the various ... adopted members of the tribe, whose fur patterns proclaim them to have been unexpected souvenirs from Euro visitors, seem to have exactly the same disposition.

To be honest – Little Shirley might not have her name in lights had she joined them, but I think she would have a much happier existence. Having fame and fortune is very nice, but from all accounts she has absolutely nothing else.

I asked Jirry about the braided tail fur that Missy K had been displaying proudly while claiming to be “Tailfast” with her fiancé. Jirry thought it over for awhile, and explained it to me in rather a low voice. It is one of the Traditions that the Spontoonies picked up from the original Pacific islanders, and do not mention in public guides. It is something like an engagement ring, but not permanent – renewed twice a year, it signifies love and the social acceptance of the bond. So her fiancé’s family accepts Missy K, even without any obligation that the two will marry someday.

Despite the occasional glance cast our way by one of the staff, I hugged him rather tightly, having guessed the basics. I might have wished for a more romantic setting, but asked there and then if he would consent to be “Tailfast” with me, at least for a trial. Considering it is on six monthly renewals, it is not as if we were getting Engaged, which would of course change everything (and need some probably rather embarrassing letters written Home.)

Jirry looked rather stricken at the thought – and his whiskers decidedly drooped. He told me that he would very much like to – but there is a problem. To be official, it takes place at one of the twice-yearly main ceremonies of the Native religion – and my attendance record at the Reverend Bingham’s church is sadly NOT transferable.

Oh dear.

19th May 1935

I fear I rather moped this morning, until we went out to Casino Island for a rather fine session at the Dance classes, where we are learning some more advanced interpretations. I had seen strange categories of dancing advertised, and wondered what a “satirical” hula might look like. Now I know!

In our own routines, I found myself putting a lot more energy into the moves, feeling rather frustrated after yesterday (Jirry being called away after half an hour by the rest of his film team for some urgent scene-shifting.) Maria was looking rather aghast at trying to keep up, though Helen and Molly seemed to be enjoying the change of pace. We were highly commended by our instructor, who assures us that if we can keep it up for the big dance challenge next month, we should be in with a good chance.

For a change, we had late passes to stay and watch one of the contests after class – Miss Wildford was there to watch, and waved us farewell as evening fell, leaving us to return to Market Square Plaza and the water-taxis home. The four of us were heading towards the main docks there when Molly’s ears pricked up, as she heard sounds of trouble. Sprinting round the corner, we saw one of the oldest docks closed for repairs – and a young Native lady, struggling with a bag-snatcher, a rather scruffy-looking ferret in a blue sailor’s jacket.

I confess that I should have taken a second to confer on tactics with my friends, but as Maria would say, I “saw red” and left them behind. The bag-snatcher turned to lunge at me, and I noticed he was rather bigger and far more muscled than I had thought – and I was obviously blocking his escape.

Dear Diary – I’m not sure whether to be proud of myself or not. He came right at me on the edge of the dock, just as in self-defence classes. I dived low as he lunged, grabbing his knife arm and almost felt our lessons kicking in as I jackknifed upright and threw him, still grabbing his arm. He went flying towards the edge of the dock – as I threw myself down to pin his arm right on the edge with my full weight as the rest of him headed for the drop. I heard and felt things beneath me snap and give way as I rolled off to complete the move and he plunged twenty feet into the low-tide mud below.

Well! Of all people, Molly was the one who had dived into the nearest telephone booth and called the Police – without of course saying who she was (we have noticed the Police here are rather prejudiced against her family.) In five minutes two constables had arrived, fished the assailant out of the mud and handcuffed him to a stretcher, as they took statements from all of us.

When I had stopped panting, I introduced us to the Native lady we had rescued. She is a type I had not seen before, slender with rather canine ears but a very long banded tail – her fur elsewhere being gray and nicely patterned with almost rectangular brown patches. She introduced herself as Nuala, and thanked us all profusely – she has a Native accent, though with something else in the background.

We had to leave urgently, as the time limit on our Passes was almost up, and water taxis are less frequent after dark. I did not really want to have to explain to Miss Devinski that we were “assisting the Police with their enquiries” again, after being locked up myself once already.

Straight back to Songmark with hardly a minute to spare before the compound closed for the night (several of the third-years were on duty, but they show no mercy to first-years caught breaking the rules.)

20th May 1935

Dear Diary – do our Tutors know Everything that happens on these islands the minute after? At any rate, Miss Devinski had heard everything about last night’s adventures – and summoned me straight after breakfast for a “quiet word.” Oh my. She awarded me ten points for chivalry, ten for good use of self-defence skills – and minus a hundred for lack of planning and common sense. Our dorm suddenly sinks to the bottom of the ratings. Miss Devinski rather rubbed it in by commenting that she was fining me twice as much as she would have Molly for doing the same, as I should not only know better, but should be setting an example as head of my dorm. Ow. Or as Prudence Akroyd puts it so inelegantly, “Ow with knobs on!”

I can see what she means, but I think it jolly unfair. Still – I had to tell Molly, Helen and Maria the bad news, and they rallied round splendidly, Maria especially. We are “sentenced” to five hours a week extra self-defence drill, for a month, an hour every day before breakfast – our Tutors’ comment being that if I insist in getting into fights, I should be very certain I can win them. That was not the idea at all!

Not surprisingly, Beryl has formed an instant attachment to us, and is asking what our next “raid” is going to be. I have tried explaining things to her, but she just winks and taps her snout slyly. She has been really quite restrained so far, despite the struggles with Missy K that tend to end up with Beryl being thoroughly sat on (physically as well as morally.) Beryl has offered to teach me all sorts of dirty tricks, which I will not be requiring – and anyway, I doubt there is any such thing as the “Cheltenham Death Grip.”

Beryl is not joining the Church parties today, as the Religion section of her application form she tells us she cheerfully filled in as “Recidivist”, a religion I confess I had not heard of. Maria thinks it is giving the game away just a little, to inquire not what religion the churches we attend have, but whether any of them have lead roofs.

Anyway – out to Casino Island today, my ears still smarting from the severe telling-off, but determined to make the most of our opportunities. The sermon was an interesting one, the parable of the Farmer’s wife and the travelling salesman, and indeed it is a pity Beryl is not here to appreciate it. Reverend Bingham tries so very hard to make his lessons interesting, but I fear he is mostly preaching to the converted.

Leaving the church I had a surprise – though Jirry was absent putting up sound stages on Main Island, his two sisters Saimmi and Moeli were waiting for me, the first time in months I had met them. In fact, I have never seen them near the Euro churches before, although their brothers are regular members of the congregation. Moeli is looking exceedingly rounded, and tells me she is expecting next month. She seems very happy at the prospect, and hugged me most affectionately.

Saimmi had a quiet word with our tutor Miss Pelton, who somewhat grudgingly granted me an extra half-hour. Jirry’s sisters steered me to a very nice leafy arbor looking out over South Island, and we had a decidedly – interesting talk. It seems that Jirry mentioned our problem to his sisters, but as he sees me every Sunday in church, cannot think of a way round it. Saimmi, being a junior priestess of the local Religion, has her own ideas about that.

Saimmi suggests that I try the outer part of her traditions, which should not conflict much with my usual Sunday worship – though she hints that the inner core of it would need rather more radical adjustments.

She mentions there is a gallery in the Museum of Anthropomorphology that is labeled somewhat deceptively, in that the Natives and Tourists are not quite seeing the same thing when they look at the same exhibits.

I took quite some time deciding – but after all, Jirry goes to both Religions, and even back home in Barsetshire there are many fascinating country festivals that do not feature in any official Church calendar. Some of them, by odd coincidence, even seem to be on the same dates as the Spontoonie ones. At any rate, just learning about their folklore and traditions should be perfectly all right, and even in the inner core of the religion I doubt folk throw sacrifices into volcanoes these days (though I am happier knowing that there are no active volcanoes for several hundred miles.)

I waved farewell to the Hoele'toemi girls, who suggested I keep my new lessons a surprise for Jirry – and it is no means guaranteed that I will be accepted, so it would be a pity to disappoint him should I fail.

I was heading down to the docks in something of a hurry, not really looking where I was going, when I bumped into a Native gentleman – Mr. Sapohatan, whom I had last seen the day Sobby Forsythe departed us in such a hurry. Quite a coincidence, certainly. He was polite as ever, and congratulated me on capturing a much-hunted criminal in such a decisive manner, and helping out Miss Rachorska. I must have looked rather blank at that name, until he mentioned it was the long-tailed girl I had helped out.

I had to point out that I was in a hurry – but Mr. Sapohatan mentioned he was heading to Eastern Island anyway, and hailed us a water-taxi. Oddly enough, one came right away, despite three groups of tourists in front of us on the dock furiously waving sheaves of money trying to attract the boatmen's attention.

It was the second mysterious and rather cryptic conversation in an hour, as he complimented me on my excellent training. He added that "Crusher" O'Hanrahan would not be extorting money from anyone else for a long time to come – apart from the lengthy jail sentence, there is the matter of compound arm fractures and multiple dislocations, plus a broken jaw from hitting the jetty on the way down. Oh dear.

I apologized for my over-enthusiasm, but Mr. Sapohatan laughingly waved that aside. Looking at me square on, he informed me very seriously that the Island's prosperity rested on keeping a good reputation, and that the Police were just the most obvious means they used. In fact, he intimated that there were some "little jobs" that he would be grateful if I might help with, suited to my qualifications and entirely legal.

We were getting close to Eastern Island by that time, and naturally I told him I could hardly give him a yes or no answer right away. He nodded assent, and handed me a card with simply a Post Box number on it, oddly enough without any other address – and intimated that anything sent to him in the local post would reach him First Class if not sooner.

(Later) I pulled Helen aside when we were running the shower, and told her of my afternoon's adventures. Helen looked rather worried – but admitted that it could be a good sign if the Authorities want to use our talents. As long as they are talking, she says, they at least can be warning us to stay clear of any danger areas. (Dangerous for us, that is.)

21st May 1935

Back in the cockpit, the first flights since before Easter! The weather was scorching, and we almost boiled away in our flight suits as we pre-flighted our aircraft. Just to irritate us further, Miss Pelton gave us all a quiz about how long a take-off run we would need in the heat (it is ninety-three in the shade today, and on the runway there is no shade.)

With the back seat laden with water ballast, I took more than four hundred yards to "unstick", feeling the engine labouring as if it was panting for breath like the rest of us. Happily, there were fierce thermals at the edge of the runway, and once airborne I was soon in the cooler air at a thousand feet. Sophie D'artagnan was right behind me and we joined formation with Madelene X – both of them being canines, their ears and tongues hanging out in the slipstream with evident enjoyment. Most unladylike.

Our flight plan called for us to fly three circuits of the island in a "Vic" of three, but apart from keeping clear of the commercial seaplane takeoff areas, did not exactly specify how far to go. So I took us down to a hundred feet and did a low-level run of Sacred Island, slowing right down for a good look as we skimmed the trees. Fascinating! Although from afar it looks like nothing but densely packed jungle, there are ancient-looking stone buildings buried in the trees, one of them right on the summit of the island. It looks like the natural stone of the island, being improbably huge to have been carried there, with formidable-looking Tikis surrounding it. More are spaced out along the beach on the Eastern side, hidden from the rest of the island chain.

Still – appearing too interested might cause even more unwelcome questions to be asked than usual, so we climbed back on course and completed our flight plan. I rather doubt Madelene X would give me a minute's peace if she knew what I have planned – effectively, talking with Missionaries from the native religion. She really hates that sort of idea.

Madelene X soon had her own troubles, as she had unfastened her flying helmet to let her ears blow free, and it blew off while we were still over the water! Not the sort of item one can buy off the shelf, as she has

a longer muzzle than most canines, and needs hand-fitting. Moral of tale – if one has protection available one should use it, or sorely regret it.

Much shaking of heads and a ticking-off from our Tutors, though being banned from flying till a suitable replacement is air-freighted over here is far greater punishment for Madelene. She is decidedly ordering in a spare helmet on the same order, and is fuming as she looks at the delivery schedules (four days from Rain Island even if it was a stock item!)

Indeed, our Tutors, though very up-to-date, do rather rule us with what they call in scripture a “rod of iron.” Back home, old McCardle did the same with the other servants, though even he moves with the times. (Actually, he bent so many rods of iron in the course of his duties that Father arranged an upgrade. He now rules with a rod of chrome-manganese steel.)

22nd May, 1934

Out to Casino Island, with the rest of the class. Our Tutors took us around the Museum of Anthropomorphology, although it was not timetabled. Still, there is a new exhibit hall just opened this tourist season, and we are all very keen to see it. Except Missy K, who affects to be bored stiff with the whole thing.

We saw the famous Fire Crystal, and had its fascinating story related to us. Beryl was looking at it with rather round eyes – until Molly elbowed her rather sharply in the ribs and pointed out that a “rock” like that is known all over the world, and would be totally impossible to “fence”. Plus there is the story of what happened to the last four people to steal it – not legend this, but attested by rather graphic newspaper reports exhibited next to the case as deterrent.

I kept my eyes open more than usual, as we looked around the new exhibit hall, on “Myths and Legends of the Islands.” A very curious place. There were photographs showing the legendary mer-folk, with dolphin-like rear ends instead of legs, and showing “convincing proof” of them in sensational newspaper articles. The Museum had obtained the negatives of some of the pictures, and had clear illustrations pointing out in detail how they were faked. One of the displays had pictures of the film set of “Water Babes” showing just how the very convincing special effects were achieved.

Very odd indeed. Although the photographs on display certainly were forged, I have definitely seen something around these islands that was very real. Most of the tourists will be sure to go away from this exhibition convinced that anything they see is another film company shooting on location. There were special-effect Merfolk models on display, of various species, that companies had left behind on completing the films (as Helen points out, if she was a film director she would have no use for a Merfolk model back in Texas, and air freighting life-sized models home would be expensive.)

Coming out of the museum, I heard a friendly hail, and spotted Nuala and a well-dressed older Euro lady, who she introduced as her mother, the Countess Rachorska. Adopted, I should have thought – having enquired, I judge Nuala is an Asian linsang, and her mother is a definite silver-grey Russian wolf. The countess was very grateful for our help, and indeed invited my dorm round to dine with her this Saturday – our Tutor agreeing.

Well! Although acquiring Beryl may not have raised the tone of things this term, being invited to meet nobility should certainly do the trick. One wonders why the Countess settled here and not on Vostok with the rest of her exiled country folk – by all accounts there is a regular Court set up there, and even their equivalent to small country squires are funded and pensioned.

(Later). I was chatting with our third-year friends Noota and Erica after supper, as they had heard of our dockside encounter and know the Countess and Nuala. Erica is of course a wolf herself, and told me a very strange and shocking tale. The generally known story is that Countess Rachorska fled Russia with the Bolsheviks in hot pursuit, and left Vladivostok with only what she wore and had in her pockets. Presumably the boat was aiming for Vostok, but was sunk by pirates in mid-ocean, and the Countess was their captive on one of the islands for nearly a year before making her escape. Arriving in Spontoon in 1918, she took up needlework to support herself – and in a few months Nuala as well.

Oh my – I had actually noticed that Nuala’s ears do look very wolf-like, and her fur is wolf-grey despite the patterning. That would explain why the Countess never rejoined fashionable Society on Vostok – by all accounts their Nobility is exceedingly fussy on matters of pedigree, and would not be at all happy to have Nuala around. Having Cossack forebears seems to be perfectly acceptable, but I doubt that any percentage of China Sea Pirate would be acceptable over there, regardless of the – circumstances.

Noota looked rather wistful, and mentioned that the Countess now runs the biggest silk and satin dressmakers on the island, and provides a lot of the film costumes and showgirl’s outfits for the more sophisticated shows. She hints that some of it is rather “interesting” – but well out of her price range.

24th May, 1935

A damp day indeed – pouring with rain as we get up for our two hours early exercise (the dance practice gets us nicely limbered-up for the self-defence classes, which one of our Tutors checks up on now and then.) Despite the weather, we were scheduled for some safety lessons, with the new inflatable life jackets. Our old cork-filled ones are insufferably bulky, and swelteringly hot on the ground, even if they do give some helpful padding against bumps and bruises.

So, all five dorms of us dripped our way down to the local docks just by Superior Engineering, with Miss Wildford cheerfully reminding us we would be getting wetter shortly. (The Staff seem to have equipped themselves with very effective waterproofs.) After all the scorching days we have had this week, today would have to be the one without sunshine, as we take turns to jump off the jetty and inflate our life-vests. Which smell very objectionably of new rubber.

Just when we had taken a dozen drops each, and were ready to head back, Miss Wildford waved us towards the airstrip again and announced an extra “treat” for us. The Rain Island air force had sent over another squadron of their old Barling Bombers with which we had trained on parachuting last term – and this time there were no parachutes!

One can quite see why they left this part as a surprise – had we been told earlier that we would be shivering wet in the hold of a Barling thundering along forty feet above the waves and expected to jump out, our Tutors might have had one of those class riots that Beryl tells us were a daily event at her old school. As it was, it was too late to do more than complain by the time the old six-engined bomber was rolling down the runway, climbing even more sluggishly than ever with the weight of water on its fabric.

Quite an experience! To give them credit, our Tutors had us dropped on the lee side of Eastern Island, with four water-taxis booked to stand offshore and pick us up. But forty feet is an awful drop without a ‘chute, and I must have almost touched the sea bottom before I started to rise to the surface. “Flight” magazine has mentioned that proper Air Force issue vests inflate from compressed gas cylinders – next time I must try and get one. Blowing through a stiff rubber tube while trying to keep one’s head above water in a rolling swell, is not the easiest of exercises.

(Later) Busy translating the local newspapers for Maria, who is about a month behind us in language proficiency. One difference between the Euro and Spontoonie versions of the “Daily ‘Elele” is the huge quantity of domestic details they go into – naturally, the tourists are hardly going to be interested in the price per load of coconuts, which oddly enough seem to be entirely imported. It seems the session of the Thing that we attended, decided in the end to give some funds for a trial sanitation project. Generator oil is expensive here, and the prospect of being able to kill two birds with one coconut and make fuel gas from wastes appeals to the local rate-payers.

Actually, I must ask Jirry if I have the translation quite right – what I think it says, is that Superior Engineering had some salvaged ship’s boilers surplus, and a certain Doctor Isaac Maranowski (formerly of Ulm) happened to volunteer his services. It seems the good Doctor has had some successes with his “Bio-gas”, and the unfortunate methane explosion which manured half the gardens (and houses) in Ulm was just a one-off, certain not to happen in a tropical climate.

Oddly enough, the advertisement right next to the article was for military surplus respirators and heavy-duty umbrellas.

26th May, 1935

Out after breakfast with an all-day Pass for the four of us, hurrah! We had heard what sounded like what Helen calls a “sure-fire rough-house” from Missy K’s room last night, and at breakfast we discovered why. On having heard about Passes, Beryl got hold of a used one and copied it for herself – without guessing that our Tutors have some central register to check them against. Copying the piece of paper is decidedly not enough – and that dorm will be getting none at all next month, hence Missy K’s fury.

In fact, it has come out that a similar slip was exactly what brought Beryl here – joining her old school demands a criminal record, but she declares getting caught is a sign of incompetence. Which left her with a problem, till she hit upon the idea of forging her record – and all was well for some years until someone else checked the central files and spotted the discrepancy. Which makes Beryl the only girl to have ever been expelled from Saint T’s, in its whole checkered history – certainly an achievement of a kind.

Still, it was fine to leave all that behind for a day, as we mingled with the tourist crowd, dressed in our best Songmark shirts and shorts, everything cleanly pressed and with fur well-brushed. With the odd political system around here, it could be that the Countess Rachorska is the only proper Nobility living on the whole of Spontoon Island – and a luncheon invite is nothing to be taken lightly.

(Ethyl’s bad-tempered twin Methyl has been grumbling that the Pacific is full of fake “nobility” claiming to be from places nobody can pronounce, let alone find on the map. But she’s just what Molly calls “full of pickles” at not being invited.)

Anyway, we found the address easily enough, 137 Aloha Avenue being high up on the hill next to Tower Hill park – a very prestigious site, with a wonderful view over South Island. The Countess opened the door herself – presumably her maids were busy shopping, this being Saturday.

A very elegant place, certainly! If the story Ethyl tells us is true, the Countess has certainly improved her lot by her own hard work – starting in a decidedly unenviable position. After luncheon she invited us in to see her design shops – adding that we could choose any items we wished for ourselves, in gratitude for helping her daughter.

Oh my. Noota was right. The Rachorska Boutique certainly produces items that movie stars might wear, though not visible to the cameras. I fear my ears must have been blushing, even though in actual area of exposed fur I have worn less myself, in Native mode (and Helen and Molly more so.) I definitely believe that showgirls might get their costumes here – for one thing, many of the costumes one would not overheat while dancing in.

Molly and Maria went into agonies of indecision – though Maria requested a catalogue, and I imagine her cheque-book will be getting some exercise soon enough. Helen rather blushed around the ears herself, as neither of us have exactly been brought up with practice in sophisticated fashions (Helen is happiest in a flight suit, and until today the only silk garment she owned was a flying scarf.)

Still, I chose an evening dress, though I rather wonder where I will wear it. Native costume seems perfectly acceptable by now, but wearing such Euro clothing feels a decidedly strange idea. It is quite acceptable to wear a few pawfulls of woven reeds in the jungle or on a fishing boat, but the Rachorska fashions are things of Home, with entirely different associations for me.

The Countess promises to have everything made up to our measurements and posted over by next week – with this much (or little) silk, certainly the postage should be inexpensive!

27th May 1935

Sunday, hurrah! Out again to Easter Island, with the rain fairly hammering down, and the Church crammed with definitely sodden tourists who seem to be dressed entirely for the sunny beaches that appear on the local stamps and postcards. There is a Native umbrella seller just outside the door who is happily boosting the local economy.

After the Reverend Bingham's address and sermon (the parable of the three soldiers and the chorus girl) I met Saimmi outside, decorously dressed in straw cape and hat, and protected further by a palm-leaf parasol. She had a spare apiece for Helen and myself – indeed, Helen has decided to join me in investigating the local beliefs. Though not religious normally, she is thinking of having more to talk about with Marti when they meet.

An interesting trip – only a few hundred yards, over to the Park where we saw the New Year celebrations. Saimmi pointed out the very impressive, indeed cyclopean masonry, and gave us a guided tour of what the fascinating ancient carvings mean. In places there are damaged areas where over-zealous early missionaries tried to remove the more outré designs, but it is still quite a fascinating sort of comic-strip of staggeringly descriptive pictographs.

The local religion is quite a naturalistic one – geared more towards gratitude towards the bounty of their lands and waters, than any complex heavenly hierarchy (Jasbir Sind has been telling us of her own Native religion, but there are hundreds of deities and they all have exceedingly complex lives involving thousands of years. Presumably one achieves Enlightenment the minute one works out the plot.)

Saimmi demonstrated some of her prayers and rituals, but did not suggest we copy her. Still – I have written some of it down in my other notebook, and may yet put it to good use.

*Editor's Note: - the "Other" Notebook is still believed to exist, but was never translated from Amelia's (very strange and proprietary) Lexarc Shorthand!

29th May, 1935

Sunshine at last! Out to Main Island, this time with ropes and spikes to scale some of the smaller basalt cliffs of the North Coast. A very fine morning of swarming up ropes and practicing our knots – knowing that one's life depends on tying the right knot, is a great incentive to Molly, who has a hard time telling a "reef" from a "granny". We managed to scale a very rough-looking crag, sixty feet or more – safely tied in to the top ropes secured by our Tutors.

By lunch-time, the sun was quite scorching, and we were all glad of the break, especially as there is a cliff-diving contest just a mile down the coast. Happily, we saw the whole thing – most impressive. Miss Pelton has mentioned that she has competed herself before now, though she declined Beryl's suggestion to demonstrate and take a running jump. (Beryl is always getting demerits and kitchen duties – even Missy K is having an awful time keeping her in line, and their dorm is on the bottom of the league right now.)

On the way back we stopped at Chiklooha, where we had such adventures around Easter – there were fishing boats out on the horizon, quite possibly the Noenoke family and their friends. Helen must have followed my gaze, as she whispered that given the chance she would be out there in a heartbeat.

Of course, that is the problem – although our Tutors would not actually be after us with the compound dogs should we choose to vanish over the horizon, we would lose huge chunks of marks off our permanent record. By repute the local schools such as the S.I.T.H.S. have folk who can “cut class” as Helen says with no particular punishment as long as they make up the work later – but I remember the rather severe forms we had to sign before Songmark would let us in.

We did promise to stick faithfully to whatever was given to us in the course, if we wanted to graduate – it would be an awful thing to go through three years of hard work and fail the course for bad behavior!

Still – Helen is planning some more unauthorized excursions, and I am decidedly keen on the idea myself. The short nights are something of a problem, but the four of us are sure to think of something.

(Later) Spontoan Island is getting quite famous, in all sorts of ways. Songmark subscribes to a wide range of technical magazines, which are eagerly passed around the students as soon as the air freight gets them here. We subscribe to “Wireless World” as well as its older telegraph based sister publication “Wiry World” – and there is a major article on Radio LONO, with its new direction-finding aerials. We have seen their setup with the new masts past Crater Lake – it seems there is a scheme to put another set on South Island to give all-direction homing. What with the air traffic increasing by the year, a definite improvement.

31st May, 1935

Oh dear. A deer is back, whom I hoped we had seen the last of. We had finished our afternoon’s sport and exercises for the day, rock-climbing on the cliffs of Main Island, and were awaiting the water-taxi at Main Village docks when we heard a familiar hail – and I spotted a very familiar horned silhouette in the crowd. I somewhat stiffened, but Molly did quite the opposite – and practically flew into his arms.

I noticed Beryl looking on, rather interestedly – and briefed her in a few words of what I knew of him. Certainly, I had to warn her to stay clear, it is bad enough with Molly not believing a word of what I know against him.

He certainly looked perfectly at ease, hardly suspicious or hunted – as he introduced himself to Miss Pelton, who noted she had seen him dance in the public competitions. Mr. Lars Nordstrom is exceedingly charming when he wishes to be. In fact, he very gallantly handed Molly five tickets to a “Trade Show” next week, and politely asked our Tutor if we could go.

Molly handed me one of the tickets – and my heart definitely raced, it is the SIRA aeronautical and military trade convention, that the Daily Elele is talking so much about – the general public are excluded, but delegates and guests from all over the world are converging here. Money would not get this.

Miss Pelton waved me over, and whispered that we could get Passes on condition we came back with complete and comprehensive reports – hard work and observation, not sight-seeing. None of our Tutors have tickets – I noticed Beryl looking on amazed that Miss Pelton did not simply take one as her share of the deal.

I fear my tail rather drooped despite the prospect of a super show – had anyone else provided the tickets, I would have been happier. It is what Molly calls “an offer we can’t refuse”, and Mr. Nordstrom certainly knows it.

Anyway – in half an hour we were on the way back to Eastern Island, all the other girls either congratulating us or seething in envy at our good luck.

(Later) Tonight is one of the main Festivals of the Native religion, according to Saimmi. I had asked Missy K about it, but she is in a filthy mood these days since getting stuck with our new arrival, and is no help in getting us out. The sun sets this time of year at nearly half-past seven – and with Jasbir and co. covering us like the good eggs they are, Helen and myself slipped out. Maria wants nothing to do with these particular local customs, and Molly seems just too dreamy-eyed to talk sensibly, let alone plan any serious breakout.

Although Eastern Island is rather “Euro” in most parts, the rather secluded North-Eastern coast is quite hidden from the busy dockside and airport areas, and the lights of Casino Island are on the far side of the hilltop that some folk are calling LONO hill after the aerials that crown it. We followed the instructions Saimmi had given us on Sunday, and soon found the festival and shrine, within sight of the low cliffs we practice not falling off three days a week. Fascinating! About fifty locals were there, and we were allowed to watch the festival and take part in some of it. It is just like the merry folk festivals back Home, except the thing they dance round is not a maypole.

Back before Midnight, having seen something that the tourists decidedly do not. Quite a sight!

- Editor’s Note: - we can assume the exact details are in the second Notebook. Anyone proficient in deciphering extinct Shorthand systems, please contact our Agents!

2nd June 1935

Off to Casino Island, for more intensive work at the dance classes – our early-morning starts are certainly paying off, though it leaves us particularly hungry (the regular timetable is strenuous enough, and we have two hours a day more than any other dorm.) So our dashes back to Eastern Island after class generally include a stop at a fish stall – I am getting a definite taste for the local Popatohi dish. Molly has a diet counter in the back of her diary, and works out to her amazement that we must be getting through four thousand calories a day, yet our waistlines if anything have reduced. Unlike our shoulders, which would definitely not fit my old St. Winifred uniform any more.

Just one more week till our dance challenge against the Althing Gate High School, over on Meeting Island! Our dance teacher is giving us some more advanced lessons – and we are practicing diligently. Maria says we shall “Dominate them with our steel wills and crush their vain hopes as with a fist of iron” but she is always saying things like that. She gets it from her Uncle, I believe.

On the way home, we ran into Nuala again, dressed in a very dashing but rather minimal costume – certainly it suited the weather, which was scorching. I asked if she worked at her Mother’s dressmaking business – but she tells me she is in Entertainment. As a singer or dancer, I expect, though Helen and Molly seemed to find it highly amusing. Anyway, whatever her specialty might be, she says it is organised in typical Spontoonie style as a worker’s cooperative, with profit sharing and cooperation for mutual protection amongst all its members.

Well! What with Jirry’s family on South Island and the Noenokes at sea, we really seem to be making contacts all over the islands these days. I shall surely miss this when returning home for the summer holidays, just six weeks away.

Nuala is exceedingly grateful to us for helping her out, and invited us out to a party tomorrow night – alas, first-years at Songmark do not get Passes for such things. Maria looks quite wistful, as she is accustomed to staying out to all hours, surrounded by high fashion and jollity – although one can scarcely credit it, she claims to have been dancing till dawn on several grand occasions.

We mentioned that we would be attending the SIRA exhibition and conference next week – and there is by all accounts a very lively party after that most years, where we might shed our Songmark uniforms and put on the party frocks and such that arrived this morning courtesy of the Countess. Nuala says she will be attending, as she and her friends always do a lot of business with the conference attendees. I assume she means dances and such.

I must say, Nuala is really very – exotic in appearance, quite unlike any of the other folk we have met in the islands so far. According to the books, Civet cats are natives of the shores and jungles around the South China Sea, and rarely spread much. In her dress I noticed she has leather patches where she sits – a most curious fashion. She spotted my gaze and laughed, explaining she has musk oil glands there, which would stain fabrics and furnishings through any normal cloth. Fascinating! Not only do most Spontoonies have very manageable clothing bills, but one at least has no need to buy perfume.

The Entertainments trade looks like it must be running flat-out this time of year, all the hotels are full to overflowing, and Casino Island seems one great mass of dances and theatres. Nuala mentions having seen the latest Little Shirley Shrine film already, “Good Ship Sherbet Dip” * which she claims is very tolerable if watched for laughs and not as the director intended. I will take her word for it.

- (Editor’s note: pencilled in plain text in the margin is what seems to be a jingle from the show:
“On the good ship, Sherbet Dip/ It’s a sweet sail, for a pleasure trip
As we sail away/ For happy landing in a coconut bay
All the dance girls, wear grass skirts/ and the boys are - light on shirts
They’re pleased to, say hello / and toast you lightly in their Volcano!”

One assumes that the first two lines are from the actual film, and the second two are just wishful thinking after having seen it...)

3rd June 1935

Just two days to go to the great Exhibition, hurrah ! We had returned yesterday to find a heavy squareish parcel awaiting Molly, wrapped in olive-green ribbon. I heard her whoop with delight three rooms away, when she unpacked it. Someone had sent Molly a whole box of ammunition, one hundred rounds of 13 mm sized for my T-Gew rifle! Of course, today is the day she practices with it over on Moon Island while the rest of us head out to Church.

I rather think I know who sent this – sending Molly flowers would get nowhere with her (the islands are laden with flowers) and chocolates are more a messy hazard than a treat in this weather. (Except of course the “tropical chocolate” we are issued with for the aircraft survival kits, which is more like compressed cocoa powder). Thinking about it, a certain stag seems to have hit upon the perfect gift for Molly, as if he needed anything more to gain her affections. I have almost given up on trying to convince her about him – and only hope she does not find out the truth the hard way.

Molly very generously gave me half her present, pointing out it is of course my rifle. I accepted with good grace, though I would have been happier had it come from another source.

Still, I left her looking more cheerful than I had seen her for some time, showing off her new present to Beryl, who had been trying to upstage her with a new subscription of "Practical Trench Knife Weekly", which had arrived yesterday. One hopes our Tutors might mention something about unladylike behavior, I am getting tired of trying to civilize Molly myself! Some folk seem to not have been brought up so much as dredged up.

Off out to Church, keen to see what sermon the Reverend Bingham has for our edification. Indeed, we were not disappointed – the Parable of the Fisherman and the Steam-Shovel was really quite a story. One sees a few Spontoonies in the congregation, but I fear they only come in on the same terms as Nuala admits to watching Little Shirley Shrine. Spontoon seems a very poor prospect for any ambitious clergy trying to claw their way up to become a Very Reverend based on numbers of conversions.

Saimmi was waiting outside for us, and showed us some more fascinating folk rituals. She hinted that the large statues are more than they seem, on a number of levels, and that the truth about what is commonly referred to as the Tiki God, would astound the world. There are Tikis all over the island, some of which are just tourist props and some of which are definitely not – and already I am learning to spot the difference.

Apart from the religious side of things, Saimmi has many fascinating tales of plain folklore. Some of it is definitely based on fact, such as the one night of the year when all the coral in the reef "blooms" at once. The Natives never go swimming that night, as it is Taboo across the whole Pacific. Helen murmured something about even coral polyps needing some privacy, which is less unbelievable than the tale Saimmi followed up with, about the fate of a vain fisher girl who broke the taboo. That pulp magazine "Weird Tails" that Ethyl reads has some local rivals in the art of strange stories, to be sure. I very much doubt it would be biologically possible, anyway.

(Later) It could be called "Looking a gift horse in the mouth", but looking carefully at the new ammunition, it struck me as very oddly made indeed. The bullets are much lighter than my old ones, and an unusual silvery-grey in colour. Helen and I investigated in the machine shops, taking one of them apart. Quite a head-scratcher, this puzzle – most of the bullet seems to be magnesium, but the core is a rod of dense, hard steel that our hacksaw hardly scratched. The proof of the pudding is in the eating they say, and it should be interesting to see what these do on the firing range this Thursday.

Molly is grinning ear to ear, having tried a dozen rounds, but only revealing they are "hot stuff", and that we are in for a surprise when we next visit the ranges for self-defence classes. Although one hesitates to agree with the girl we knew as Sopy Forsythe, she was right about one thing - Molly's idea of self-defence starting at a mile range might be just a little excessive.

5th June, 1935

A big day, indeed – the first time we have ever been given Passes letting us off class. True, the class was a swimming exercise which we are hardly in need of – and the SIRA conference is just once a year, and very exclusive. Miss Devinski had us in for inspection, and did everything but run us over with a fine comb looking for faults. Happily I had prepared us, remembering old McCardle's high standards back home – and very reluctantly our Tutor passed us as being neatly dressed and well-groomed representatives of Songmark. With our cameras and notebooks in our bags and our precious trade fair tickets, we headed out to Meeting Island, where the Althing have cleared out their big assembly rooms for a few days of profitable trading.

The senior girls tell me that although the Spontoon Islands Racing Association organise this event, in fact it covers a wide range of aeronautical and other technical matters. One technology can be put to many uses – even peaceful nations are starting to build fast mail-planes that can carry two tonnes of cargo to distant destinations despite night and bad weather. Maria says there are German and Italian representatives at most of these meetings – and indeed, we saw the company flags of Heinkel and Cant amongst the exhibitors as we arrived. Some of the fast mail-planes are actually speedier than most nations' biplane fighters in front-line service, definitely an example of beating swords with ploughshares.

Quite a show! We were there six hours, getting through three notebooks apiece, trying to record everything we could – our bags positively groaned under the weight of sales brochures, and between us we must have heard enough polished sales talk to sell a bomber squadron to a Quaker congregation. Airframes, engines, radios and all sorts of instruments were on display, some of them ready to sell and some "in development."

Indeed, I spotted Maria looking up transfixed at a working model of a 36 cylinder Isotta racing engine that must have been ten feet long, destined for next year's Schneider Trophy no doubt. Helen had murmured that the Italian concept of engine testing was to take a pair of engines and put bigger superchargers on one of them until the engine exploded – then build the other of the pair with the boost turned down half a notch. Maria nodded vigorously, and seemed puzzled that we found anything odd about the idea.

Not just aircraft were on show – an awful lot of military hardware was on display, at least in terms of booths with brochures and representatives. Quite a few interesting vehicles, and not all military – there was a big display of peaceful German tracked “Land tractors” that can go over any terrain (handy for logging and off-road transports). There was even a poster for a splendid idea by Vickers for a lightweight “Police Tank” *, shown chasing a rioting mob with smoke grenades and tear-gas dispensers launching out of drainpipe-sized side tubes, enforcing law and order. Molly looked quite furious at the sight, claiming that it was plain unfair and unsporting. But progress is progress, and indeed I noticed a Japanese delegation eagerly scooping up brochures.

It was interesting to spot what was not on display – though I looked carefully, there was no mention of the very aerobatic “Sea Fleas” I had seen in such odd circumstances this Easter, nor anything about Spontoon developing the LeDuck propeller-less engines. One might have thought there would be mock-ups, such as the Italians have of their fascinating Camprini aircraft, with the props inside the fuselage. Possibly the Spontoones (and by extension Rain Island) are keeping them for a special publicity launch.

The Rain Island Naval Reserve had their own area with eager salesmen swarming around it most of the time. Only when the crowds had thinned towards the end of the afternoon did I notice who was there – in his guise as an Importer and Exporter, a certain stag who I well know is into profitable exports of various sorts. He bowed very politely, and was as charming to me as one could wish – and indeed I had to grit my teeth and thank him for the tickets.

Evidently, of his various enterprises, some of them are highly useful to the local Government – which is probably why they are reluctant to act against him without absolutely hard evidence. One can be a (presumably) loyal Spontoonie and a villain at the same time, it appears.

Indeed, he extended our invite to the informal evening meetings, in the same building – where sales brochures are definitely banned, although most of the actual deals are sealed over coconut cocktails and rum punches. Molly and Maria instantly jumped at the chance, pointing out that our Passes actually are valid “until the official meeting ends”, and the evening session is indeed sponsored by the official organisers. I could hardly argue with that – and as they were determined to go regardless, I had to go too.

So – straight back on the first water-taxi to Eastern Island, a dash into Songmark to dump the brochures and notebooks, a very rapid shower and groom and then – on with our best clothes, the Rachorska dresses! Inside an hour we were back on Meeting Island, feeling very different and looking quite unrecognisable. Of course, Miss Devinski’s initial inspection was for the regular show – we would look quite out of place dressed in our official blazers and dress shorts, for the fashionable evening session. Besides, we hated to bother our dear Tutor twice a day for the same duty.

The after-show reception was upstairs, where the sales folk and minor diplomats had changed into evening wear. Quite a glittering crowd, of all nationalities, and indeed representatives of most of the major aircraft companies were there. Some famous faces I recognised from back issues of the Daily Elele and the Island Birdwatcher – there was that black-furred German aviatrix wolf who scooped so many of last year’s prizes, talking with the Spanish hamster who pilots the orange floatplane GeeBee racer. To my embarrassment I could not remember their names, only what the ground crew call their aircraft – one being the “Blitz Eagle” and the other the “Spinning Incinerator”.

Certainly, a good aircraft deserves a good name. I recall my uncle telling me of his flying in the first days of the Great War, when he was equipped with the fearsome (to all concerned especially the pilot) B.E.8 “Bognor Bloater”. Even now, children’s comics are full of lurid pictures of trenches crammed with fleeing Huns all shouting “Achtung Bloater!”

A most pleasant evening indeed, though I was hard-put to keep an eye on Molly and Maria, especially as there were Spontoonie waiters circulating with ever-full trays of drinks. I essayed one of the “Summer Lightning” rum cocktails – which were very relevant to this event, being surely powerful enough to fill a racing aircraft’s fuel tank! One was quite sufficient – and I could only hope the rest agreed with me.

Molly vanished for ten minutes – but much to my relief, reappeared, though looking somewhat disheveled. She whispered that the Precautions used by the Native girls seem to be far more – agreeable to use, always supposing they work. I restrained from slapping her silly ears flat, but not without great effort. An immediate retreat to the powder-room to take what additional steps we could – not something I had intended to be doing tonight, but I hardly liked to haul her back to Songmark and explain to Matron.

We had only just rejoined the party when the stag responsible reappeared, with hardly a hair out of place. I felt safe enough talking to him in a crowded room, and indeed he was most solicitous of Molly. Very strangely, I know I talked with him for at least ten minutes – but I cannot recall anything that we said. I do recall that he has most captivatingly deep eyes – Helen told me that I seemed to be quite raptly following everything he was explaining to me. Very odd.

A quick check of the time had us heading out as fast as our party dresses would allow – aircraft are not the only things with a “Do not exceed” speed limit. Back to the Songmark just in time, luckily it was Noota and Conchita on gate duty, and indeed we were within the letter if not quite the spirit of our Passes still. A tiring day, and full of surprises!

* (Editor's Note: The Vickers Police tank was an actual 1930's project, and the poster was just as Amelia describes. Which just goes to show how some ideas are only a little ahead of their time...)

6th June 1935

(Written late at night, Maria cursing me to put the light out and let her get to sleep)

Dear Diary – there is more than one sort of hangover, it seems. Although I stayed well clear of a second “Summer Lightning”, we were stuck with having to write up our reports at full speed, while it was fresh in our memory. While Maria headed out to the dark-room with our cameras, the rest of us started scribbling first drafts – and all before our early morning self-defence classes, which we are still stuck with.

Hurrah for Jasbir and her dorm – they volunteered to do our kitchen duties today, for which they get the second copy of our reports after the Staff. Hard at work with typewriter and mimeograph, some ten hours non-stop work by all of us, somehow wrapped around our usual full timetable! Amazing what one can do in a tight spot. Indeed, we had our report ready as an “Evening Edition” – we handed it straight off the mimeograph to Miss Devinski when she made her tour at lights-out.

As soon as our copy was in, we collectively collapsed, having been up and working without a pause for seventeen furious hours. Molly says that having seen how hard they work, she will never throw rocks at reporters again (some of them have written what she thinks are prejudiced reports on her Family and their Business Associates.)

7th June, 1935

(Re: yesterday)

Ooops! What with yesterday's frantic work on the SIRA convention taking till lights-out, I quite forgot about noting our trip to Moon Island for self-defence classes. My T-Gew rifle “lives” there, safely under lock and key in the Rain Island Naval small-arms range – it is such a strain to haul it around on water-taxis, and one gets such peculiar stares from tourists.

Molly set up the long-arm range along with the duty officer, from whom she had procured some rusty but sound sheets of forty-pound steel, * possibly salvaged from a Gunboat wars wreck. She seemed in quite a mischievous mood, and I found out why.

This new ammunition is certainly “hot stuff” as she said! On firing, the recoil was no different than normal (i.e. even with the bipod, it almost took my shoulder off) but there is a bright “tracer” streak as the magnesium ignites, and the target lit up like a flash-bulb! The plate was decidedly punched through. Molly was jubilant, and the Range Officer was looking highly dubious. He vanished off towards the office as soon as we had finished, and I could spot him urgently telephoning someone. Most worrying – as it is, we can hardly risk getting incriminated in any more secret dealings.

(Today)

On the way to the airstrip for our flying lessons, I dropped off a postcard to the Post Box number that Mr. Sapohatan had given me. There are some things it is unsafe to hold on to – Molly's present may be “hot stuff” in more ways than one, in fact what she would call a “hot item.” One almost feels one's tail-fur scorching. I have tried to persuade Molly to hand her remaining rounds over, but taking a bone from a starving wolf would be a far easier and safer exercise.

Still, a quite splendid flight, all six Tiger Moths in the air as we practice formation flying – two “V's” led by Miss Pelton and Miss Wildford. The sun was absolutely scorching – it was a relief to reach five thousand feet, with cooler air going past at eighty miles an hour. A whole hour's exhilarating flight, though awfully hard work keeping tight enough formation in the thermals rising off Main Island. Then back to watch the other dorms trying it, Helen and Molly giving what they call “Bronx Cheers” at Beryl's attempts to stay in position. She may have inherited some skills at evading pursuers in the air, but not with sticking together in company.

(Later) Hard work pays off – after Dinner, Miss Devinski calls us up in front of the whole school and commends us for our report on the Trade Show, which she has copied and sent to SIRA themselves for comment. Passes all round, a coveted twelve-hour Unlimited pass for next Saturday! An Unlimited one has no restraints about where we go and why – the first time we have managed to get such a treat.

Much seething from Beryl and from Prudence's dorm, commenting that we get all the luck – we not only go to the trade show, but are rewarded again for having done it. Had we turned in a shoddy report, things would have been very different – something like a week on kitchen duty in the roasting heat, and no Passes for a month. Our Tutors certainly know how to get the most out of us – though Helen comments she knows how an orange must feel after a patent orange-press has done much the same.

- Editor's note: under standard Naval terminology, forty pounds of armour steel to the square foot works out at about an inch thick. It appears Amelia has been reading “Jane's Naval Annual” again.

8th June, 1935

One can definitely admire the postal system here – though I had not checked our post racks last night, I have a reply awaiting from Post Box Nine, which got there and back in about four hours flat. As per instructions, I had my remaining rounds in a holdall, forty of them making quite a load. On the way to Main Island, a perfectly ordinary Water-Taxi lady raised her hat and politely asked if I had any deliveries for Post Box Nine – I handed them over, and she wrote me a receipt. Very odd - she hardly looked like a secret agent.

I had thought that the Authorities might be able to pin this on Mr. Nordstrom, who (presumably) has no right to hand out secret technology such as this. But as Helen pointed out, the ammunition was delivered in a standard container with no note or letter, and the delivery address typed. So there is no proof who actually sent it, and I very much doubt if they were careless enough to leave incriminating fingerprints.

After lessons and evening meal, a most surprising piece of news was posted up on the school notice board – Miss Pelton, one of the four founding members of Songmark, is getting married in August! Great surprise all round – one might not have thought any of them quite the domestic sort – “batchelorettes” I would have said. Ah well, one lives and learns. A wedding date in the holidays of course gives the School time to buy and leave Miss Pelton presents, but (Helen points out) not to crowd the Church by actually showing up.

I have aunts and other relatives who say they always cry at weddings, but some of the girls from Prudence’s dorm look definitely heartbroken, Ada Cronstein in particular. Maria says she thought it very strange, as they have always been loud in our tutor’s praises, and one would think they would be celebrating such a happy occasion. After all, they have an enlarged photograph on their wall of her walloping a smashing hit over the net at a tennis tournament – Maria says one with her in wedding dress should complement it very nicely, even if it shows rather a lot less fur.

Although I certainly had a loyal admiration for many of the sporting stars back at St. Winifred’s, I never had “crushes” on them – though of course I was quite familiar with the idea. For a change, I could be the one to enlighten Maria – and “Female Bull” or not, she can blush very prettily when the occasion strikes.

9th June, 1935

Another big day for us – we missed our early dance practice, as we certainly needed all the rest we can get – and today being Saturday, we are not bound to our self-defence drills either. Our initial Passes are written up for the morning at Meeting Island and the dance contest with Meeting Island High School, (generally known as Althing Gate) who have quite a reputation here. Our twelve-hour Unlimited passes are signed off to run starting just afterwards – making a long day out indeed.

A large box arrived just after breakfast for me – inside was a very nice headdress of traditional local make, decorated with sea shells and marine symbols – the only sign of its sender being an unsigned note “with complements.” I am quite sure that this is from the local Authorities - unlike the last anonymous parcel for us, I have no worries about accepting this one – and indeed wearing it to the dance contest, which we are attending in Costume.

Molly looked very put-out, admiring the headdress, although I did my best to persuade her to hand over those thirty “hot items” she has left. She says she would rather stick to her guns – an apt way of putting it. The trouble may arrive when she gets asked firmly to hand things over, and cannot! Helen and myself have discussed how much to tell Molly - but how to persuade her to take things seriously enough, without revealing what we know? Missing out on an authentic piece of traditional Costume might be the least of her worries.

Still, we soon had enough to worry us, with a crowd of about two hundred assembled at the beach, where we were scheduled second on the day’s events. Quite nerve-wracking, and not the place for one’s grass skirt to part company. The first dance was a team from our old rivals the S.I.T.H.S, with some familiar faces and tails on show, matched against a Main Village dance troupe. A very fine showing – they danced the Water Wave and the Samoan Swerve, the judges awarding the prize to the S.I.T.H.S. as we cheered them on. I have taken pains to teach Molly, Helen and Maria just what “play up and play the game!” means, but they don’t instinctively respond to it the way they might have, given a proper education.

We were really up against it, for the first time playing a polished semi-professional team, who perform in public sponsored by the Althing and some local companies (notably a patent medicine manufacturer, whose “Snouto for healthy snouts!” advertising was all over the stands.) At least our Costume was impeccable – and indeed we needed all the confidence we could muster.

Althing Gate came on in style, six reptile girls all looking rather older than us – Spontoon not having its own University, one assumes they have more senior classes than a regular High School would suggest. We knew we were in for an awful struggle, but we could hardly guess just what we were up against! Fortunately, Miss Aha had turned up on schedule, and again provided a fair account of our contest:

(Editor’s Note: the following scrap was found on the diary, but due to the “Daily Elele” apparently using only the cheapest and most frequently recycled paper, large sections have faded and crumbled away since 1935. It is reproduced here “as found” with no guarantees as to accuracy...)

<<<

“DANCE YOURSELF DIZZY DRAMA!

OR

Meeting Island meet-up metes out mayhem!

Today saw a return to public showdowns for the current Althing Gate champion team, set against the junior Songmark dance troupe of Bourne-Phipps, Duclos, Procyk and Inconnutia. The islanders line up / / and Misses Taponona, Cuthbert, Dibble, Grubb in the front line / / fortunately NO repeat of their embarrassing incident last time with the banana. Miss Josephine Baker was never like that anyway.

Songmark started with a strong drive out from the base line/ / back flip/ / with a lemon instead / /inadvertent splits, which left her more surprised than hurt, but Procyk carried on regardless.

/ / second round showed a resurgence of Althing Gate, Taponona leading with a “breaker swirl” that quite got round the opposition and / / deep into opposing territory, forward pass and / / triumphant return to own ranks with a fine Maori-inspired victory chant that really had the windows rattling! Songmark drew up into a “Water Wall” formation and came out fighting, picking up the beat with more energy than we have seen them muster so far – not that there was anything lazy about their last public outing and two-one win against the Technical High School. Miss Inconnutia led a 1-2-1 diamond formation, dancing forward with / / lock-step, pash-dance inspired and / / hammerlock, double hammerlock, the judges / / Triumph Of The Will, and other Euro fashions. It seemed to work for her!

The third round saw both teams coming out of their start lines determined to wear each other down and / / battle of attrition / / palm sway / / Typhoon Strike, in under the defenses and/ / Pataharapo snout to snout face-off with / / thirty minutes of grueling non-stop dance, the fur really flying! Grubb looked half dead on her feet, swaying on her tail-tip more in exhaustion than dance, when the bell rang for the end of the round and they retired to their corners.

Fourth round began with the band picking up on the spirit of competition themselves and / / dueling saxophones, fuelled by copious consumption of / / an old Chicago jazz-club tradition by all accounts, and half-way through the number the impressively framed Lion “cut” his opponent with a louder, faster and higher performance that had both dance teams frantically struggling to keep up to a pace twice as fast than they ever practiced with! Bourne-Phipps led the comeback, launched herself into a splendid / / five times and a finale the like of which this reporter hasn’t seen since the Rain Island main dance band last Summer won by just one point, nine minutes into injury time.

The judges had to go away and confer for five minutes on this one / / requested a pair of dice and a coin apiece/ / ouija board or possibly / / Althing Gate win 53/47 on points, in a contest that even the audience will have to go away and rest after watching!

>>>

Well ! Quite our best performance yet, and no complaints really about the score. I congratulated their team captain, a Miss Pataharapo, on a staggering performance – I was staggering myself by that time, and all her team looked decidedly “danced out” too.

Rather shockingly, Molly and Maria looked highly annoyed with the result, Maria storming off to the showers. Anyone might think they hadn’t been brought up to know that it’s how you play the game that counts, not just the final score. I will certainly need a word with Maria sometime.

Still, we received our share of complements, the S.I.T.H.S. team coming over and congratulating us – Maria having already vanished, though. One would have said she flounced off, but if there’s one thing Maria doesn’t do, it is flounce. One of them recognised my headdress, and was very surprised that I had one – apparently it is a “wave crest” headdress, which was worn by the original inhabitants of what is now Casino Island. Every island had traditional variations in design, but with the original Accounting Island being given over to “Euro” settlement, their particular model stopped being made as a piece of everyday wear, now being only used for ceremonial occasions such as major festivals and weddings.

I confessed that I felt somewhat odd, catching a glimpse of myself in the changing room mirror – to all outward appearances an Island girl dressed in fully authentic Costume, and wearing a headdress she might put on for her wedding day.

Maria rudely broke me out of my mood, throwing down her towel and fuming sulfurously in Italian. I did try and point out to her that all the Althing Gate team are born Spontoonies, and have been brought up on a daily exposure to dance tradition – probably they could all read a hula “story” before they could read a book. One hardly expects to win all the time, let alone against such experienced competition.

Alas – Molly backed her up, with her “no second place winners” argument that I have tried to talk her out of before. I was under the impression, personally, that we were competing for sport – and nobody likes to play with a bad loser. I compete on the rifle ranges as a sport just the same (there is nothing unladylike about target shooting, my grandmother took the Women’s Rifle Cup at Bisley in ’94) whereas Molly’s idea is to blow the biggest holes in the targets as fast as possible. The staff on the Moon Islands range have learned to frisk Molly for mercury-cored rounds, pointing out it is a sporting range and not an Unsporting one.

Maria is now going around fuming that our fitness levels are obviously not enough – hopefully this should incite her to get out of bed a little less reluctantly in the mornings. One supposes that being brought up on family rhetoric of crushing all obstacles by inherent superiority and a will of indomitable steel is just a little fragile – on the occasions where one loses.

A far less strenuous afternoon, where by great good luck both Jirry and his brother Marti are free, in the height of tourist season. It seems they are booked to meet a tour boat that has been delayed by quarantine in the Latvian East Indies, and will be arriving tomorrow. The Spontoon Guides' Association is very strict on their members working the hours agreed, it seems – so Jirry gets paid regardless, but is forbidden from doing any other guide work today.

Jirry pointed out the various guides working “freelance”, meeting tourists off the boats and trying to persuade them to head out on expensive day-trips. Not all of them are entirely honest by all accounts, but they are required to take examinations in Island navigation and history – rather like taxi drivers, they have to know the tourist trails even in the dark.

To the cinema, with a fine and exceptionally Stark German “film noir” that had us quite gripping our seats in suspense. Jirry says it is a great relief, after working with Little Shirley for most of last month. I confess that I was most exceptionally pleased to see him – and very grateful to have a wholly free afternoon. The newsreel afterwards was interesting as ever, with news from Home as well as Europe. There was a feature on those very modern, updated sort of national Scouts the Germans have – they looked most dashing filmed on one of their mass rallies. Quite some distances they march, too – it looks like they could march all across Europe if they put their minds to it!

Afterwards – a half-hour boat ride across to South Island, to the remoter West-facing coast to catch up on things. Really, it is most surprising – the more hard work we get through, the more energetic I feel – and Jirry remarked that he would have to put in some more exercises himself, to keep up. Quite a complement, indeed! A most pleasant afternoon, and I must confess that Molly was right about one thing – the Precautions the local girls use are FAR more agreeable.

10th June, 1935

Maria is showing a lot of the “Will of Iron” this morning, though I could wish she was practicing it on someone else! She roused us at four, and chivvied us around the inside track of the compound for two hours – after which she insisted we go through our self-defence drills – on a Sunday, no less. Molly commented she can be expecting little good of her church congregation, if this is how she prepares on a Sunday morning.

Beryl was up early and joined us for a fivesome – self-defence of two against three, in various combinations. She was very keen on the idea, and says she truly misses some aspects of her old school. We had to lay down some ground rules about biting, clawing, gouging and various “low blows” but otherwise she proved very happy to practice with us, and promises she will teach us the “Roedean nerve pinch”.

Definitely not a relaxing Sunday. The weather had been scorchingly hot and dry for a week, with steady baking winds from right across the subtropics, the tropics and (Beryl claims) the supertropics. Someone gave the alarm just as we were finishing breakfast – a brush fire on the island, out on the Northern tip!

It was impressive to see how fast the second and third-years turned out, heading out of the compound towards the depot at the airfield, where the fire truck was already heading out along the coast. The locals were passing out fire brooms and beaters, this being a fairly common event in high summer, Spontoon being full of relaxed (for which read careless) tourists who are far too busy having fun to worry about where their cigar butts and picnic bottles end up.

Our Tutors called for volunteers – and indeed they got them, all of us. Songmark itself has enough fire-fighting equipment to handle small blazes (we have all heard about the cookhouse inferno last summer, when Noota tried to demonstrate how to deep-fry a thresher shark) and we have had basic training as to using them.

As we trotted North with a beater apiece, Molly was commenting that with her luck, the fun would be over before she got a sniff of it. Definitely tempting providence to claim that, I thought – and indeed I was right. I do so hate being right sometimes.

We were assigned to the Western coast, the fire on the East being tackled already – and we cheered as one of the converted Osprey water-bombers flew overhead, dropping its rainstorm on the main blaze. All looked quite under control – until the wind gusted and changed direction, showering us with sparks!

All the heavy equipment and the trained crews were off at the main fire site on the Eastern side of the island – the island road goes round the coast one way to the North through the burning area, and to the South one must skirt LONO hill and the airfield to get back to our side, easily two miles. So it was just what Helen calls the “Little league” cut off with just our fire brooms and sparks raining down around us. A hectic time ensued – us first-year Songmark girls and some of the staff, beating out each flare-up as it took light, and making sure that our retreat to the beach was kept open.

One can definitely have too much excitement for a Sunday morning. The first water-bomber made another two passes, then a second one appeared (finding a pilot awake early on a Sunday is generally a problem) but it was another three hours before the last embers were being damped down. The fire truck had been busy spraying the buildings and (partly wooden) transmitter masts of the radio station on the hilltop – we had been definitely alarmed to see the transmitters wreathed in spirals of flames and smoke from the scrub alight on the slopes below.

It was well past noon before we could troop back down the hill, and hand our brooms in. The fire truck provided us a welcome shower – such a collection of singed fur and smoke-rimmed eyes I have never seen. Beryl says it reminds her of her old school, where they have progressive chemistry teachers who seem to teach more about explosives, incendiary mixes and phosphorus than might be really wise.

Maria was quite disconsolate about missing her church service, the only time since October she has failed to attend, apart from the week of the Papeete Influenza epidemic. Molly pointed out that she could regard this as a scripture practical, as she gets to climb a mount and witness a burning bush at first hand – several of them, in fact.

One should remember how seriously Maria takes her religion – fortunately, our self-defence courses are building up very sharp reflexes. Maria is stronger, but Molly is extremely quick – we found energy to laugh as they found energy to vanish down the road, Maria in rather slow-motion pursuit with her beater swinging menacingly round her head. (With any luck, today should dampen down Molly's unfortunate enthusiasm for setting things on fire, having seen the results.)

A pleasant reward for our efforts – our cooks had been fighting the fires alongside us, so there was no lunch ready. But down by the airfield, Mahanish's bar and restaurant had thrown its doors open in gratitude – for anyone smelling of smoke and burned fur, luncheon was “on the house”.

Our Tutors are a practical lot, and rarely refuse the offer of feeding us for free. I hate to think what the Songmark food bill comes to – possibly it explains why they serve us so much locally grown Poi. Happily, Mahanish's had a rather better menu, though everything but the chilli was “off” by the time we were served. Maria complained she had come near enough today to being burned up externally, let alone internally – but I noticed she still had seconds.

A quiet afternoon on the beach, washing some of the smoke out of our fur. As our Tutors were along, this was a semi-official trip and Songmark bathing costumes were the order of the day – very smart to be sure, but this time yesterday I think I looked rather better in minimal Native costume. Plus – for certain reasons, it would have been rather embarrassing to have worn an official Songmark costume yesterday and hand it in to our laundry.

Despite all our good meals, we seem to be “reducing” rather rapidly, with all this exercise in the hot weather. One sees many of the more impressive native gentlemen of “Euro” stock with quite strikingly well-defined muscles – and it looks like we are heading the same way. I hope things do not progress too far, as I now quite adore my Rachorska dress, and want to fit in it awhile longer.

(Evening). Tonight I had a sharp lesson in what Father calls the Responsibilities of Command. I had been having such a very pleasant time yesterday that it quite slipped my memory to check what the rest of my dorm had been doing. Helen and Maria I can trust (that is to say, I can trust Maria as much as a block of dynamite – quite safe in normal handling.) But Molly had been out distinctly unchaperoned, and spent the rest of the afternoon and evening with a certain stag of most shady repute. I really do not know what I can do about Molly; she takes no care of her reputation!

Molly was quite gleeful about her and Lars, who she says is “sophisticated” – though I pointed out she can hardly fault the Spontoones on that score either, at least the ones who watch stark German Film Noir. I should have probably kept my mouth closed, as she detailed how “sophisticated” he was with her, something she seems to be greatly enjoying. Oh my!

13th June 1935

More climbing practice – we are moving onto trees and buildings next week, but today we finished this part of the course with a definitely memorable climb. An early start (cold breakfast at six) and onto specially ordered water taxis to the southern villages of Main Island. Of course, one is overlooked by the great main face of Mount Kiribatori – easily three thousand feet of naked rock rising from the jungle and plantations, the last thousand of them perfectly sheer. Maria has seen the Matterhorn, and says that it only needs snow to make it a very passable twin.

Fortunately, we were not expected to do the whole thing, and in fact the main face is still famous for being unclimbed (“unclimbable” as the guides say to tourists). Miss Pelton pointed out our route, an obvious crack angled across the lower slopes heading towards a green spur with a footpath down marked on the map.

I managed to take a peek over Miss Pelton's shoulder at her map – it is very different from any of the others we have seen, being far more detailed with networks of trails we have never seen before. One wonders where she got it, and who else might have them – certainly, there is nothing remotely similar in the shops.

Our tutors led the climb – that is, Miss Wildford went on ahead to secure the safety rope, and Miss Pelton followed up the rear. Our five dorms were each on a “rope” climbing separately, without any further instruction – and just our luck, we were picked to go first.

Dear Diary – I know I complained about the fire being rather too exciting a way to spend a Sunday morning, but scrambling across a rock face with a drop of five hundred feet below one’s tail, is probably too exciting for any day of the week.

At least, we showed our tutors how well we had learned our lessons – there was a particularly tricky piece of vertical rock chimney that I could wriggle up, but Maria had to head-jam her way along. Her horns proved useful, and happily she has the neck muscles to match – especially recently. Twenty yards of extremely “exposed” paw and snout-jamming followed, with some admittedly spectacular views (a lot of empty air, especially straight down. None of us at Songmark suffer from vertigo, but I personally would have preferred the view with an aircraft under me.)

It was two and a half hours of definitely hard work, made harder by the wear on the nerves. I think we all slipped at least twice, though nobody actually fell on our rope. Madelene X took a tumble of about five feet before being held by the rope – dangling over enough space to use a parachute certainly makes one careful about the quality of the knots and rope involved. One wonders how Missy K managed to fit through the narrow part – presumably the way toothpaste fits through the hole in the tube. But by noon we were all up on the knoll, ruefully comparing scrapes and bruises.

A very welcome hour for lunch, lying flat on the short grass looking out over Casino Island with the tour boats and water-taxis looking like water-insects far below us. Molly is ruefully rubbing some parts of her anatomy and speculating that our Tutors may be getting handouts and sponsorship from local medical companies such as “Snouto, the patent snout reviver”.

One supposes it is a fine character-building exercise, after all – back home Archbishop Crowley was famous for scaling the nine hundred feet of loose chalk face of Beachy Head solo, even before reaching his current post of leadership. Everyone knows how he carried out so many and so radical Church reforms, more than anyone did.

Amazingly, even on today’s trip Beryl carried her perpetual deck of cards. I have been taking instruction from Molly and Helen, who have been trying to bring me up to scratch on poker, acey-deucey and three-card stud (back at St. Winifred’s, we only played snap and Happy Families.) Beryl is a very accomplished player, and her winning streak even had Molly fuming. According to Molly, cheating is a recognised technique, and half the skill is in not being detected. It seems Beryl has acquired some very definite skills at her old school - if she was as sharp elsewhere as she is with cards, you could cut glass with her.

A brisk slide and scramble down to Lukapa, the Polynesian village on the coast, where we awaited the water taxi home – and witnessed an interesting side to local life. In the market square, we noticed a smartly dressed gentleman in Euro clothes haranguing the passing natives, although he was without the traditional soapbox to stand on. We spotted that he was a Missionary – a stridently fundamentalist Unitarian one, clearly over from Casino Island to make converts. It was quite interesting to hear his vision of the future: without anyone changing their existing religion he predicts the whole population will be converted to Unitarianism too, forcibly if needs be.

Although all sorts of churches and temples are on Casino Island, everyone knows that Main Island is strictly off-limits to theological press-gangs, though we had not seen the (highly unofficial) rule being put to the test before. After twenty minutes a local constable came over and had a quiet word with him. He left, though vowing to be back – much to Molly’s disgust, as she had picked out a box full of spoiled fruit she was preparing to throw as soon as any of the locals started it.

Beryl had if anything a larger collection, and was just filling discarded fruit rinds with rocks when the constable chivvied her target away. She seemed very disappointed, and commented “the things you see when you haven’t got your croquet mallet.”

I have examined that croquet mallet – the head appears to be ordinary wood, but is in fact four pounds of steel painted with wood-grain. Whatever else you may say about Beryl, she is loyally carrying on her old school traditions.

15th June, 1935

A very fine morning’s flying, then into Songmark for lunch. We had been out very early to catch the cool morning air (it is a hundred and five in the shade at lunchtime) and missed picking up the early post. A letter from Home, in Father’s writing – the sight of familiar stamps and postmarks reminding me that we only have four weeks of term remaining.

An awful shock – Father writes that he has been seconded to assist the French Army in the modern “entente cordiale” spirit, and will be spending Summer in the far reaches of the Indian Ocean, helping them plan out the anti-tank defenses of Kerguelen. And this was just after I had written telling him of all my plans for the summer, including the steam catapult for launching the rebuilt Flying Flea #8 over the kitchen garden. It really is the most beastly luck, how he gets called away at all the wrong times.

It was all very well to spend a month with Helen and Molly on the fishing fleet at Easter, but two months is really an awful hole in the social calendar. Definitely, I will have to put on my thinking cap as to the best use of the time. Looking at the newsreels from home, fashions have already changed twice since I have been out here – not that I follow fashion, of course, such frivolity being frowned on at St. Winifred's.

One happy thought is that my allowance has been increased, the drafts to be paid to me weekly via the main bank on Sunset Square, Casino Island. Monthly would have been handier, then I could have got a ticket home to see Father before he departs, and possibly travel out with him as far as Aden, not so far from Jasbir's home. This will pretty much tie me to the local area, wherever else I go in the week.

Thinking of Jasbir, her own dorm has been doing rather well at the Dance school, having trounced a quite senior class from the Casino Island Cooperative High School last week. We are starting to train as a double-sized team with them, which is proving an interesting challenge. Irma Bundt being of Maria's type, we have a powerful backing "pivot" when putting together dance moves. Li Han and Jasbir are quite remarkably fast, and I fear we would be very hard-pressed to keep pace with them without our extra exercises. Certainly, this time last year none of us would have stood an earthly chance.

Folk are already talking about the end-of term "exams", which only partly consist of filling in papers. Of course, the third-years are getting ready for putting their skills to the test for real – making their way in the world, with no re-sits available for failure. We shall miss Noota, Erica and Conchita – the only dorm who really went out of their way to help us first-years!

Out three friends are deep in plans of setting up in the prospecting business, having made a good impression with the Tanoaho family on the Cranium Island trip. Not, they point out, in actual prospecting – the jungles and dockside taverns are full of grizzled prospectors who have spent a lifetime searching to little avail. They plan to be in mining support – find the one prospector in the hundred who has struck it lucky, and get his product out to where folk are waiting with ships and money – a far more reliable way to earn a shilling.

It might be a good time to jot down how our own dorms have done so far – nearly three terms have honed us into a very varied pack, much to my surprise. Back at St. Winifred's, the idea was to rub off one's sharp corners and produce keen team players – here it is more like flint-knapping, trying to put on the sharpest edges that skillfully applied pressure can produce.

Jasbir and Co – absolutely dance-crazy, and will probably get on the stage next year despite anything our Tutors say. They are not quite so fanatical about exercise as us (read, as Maria) but they seem to take all the prizes where a gym or a rock wall is in sight.

Madelene X – has quite a problem keeping up in the practical classes, but absolutely shines when paperwork needs doing. She has Susan DeRiuz in her dorm, the maths brain, who can do things in her head most of us need three minutes with a slide-rule to get almost right. And she never gets lost – it is quite uncanny.

Prudence Akroyd's dorm is definitely a success in a way – they must be the most popular, depending of course how one defines it. They are getting quite a reputation on the sports field as well as off it – drawing an admiring audience of a certain type from all over the island to watch them play. Volleyball, tennis and swimming are their great strengths, and this term they have joined a formation swimming team that is often used as extras by film companies. This prompted Beryl's tasteless but intriguing question, "If one of a team of synchronized swimmers drowns, do they all have to?"

Missy K is having an awful time with Beryl – Beryl wants to join our dorm, but even if we wanted her, it would unbalance the numbers even more (despite the occasional problem with Molly and Maria, I wouldn't trade them for their weight in gold, not even Maria's weight.) Her other dorm mate, Adelle Beasley, is surprisingly colourless for a Songmark student, and her main claim to fame is the time she has spent under our Matron's care for minor accidents. She is skilled enough in the air, but has broken more crockery than the rest of us put together, and managed to fall downstairs twice last week. Not someone you really want packing your parachute.

As for ourselves – we might not have won all the prizes, but I doubt anyone else has had as much adventure! Not that we really plan to – much of it just seems to happen on its own accord. Miss Devinski has commented that was true of the causes of the Great War, too.

16th June, 1935

Quite a scorcher indeed – we managed to get late passes for the dance school, which in the height of summer is only doing its more advanced and strenuous classes in the cool of the evening. The morning was spent with some of the Third-years, Daphne and Noota amongst them, as we went on a semi-official trip to South Island to watch some local sporting events.

I hardly recognised Haio Beach from our Winter explorations – seeing it crowded with tourists and concession stalls came as rather a shock. On the South-facing beaches they have what Casino Island does not – a clear view out into the open Pacific, the waves sweeping straight in through gaps in the reef. Despite the fine local weather there must be a typhoon out there somewhere – the waves were huge, and sweeping straight in at us from the Southwest.

The main competition was a peculiar game that Prudence's dorm have already tried by their accounts – a traditional Hawaiian sport called “surfing”. One stands, or tries to stand, on a long polished plank floating just offshore, then paddle onto the top of the wave as it breaks. Most of the tourists who tried it fell off immediately, though some of the locals (of Hawaiian descent, one assumes) can stay on all the way to the beach.

Molly and Helen had their cameras out – certainly, quite a sight to record for posterity. With the spread of tourists and “Euro” beliefs, old traditions like these will probably die out even in the remoter islands, which is a pity. As Molly points out, new crazes spread from Civilisation to the backwoods, and not visa versa.

Daphne demonstrated how to stand on a “board” as they are called, and seemed quite glum to realise she had just three more weekends left. She pointed out what I had not really considered – in September we will be second-years, and responsible for keeping a sharp eye on the new bunch! A frightening prospect, if any of them are like Molly or Beryl (and given Songmark's growing reputation, they will be. No doubt at all, they will be.)

Prudence was along with the rest of her dorm, who showed remarkable skill on the Hawaiian “boards”. I recognised their various native friends, whom I recall them trying to show round Songmark. I would have thought they knew better even then to try it against our Tutors – who knew just what they were about when they put that dorm together. Ada Cronstein is a particularly extreme case – “anything in a grass skirt” seems to be her motto. Easy to see why she was swapped for Adele Beasley, as she is very much at home in Prudence's band. At least, they will not have to worry about taking Precautions as the rest of us do.

Thinking of which, I was introduced to Tahni, Prudence's friend. She is definitely not of Hawaiian stock – spotted Hyenas are from Kenya and such places, and a rare sight around here. I had heard about Hyena girls being “different” – and as Tahni wears a definitely tight stretch-fit bathing costume, I can see the stories seem to be quite true.

17th June, 1935

A strenuous Sunday again, though mercifully without any brush fires. We have kept up with the self-defence classes, though Miss Devinski has said we have finished our punitive month of extra drill – as with dancing, the more one practices the better. In fact, after awhile it gets almost addictive: right now it would feel rather odd not to be up first thing and working flat-out.

Beryl is very keen on self-defence: she demonstrated the use she can put her croquet hoops and spikes to in a dire emergency. The hoops are quarter-inch tempered steel rods, ground needle-sharp at the tips – and she can sink all five of them into a telegraph pole at ten paces, about as fast as one can see her hand move. Molly was most impressed. The croquet balls are solid steel of about a pound weight, and with her old school scarf as a sling she is highly accurate to fifty paces. Prevention is better than cure, she says, and indeed she can flatten a potential mugger before he has even thought of robbing her.

Still, after two hours hammering round the track with Maria behind us bellowing like a drill-sergeant to pick our paws up, and another hour practicing double hammerlocks and jujitsu throws, we were very glad to relax in Church, listening to Reverend Bingham. His Parable of the Actress and the Bishop was definitely – unusual, though certainly memorable. I think it must be the heat; it is a hundred and ten degrees outside and he is still wearing his full ceremonial outfit, tight collar and all. Maria says her priest is down to a sort of waiter's clip-on white front and collar, plus of course his hat.

After one sort of Church, Helen and I met up with Saimmi, for our lessons in local folklore. Friday night is one of the main celebrations of the local calendar, and Saimmi hints that we may be welcome there. From what she tells us, she has been working hard on persuading her Church leaders to let us take part in the ceremonies – I hope we do not disappoint her.

I enquired of her sister – it seems that Moeli is doing very well, and is expecting any day now. Saimmi mentioned that I might see the whole family – rather odd, as I thought I had met the Hoele'toemi clan by now. Possibly there will be cousins coming over for the main celebrations.

19th June, 1935

Climbing again, though without a rock face in sight. Plenty of ropes, though – we are back over on Moon Island, where the towers we used for parachuting practice are being climbed the hard way. Although one never sees it in the films, throwing up grappling hooks really needs a steel helmet for safety – as the hook is very liable to bounce off first try, and come down points-first.

Adele Beasley is just unlucky – and rather bad at dodging. She was packed off to the Naval Station first-aid centre pressing a field-dressing to her head, but it seems there is nothing that a few stitches will not fix (memo to myself – the books certainly say that scalp wounds are messy, but they do not really warn HOW messy!)

Having got up the towers, there was the matter of getting down in one piece. Miss Blande demonstrated how to “rappel” without any equipment but the rope – a handy trick for emergencies, though best done with heavy gloves and thick jacket or one’s fur suffers severely.

Prudence proved quite a climbing star, beating even Jasbir shinning up the vertical ropes – an exercise we were always very keen on back home, being jolly good fun, and indeed some folk spent hours at practice. It certainly builds muscle tone very nicely, and proved a very useful exercise when the playing fields were underwater. Ada seems to be quite a competitive second, and certainly scored a few points for their dorm.

After all the excitement, it felt rather odd to be sitting in a classroom with our notebooks open. Our aerodynamics tutor Herr Bussmann is back from the Volta Conference in Europe, and seems to have been very well received. He brought back plenty of monographs, which we were allowed to look at – I managed to look through one by Monsieur Rene LeDuck on his “tuyere thermodynamique” engine data before Madelene X grabbed it. Happily my technical French is good enough to follow the gist of it – one would not be surprised to see Herr Bussmann’s model aircraft soon sporting what looks like oversized drainpipes for engines. Exactly how they will start rolling down the runway is another matter, as the LeDuck engine only starts giving thrust at about two hundred miles an hour.

Our tutor tells us that Spontoan Island Technical High School are planning to build a wind tunnel, not full-sized perhaps but quite enough for model testing. One wonders just what they will be testing in it – having seen their own LeDuck inspired designs flying (briefly) and crashing (spectacularly), some tunnel testing might well improve matters. I always understood wind tunnels to be awfully expensive – the S.I.T.H.S. complain they cannot afford their own aircraft, so I hardly understand how they are managing - unless someone else is paying for it.

A sweltering day indeed – we had a ten minute break, enough for me to trot over to Song Sodas and fill our vacuum flasks with iced soda. A great help to concentration, in our classrooms at this time of year! And a wonderful invention, despite the worries my Great-aunt Edna had when she first received one as a gift (she refused to be in the room with it unless the door or window was wide open, in case the vacuum leaked out and filled the room.)

21st – 22nd June, 1935

Dear Diary – it has been an interesting experience, to say the least. Yesterday (Friday 21st) we had our usual two hours of classes in the morning, and a rather fine self-defence class where we learned to defend against blunt weapons such as lead-filled coconuts, a favorite weapon of various Oriental secret societies according to Beryl. After lunch, Miss Devinski called Helen and myself to her office, and handed us our Passes – rather different ones than usual. These simply stated that we were to “observe the local religious ceremonies, and return as soon as they finish.”

I fear that if Molly ever got hold of such a pass, she would vanish for a week and claim it was an impromptu pilgrimage to somewhere remote. (In her case, a hotel room with the obvious suspect.) Miss Devinski also mentioned that appropriate dress should be worn – and that we should present ourselves on the main docks at six.

Definitely a first for us, changing into full Native dress in our dorm room – that is, our “lava lava” cloth dresses, all quite demure and nothing one would be embarrassed to wear on Casino Island. We picked ourselves a hibiscus flower each for our head-fur on the way out, and were on the Eastern Island main docks in good time – though feeling definitely nervous.

Again, I found myself wondering just how “in” with the local authorities our Tutors really are? Miss Devinski certainly seems to know all there is to know about what we do around here. To run a business such as Songmark one needs to do far more than just rent a building and advertise for staff and students – especially as we keep getting so many “interesting” instructors and events laid on for us. Would plain money have bought those training parachute flights in serving Rain Island bomber aeroplanes?

Although we were expecting a water taxi, we had a rather different ride, as we were hailed by a native sailing canoe, one of the big outrigger ones with both oars and sail. I recognised one of the rowers from our Easter fishing trip – and then we were off at full speed, the wind behind us as we headed towards South Island. At first I thought we were heading round to Haiio beach – but instead we landed on the less settled eastern coast, that faces out to Sacred Island. Our escorts were friendly enough but not informative – evidently they were not the ones who would be showing us the ceremonies.

On the beach we met Saimmi along with her senior priestess Ropitapi, who we had met nearby in January; she seemed pleased enough to see us, and complemented us on our costume. Quite a complement, coming from her! Saimmi took us aside and explained that the real ceremony would take place elsewhere at dawn – but that tonight we were their guests. I presume uninvited guests are politely diverted elsewhere – we had seen two ships of the anti-pirate patrol “on maneuvers” north of Sacred Island, which I doubt is a coincidence.

There followed a very fine evening, with a bonfire on the beach, and the sort of meal we had quite become accustomed in the Easter holidays – whole roast fish, baked sweet potato and roasted breadfruit for dessert. Quite an excellent time indeed, though there was nothing mentioned about the morning – except that we should get plenty of sleep. Which although nervous, we did manage.

It was pitch dark when Saimmi shook Helen and myself awake – but the sky was clear and just starting to pale in the East as we stumbled down to the beach. Again, I was quite impressed at how Saimmi sees in the dark – since Helen and myself are of feline type we are rather good that way ourselves, but Saimmi seemed to see as well as if it was broad daylight. There were half a dozen native craft already out on the water under the starlight as we headed for Sacred Island – and despite having flown over it with cameras snapping so many times before, this was the first time we had set foot on its shores.

Looking back, I noticed a speck of light, then a bright flare off on South Island – and realised just where the fire was. It was the rocky top of Mount Tomboabo, that Helen and myself climbed last December, and noticed the remains of a carefully disguised fire just after the shortest day. Not a coincidence, I should think. I asked Saimmi, who nodded with satisfaction and simply noted that the signal was given, and someone should be arriving shortly.

Although I had seen very little from the air, there are structures on Sacred Island hidden under the trees. That is to say, there is what looks like an old dock cut into the rock – a very old dock, looking as if it was cut by hand, leading out to the deep waters. Facing it and heading up into the dark under the trees was a double row of Tiki sculptures, these quite recognisably genuine and not the “tourist” type one buys souvenir models of on Casino Island. It was hard to count, but I saw at least a couple of hundred Natives there and in the woods, only a few of them having torches. Most wore head-dresses of a very unusual type I have not seen before, although the Museum of Anthropomorphology on Casino Island claims to have examples of all the traditional designs.

Looking out over the waters to the East, the Priests (I assume they were the Priests, at least they wore the most elaborate costumes) began to chant, and the rest of the congregation took it up. It was one of the ones Saimmi had been teaching us, so we could all join in the responses – and I had translated it as being an invitation for all the people to come join in celebration. Which sounds very standard, but some of the phrases had sounded rather odd – the bit about “from the warm Isles and from the cold waters together” had been puzzling me. I know what they mean, now.

After about ten minutes, there came a sound out to sea, a deep lowing something like the conch shell trumpets I have seen on Main Island, but only heard off deep in the jungle. Something flashed white, about three hundred yards off in the waves – and behind us, a large bonfire was lit and flared up on a raised platform, lighting up the whole area. Suddenly the chanting ceased, and it all became very still.

Then – Dear Diary, I hardly know if I should write this down. But something came in from the sea to the old dock, which is about the size of a municipal swimming baths – or rather some persons, a whole lot of persons. I thought they were just swimmers – till one of them leaped out of the water, and I saw close up one of the “Natives of No Island”. I know what I swam past in the lava cave on Main Island, and I know too what chased after Sippy Forsythe the next day – to bring her back captive, I still like to think.

The ceremony went on for about an hour, and it appears the ... newcomers are very fond of cooked fish. Which must be a rare luxury, considering the problems they would have with fires. At its height the first rays of the sun just shone over the waves, lining up the avenue of Tikis exactly. Some of the new arrivals clambered and were helped into light canoes, which the Spontoones grabbed in teams and carried up the ceremonial avenue to the top of the hill. We sang the long chant that I recorded on page 37 of the blue notebook, and danced the moves that I illustrated opposite.

I was amazed to see there is a rock platform on the hilltop, carved with the same sorts of very interesting bas-reliefs as in Tower Hill Park, but more of them and even more – informative. Looking around, I spotted the trees had been carefully bent back with liana ropes, exposing the structure for a few hours of dawn sunlight – in emergency, ten seconds with machetes would hide the whole thing beneath the branches once more.

The final celebration was very like those in the woods back home in Bassetshire, and very moving. I know what would happen to prying anthropologists who tried to put those in their books! When it was finished the sun had cleared the horizon, and twenty husky Spontoones picked up each laden canoe and ran down the hill, through the long Tiki-lined avenue under the trees, to the old dock where some of the arrivals were already leaving.

I recognised several Spontoones there – some of whom seemed very surprised to spot Helen and myself. But Saimmi cleared the way, and it was all smiles as we were invited to meet one who had asked to see us.

Oh my. I remember Moeli saying we would meet some members of her family, and I remember ages ago she had hinted that her kitten would be “a little different”. And they say we British are good at ironic understatement! She showed us her child – she cannot be more than two days old, but swims like a dolphin already. Moeli seems in excellent spirits, and introduced us to her husband, whose name I can set down in shorthand but have little chance in putting down in proper spelling. It is something like () *

Moeli will be staying here a week more, she tells us, and then her daughter will be ready to join the other side of its family. She seems fairly content with the situation, and explains that she had always known this would have to happen. It appears that it is not such an uncommon marriage in these islands – something like half a dozen a year, mostly in the Priesthood and from the remoter villages. One very much doubts that the main hospital on Casino Island sees any of these – one “Euro” doctor dropping in for the birth and some very embarrassing questions would be asked.

We waved farewell, and that phase in the celebrations came to an end. If any high-flying aircraft had turned a camera on the beach (which is hidden from observation from any of the other islands) they would have seen nothing out of the ordinary – on the surface, it looked rather like the “rituals” one sees put on for the tourists. One would think that the same folk who had been doing this for real this morning, would hardly stoop to make a parody of it in front of loud-shirted tourists this afternoon. But – the Spontoones seem to like that sort of thing, and seem to take a very subtle satisfaction in it. I will have to think about this one.

In the more “public” ceremony, there was something I was very glad I had Helen to witness. The high Priestess had called several names out – and with a real thrill I heard mine read out with Jirry’s. And then I saw him, looking most excellent in his full Native costume, very plain but with a collar of pierced sea shells. My tail went quite sideways at the sight, but nobody seemed to think it amiss of me. I was wearing only my ceremonial headdress, my grass skirt and a fresh flower lei, but felt as comfortable with it in the crowd as I had ever felt in any costume.

Jirry and myself are now Tailfast! It was a short but most moving ceremony, which I had checked through in advance and in great detail. I have a braided ring of his tail fur and mine, and he has one just like it. (One wonders how reptile folk manage the tradition: I must enquire of Saimmi.) Of course this is not an engagement ring, and Molly would probably call it something like “try before you buy, with no obligation”. But then, her family is definitely into coarsening things such as Trade.

Back with Jirry and the rest of his family to their South Island hut, his parents congratulating us both. Of course, in six months anyone may be Tailfast to anyone else, but this feels really very gratifying. I fear we stretched the spirit of our Passes again, by staying till almost dark – but it seems it is the custom to spend today in quiet celebration, so that should do as part of the religious ceremonies we were set loose to observe. I fear Molly and Maria had to do without us at the dance classes, but Molly at least has more Entertainments than I like to think about. I spent much of the afternoon with Jirry, making good use of the opportunity – after all, there is no point being Tailfast and just pen pals. Missy K is Tailfast to that very handsome mink gentleman, and I am fairly sure I know how Songmark’s sole Spontoonie student spent most of her Easter holidays – when she burned off about two dress sizes worth of weight.

Still, it has been a day of fascinating discovery. The next time we visit the Museum on Casino Island, I will look with great interest at the exhibition showing how all the interesting people I met today are really just Hollywood special effects. The Spontoones really ARE good at making folk look the wrong way at the right time!

* Editor’s note – either Lexarc shorthand was awful at recording exotic speech sounds, or Moeli’s mate really DOES have a name that sounds like someone scrunching two pawfulls of wet seaweed together.

23rd June 1935

After yesterday’s religious festivities, it felt most odd to be sitting in the Anglican church on Casino Island, listening to the Reverend Bingham’s sermon (the parable of the sailor and the fishmonger’s daughter). I have my braided ring of our fur in a native locket of fine shell on a necklace around my neck, and have to resist taking it out to look at it. Helen has quite given up on concentrating in church, and tends to sleep through the whole thing. What with two hours dance practice and an hour of self-defence before breakfast, we can definitely use the rest.

Surprisingly, Beryl attends a church here, or at least goes to one of the minority temples. I recall her leafing through a directory of all the churches and shrines on Spontoon, and having something of a problem with our Tutors letting her go to the Temple of Sacred Reward. Not a religion I had ever heard of, and Saimmi says they have a bad name on the islands – but the Songmark brochure does say very clearly that any student can attend any available place of worship on the islands.

While waiting for the water taxi back, I noticed Beryl saying farewell to an expensively dressed young gentleman of the rodent persuasion, whom she introduced as Mr. Van Hoogstraaten Junior. It seems his Father is a businessman and financier on the islands, and a major shareholder in her Temple. A strange sort of Temple, to issue shares! One can almost imagine them advertising “Eternal Salvation Or Three Times Thy Money Back” at that rate.

Beryl seems quite pleased with her Sundays and tells us she has found some like-minded company, who also have Wednesday late-night sessions, which she will put in to attend. I foresee some words with our tutors about this, though of course Ada Cronstein goes to the Synagogue on Saturdays, and Jasbir has a quite

elaborate calendar of rituals. Helen comments that any temple Beryl attends, is liable to have very little religion attached to it. I have heard of Recidivists being dedicated, but it would be interesting to see how they managed to get it registered here as a religion.

Some good news on the notice board when we returned for lunch – Songmark are buying a seaplane! A hangar is being looked for on Eastern or Moon Island – and by next term we should all be able to practice water takeoffs and landings. Maria is hoping it will be some hot ship such as an abandoned Schneider Trophy contestant, but they are the very last thing one wants to learn from scratch on. Something like a surplus Osprey with dual control seems more probable (and manageable). Of course, the second and third-years are always busy on borrowed seaplanes of various kinds – it seems the third-years gain points towards official passes by finding useful contacts for the other Songmark students. If I had my own aircraft here, I know I would feel definitely worried at the idea of Maria or Beryl borrowing it for the afternoon. One imagines by the third year, people have learned how to be exceedingly ... persuasive.

One hopes whatever aircraft we get is durable! Yesterday Molly managed to write off Songmark's oldest Ford lorry demonstrating how her Father's friends do a "bootlegger turn". The steering was rather worn out anyway, and at least we now know what the components of a rack and pinion gear look like, having gathered them from various spots across the compound.

25th June, 1935

The first day in weeks when we have slept till breakfast time, neglecting our dance and self-defence drills – but indeed we had plenty of exercise, and needed every minute's sleep in preparation.

Our year has been swimming three or four days a week this term, sometimes keeping in the water for hours at a time. But today we had a real test – as our Tutors arranged us to do something we have been told since September we really must never attempt. From South Island we were to swim the straits to Main Island, hopefully as far as the big central bay there.

An exceedingly light breakfast, fruits and a bar apiece of tropical chocolate – then out in water-taxis past Casino Island, and round the northern spit of South Island that looks so much like one of the flukes of a two-mile anchor. We assembled on the West-facing beach while the water taxis held station offshore, ready to assist us if needed. Miss Pelton had a copy of the local tide table and a stopwatch – and set us off dorm by dorm, five minutes apart with a water-taxi assigned to watch each team.

We were off last for a change – the rules being that we all arrive together or abandon the attempt. Fortunately the current was warm, and we had been sent out at the calmest stage of the tide – with less than a mile to cross at the narrows, Maria calculated it as an hour's easy swim.

Now we know why we were warned off trying it without a support boat! Though we set off in good style straight for the opposite shore – ten minutes later we were heading more or less into the depths of the Pacific, as the central Spontoon waters drained with the ebbing tide. Maria was all for turning straight for land – but with some difficulty I persuaded her to keep heading straight West, where it looked alarmingly as if we would miss the southern tip of the island entirely.

Another hour later we were nearing shore, the returning tide pulling us back North at about three knots – and no sign of the other dorms. Still, with one's snout just clear of the water it is impossible to see far, and we had worries of our own without thinking of the rest of our year. Definitely tiring, struggling against the current, but once we passed the southern "hook" of South Island we voted to keep on going.

After a hundred and thirty minutes we staggered onto a deserted shore in the shade of a sugar plantation and flopped like castaway jellyfish while the two water-taxi ladies cheered and pulled in to land. Apart from life-jackets, the water-taxi was stocked with a case of Nootnops Red, which we got through about half of before we landed at the meeting point of the Easternmost of the three Polynesian villages. Looking at the chart they carried, we covered about three miles in a great loop despite keeping our noses pointed the same direction – and none of us will ever underestimate the currents round here again. One assumes that several of the folk reported lost in "tragic swimming accidents" really did drown accidentally.

Hurrah! We were the first to cross the bay – Prudence's team made it as did Jasbir's, all the way through the currents. Madelene X ran out of steam before reaching the nearest shore, being picked up by the water taxi – and Missy K made a botch of the navigating, was caught in the main tidal race (five knots) and hit the shore about two miles away!

Memo to myself: look at the map for flying routes – but when getting one's feet wet, a tidal chart is definitely required reading.

27th June, 1935

Busy preparing for the exams! These are mostly severely practical ones, from what our third-year friends tell us. Conchita recalls questions like measuring the distance across a river with a short length of rope and a compass – that sort of thing.

In fact, our Tutors are always marking us at random – this morning in the navigation class, Miss Wildford sat down on the floor, calmly announced she had broken both legs and asked Jasbir's dorm exactly how they would get her down to the docks for evacuation. They had to do it, too! She had "recovered" well enough after lunch to surprise us with having to rescue her during the swimming session. Unconscious or pretend-unconscious people are much harder to move than I had thought.

Still, every mark we get now is one less to do in the main exams at the end of next week – Helen's whiskers are drooping at the prospect of written tests, something she truly hates. Her "education" was a severely practical one, and she says she would far rather carry Missy K in a fireman's lift up Mount Kiribatori, than the three days of sitting and answering questions we are expecting.

Maria is already booked to go home, her Uncle's air force have a carrier exercising somewhere off the Mixtican coast that will be picking her up in the last week of term. And I still have no idea what I shall be doing – Molly will be going off on Maria's flight, and changing at Cuba for the last leg home to Detroit.

With all this, there is also the SIRA association beginning their preparations for the August races. Of course, I hardly thought it would be just a matter of naming a day and having the flags ready – but the amount of work involved is quite staggering. The Daily Elele has a diary of the events scheduled – next week there is an "amateur hour" where any interested flyers test the course in whatever machines they have available (various aircraft classes are allowed. I would not have guessed there was a heavyweight commercial airliner race, till I saw that Dornier X practicing!)

Alas for poor Flying Flea #8, the salvageable remains of which (Father writes) was destroyed last week in a mystery fire! If I had shipped it over, I might have fixed floats on it and at least entered for the fun of it. Madelene X says I should have raced it against that floatplane GeeBee, under the "very silly" class.

Rather letting the side down for Madelene, I should have thought, seeing that the Flying Flea is a French breed in the first place. And she can hardly complain about silly designs – on the newsreels we have all seen those French "monowheel" motorcycle racers where the driver and engine sit inside one big wheel like a convict in a treadmill, and now there is one of them rocking and swaying around Casino Island, much to her delight. Its owner is a Parisian, who is loud in its praises and full of predictions that it will be the transport revolution of the future.

Madelene begged a ride alongside the intrepid owner, and indeed it handled the roads quite well, despite what looked like an alarming swaying motion at every touch of the brake or throttle. Either it will be a transport revolution, or at least a useful test device should anyone ever wish a seasickness simulator.

29th June, 1935

A local post parcel for Molly arrived today – I poked my snout round our dorm door to see her sliding herself into an obvious Rachorska dress, a decidedly – sophisticated one, mostly black silk. Molly certainly looked very stylish in it – and though there was no note, only a single white rose, I have no doubt whom it is from. The really disturbing thing is, it fits like a glove – our shapes have changed somewhat since our only official fitting by the Countess, and this is more up-to-date.

Helen's comment was that when a young lady puts on that sort of present, it is usually from someone who plans to take it off her (I paraphrase. Helen is a little rough in speech still sometimes.) Molly just stuck her snout in the air and announced Lars was very welcome to. (I paraphrase still more. Molly is sometimes quite unbearably crude. You might think the wines and spirits trade could afford some more enlightened education.)

Helen has been making some creditable attempts to discourage Molly, but her more direct approach has fared no better than mine has. Even when Helen pointed out her probable fate had I not rescued her, Molly countered that Lars had plenty of other occasions had he wanted to make off with her – and anyway, even if true it would have been "just business" before he got to know her better.

When Molly says something is "just business" she is generally reminiscing of her life back home when various of her family's business rivals had unfortunate accidents that put them *out* of business – spirit warehouses catching fire, odd accidents with tonnes of war-surplus chlorine and the like.

Indeed, she countered that anyone who thought she had reasons to hold a grudge against him, would hardly be giving her ammunition. But everyone in Mr. Nordstrom's profession already has all the weaponry they need (he has mentioned to her his rivalry with Berckhardts' establishment) and he presumably has ways of stopping them being able to use it.

Helen gave up at last, and predicted she would end up writing to Molly c/o some house of ill repute in Macao. At least one of us is very wrong about Mr. Lars Nordstrom, but I will not be going near enough to personally find out!

Off again to the dance school along with Jasbir's dorm, as we take part in some large-scale exercises with our whole dance class. Our spare-time exercising is paying off, as we are able to get through even the most strenuous dance routines without much difficulty. I recall back in November, we would finish our Saturday sessions weak at the knees and staggering back to the water taxi; now we step through them having already started the day with two hours on the running track and an hour's self-defence class. Maria has got hold of what she says is an advanced exercise handbook – but she refuses to let Molly see it, and neither Helen or myself speak any Italian (we are fairly certain it is nothing but an infantry training manual.)

Still, I am head of this dorm, and Maria will not be shouting unnecessary orders or making us carry loads round the track. No names, no pack-drill.

30th June, 1935

A relaxing Sunday, beginning as ever with our self-defence class. Beryl is demonstrating advanced hockey moves that can be adapted to work improvising with branches – for an hour the open longhouse resembled a Robin Hood film set with quarterstaffs flying. Beryl is really quite enthusiastic about self-defence – at her old school they “learn you all the tricks” as she inelegantly puts it.

It seems that although at St. T's the junior years are indeed a savage free-for-all of unkempt mobs battling it out – in the senior year there is a definite mellowing, or at least a change in direction as those who have come through with ears and tail et cetera intact, suddenly decide to be debutantes. Or that was the general impression, though Beryl put it very differently. At any rate, Beryl has been looking at our evening dresses somewhat hungrily – happily for us, none of them would fit her size and species, or we would definitely have to lock the wardrobe.

One would never have thought that Molly could get tired of her Sunday excursions over to Moon Island to the rifle range – but the “hot” ammunition for my T-Gew rifle is long gone, and Beryl is quite persuasive. At any rate, the two of them headed out to the Temple of Sacred Reward, for Molly to look around.

I have asked Miss Devinski about their odd Temple, which she assures me through rather gritted teeth, is officially registered as a Church. But it is owned by Mr. Van Hoogstraaten Senior, who seems to have invented it from scratch. Possibly it is one of those Mystery Religions, where one must rise to be their version of Archbishop before being revealed what they are really doing.

I think I can do better, myself – having not one but two perfectly genuine churches to attend. The Rev. Bingham is on holiday this month – some of the parishioners were commenting that he could certainly use a rest. Still – the sermon seemed definitely dull without him, and Helen and myself were very keen to see what Saimmi had to show us.

We were certainly not disappointed – having already seen the Natives of No Island last week, we learned for the first time something of their history and religion. It seems that they have been here all along, even when the Spontoon group was deserted of all its original Pacific Islander inhabitants. When the next wave of settlers started to become “Spontoonies”, they made contact with the Polynesians amongst them and very slowly let others into the secret.

From what Saimmi tells us, Sacred Island was the meeting-place for long centuries before any land-dwellers ever arrived on these islands – it seems there is something about its underwater shape that is of particular significance for them. The temple with the aisle of Tikis is by far the oldest building on the island, and linked to the events that (amongst other things) prevented coconuts growing in these islands.

I asked about that, but Saimmi smiled and noted that it is quite another story, and one we will know the full facts of only if we enter the inner part of the religion. Quite a shock, as with meeting the oceanic community, I was sure that was the big secret!

1st July, 1935

Revising flat-out! Only now do I find that Helen has never sat a formal exam in her life – now is not the time to learn what she should have been practicing years ago. Molly is looking definitely worried as well, as she realizes that there are some problems in life that firepower will not help with (if she has learned nothing else this term I suppose this is a worthwhile lesson.)

3rd July, 1935

A scorching day with marvelous aircraft arriving overhead for next week's time trials – and us sweltering away on navigational papers and engineering problems. As Miss Devinski said when she handed out the papers – get one's fuel calculations wrong over the Pacific and one might not get the chance to take the test again. Not the most encouraging thought to take into an exam.

(Later) Tomorrow being a flying practical, at least there is very little to revise – though I have been memorizing local radio frequencies and the like, in case we are called on to give any in-cloud flying. Of our six Tiger Moths, only SP-455 has a direction-finding loop on the radio so we will have to take turns on that part of the flying test. Helen is happy with the flying but getting definitely twitchy at all this “book-larnin”, not something she takes to at all.

4th July, 1935

One part of the exams that Helen certainly approved of – in the cockpit again, for air navigation and formation flying. It was rather a wrench to concentrate on getting through the problems Miss Devinski was setting from the rear seat, being just such splendid flying weather one wanted to loop for the sheer fun of it.

Helen and Molly were wishing they had some firecrackers today (in Molly’s case, she was wistfully describing “jam-tin” ones as her Father’s associates learned to make over in France) – passing Mahanish’s restaurant on the way back to Songmark, a crowd of American pilots and tourists were noisily celebrating their Independence day, and the fact that they were looking after their own affairs. Helen was quite surprised to spot a smaller contingent of British tourists with them, celebrating with equal enthusiasm. I did not quite like to explain it to her.

5th July, 1935

It’s over! We were kept hard at it all day – but by four o’clock the final papers were handed in and we were left to wander the compound in a rather shell-shocked state. Prudence was the first one to come to her senses and her dorm vanished towards Song Sodas – a splendid notion, in half an hour the rest of us had all joined her.

Either Prudence had arranged this well in advance, or she had reached the telephone at record speed – whichever, we found her most happily sitting with her friend Tahni by the time we arrived. I should have thought of this myself – our Tutors are definitely busy with exam marking right now, and are hopefully a little less vigilant than usual.

An ice cream was welcome indeed, and though I was glad of Helen’s company and the rest, I really missed having Jirry here. Looking at Tahni, it was certainly easy to see that she appreciated Prudence’s company. Quite ... outstandingly so, in fact. Molly whispered that if one dated spotted hyenas, if the brother was unavailable then the sister could stand in perfectly well.

Naturally, we are not quite confined to our compound before lights-out – anyone can vanish for an hour or so in the daytime without being remarked on. Prudence and Tahni did so as soon as they had finished their soda, leaving the rest of us wishing we had planned better in advance. Whatever folk say about Prudence, she has wits as sharp as they make them.

(Later) Amazing – Miss Wildford dropped by and announced that we had all been booked for the evening at Mahanish’s, and had half an hour to get ready! Various jaws dropped – followed seconds later by a stampede towards our dorms and a frantic unpacking of best uniforms. An excellent meal, of the sort of chilli dish the League Of Nations would probably ban as a potential inhumane weapon if used on the unsuspecting. I greatly enjoyed it, all the more so for the unexpected treat. Hurrah for our Tutors!

6th July, 1935

Dear Diary – more good and bad news. The good news is that Molly and myself have tickets for the SIRA meeting tomorrow night – the bad news is who sent them, and that Molly insists on going. She reached Miss Devinski first, who wrote her a pass on condition she takes someone with her – and this time the tickets have our names on them.

Molly is practically walking on clouds – despite everything, I can hardly bring myself to discourage her, even if I had any chance of doing so. Of course, it will be a large meeting, with all sorts of officials and aircraft experts around, so we should be safe enough.

Beryl is fuming, and offering to try and alter the tickets to put her name on mine – she has a quite fascinating little printing set and a wide range of official-looking rubber stamps which she says often come in handy with paperwork. It seems that her former school is not entirely lacking in artistic courses – she is busy at work on a landscape engraving exactly like that appearing on the local fifty-shell banknote.

Still, off to the Dance classes, where we are still working on large-unit tactics and combined operations (as Father would say). To our surprise, Beryl turned up, claiming she had a Pass to visit the Museum of Anthropomorphology and study local artifacts. The only local artifact she showed any interest in is large, red and glittering, and given the fate of the last few folk to successfully steal it, the Museum need very little security around it.

Quite a sight as we waited for the water-taxi back – a fascinating racing floatplane, a twin tail-boom model with pusher and puller engines, touching down by Moon Island with a bigger utility seaplane following sedately behind. Maria cheered the place down – evidently it is an Italian contestant, probably with mechanics and support equipment in the aircraft behind. A very distinctive design, * and one she assures us is bound to win on general principles. If Italy had won all the times Maria claims they should do on general principles, the Schneider Trophy would be held around the Adriatic isles, not the Spontoon group.

* (Editor's note: evidently a development of the 1929 season's Savoia-Marchetti S.M. 65, strengthened to avoid the original model's troublesome and embarrassing problem of the tail falling off.)

7th July, 1935

It has been a long, long week – I had thought it would be a relief to finish with the exams, but today I was quite as tense as before any navigation test. (Helen was not greatly encouraged by Miss Wildford's sage remark "there are worse things than doing navigation – such as discovering you needed some and didn't do it.")

Church seemed definitely flat with the substitute Vicar, and we were very keen to get out and meet Saimmi. She took us to the park on the western side of Casino Island, where there is an ancient grassed-over crater with some fascinating stone carvings. I felt quite at home – there is one just like it in the next parish to mine, the quaintly named Devil's Punchbowl over by Goatswood. Only the lack of pouring rain and freezing wind was rather a giveaway that I was on the far side of the world.

The carvings are as I copied into my other book – the Spontoonies have some very strange creation myths, possibly because the local aquatic folk first told them. Saimmi showed us the weathered, exposed carvings – and after a quick look around for non-native watchers, she showed us some more. There are sand and gravel paths around the deep natural fissures at the bottom of the hollow – scraping a paw-thickness of sand away, Saimmi uncovered some other carvings, even more interesting. Fortunately we did not have to excavate them all – we covered them again, retired to an unmarked villa just on the side of Tower Hill, and Saimmi showed us a hand-written book with a full record of what thousands of unsuspecting tourists walk over every week.

Back to fill in the details in my second book – I hardly feel comfortable taking it into Church somehow, as despite the text being in shorthand, the various pictures and tracings are very recognizable, and not the sort that are displayed in a traditional Sunday-school. Except of course in Goatswood, where they have alternative traditions.

Helen is decidedly worried about my heading out with only Molly, and promises to start ringing every sort of alarm bell if we are late – a most reassuring idea.

(Later). A most wonderful afternoon and evening! We collected our passes and headed straight out to Meeting Island, where we could see six of the racing floatplanes pulled up on the beach – I suppose there is a lot more style in taxiing up to a SIRA conference in a thousand-horsepower racer rather than a chugging water taxi.

Molly had brought her large satchel, and after she vanished for five minutes in the powder-room, I discovered why. Her new dress is certainly worth showing-off, though I doubt our Tutors would approve of it or where it came from. I felt really quite dowdy next to her, despite the smart and well-respected Songmark uniform. Rather like a Girl Scout next to a debutante – in higher social circles having a sleeve covered in merit badges rather fails to impress.

The main meeting had the main SIRA panel discussing all the arrangements, with the racing teams taking careful notes. I suppose if they ever doubled the course length, any racer with a bare minimum of fuel tanks would be in real trouble – hence the course is decided two months beforehand. Even so, looking over some shoulders I spotted engineers doodling drop fuel-tanks under racing wings. Even the weight of an extra ten or twenty gallons could be critical, as some races are won or lost by fractions of a second – and winning aircraft very commonly cut it so fine they run out of fuel taxiing back to the beach. Various welcome speeches were made, and then the meeting broke up for cocktails and an hour's general discussion.

Having filed my notebook away, I could relax somewhat and mingle. Though of course I kept my eyes wide open – one of the engineers was sketching on the blackboard his idea for a radiator that actually provides thrust as well as cooling, with steam boost powering something like a LeDuck engine. Considering most trophy winners are fighting overheating by the time they are in the final lap, the prospect of turning some of that into speed seems very tempting. (It also looked very like the tubular radiators of the "Sea Fleas" I saw under Main Island.) One supposes there is nothing to be lost from telling the competition about the idea at this time of year – if it works the secret will be out for next year's season anyway, and it is far too late to start radical rebuilds for August.

A polite cough made me turn round, and before I knew it I was looking up into Mr. Nordstrom's eyes – which really are a most remarkable hazel colour. Molly had of course found him already, and we three

retired to a table while the rest of the party surged around us somehow distant, like passers-by on the pavement outside.

Lars is really a most polished conversationalist – he began by telling us of his problems and triumphs with acquiring interesting technologies and materials for the island, with some chemicals in very short supply. I am sure he mentioned having obtained sodium metal by the barrel for local aeronautical use – very odd, as although it is used in engine valves one would hardly need tonnes of the alarming metal unless the engine was wholly cooled by it. Which would be a most radical engine design, and I am certain the aeronautical press would be raving about it one way or another as soon as word leaked out.

A fascinating discussion as far as I recall – this morning I sat through a prize-winningly dull sermon that I forgot almost instantly, as I am sure the rest of the congregation did. That is hardly surprising – the difference being tonight, that I know I found the conversation most intriguing, and wish I had taken notes!

A wholly pleasant evening, finishing with Lars escorting us to the water-taxi and putting us onboard in good time with no more than a respectful kiss for Molly, who seemed remarkably content with that. Helen and Maria were quite worriedly waiting for us, and Helen in particular was quite fussy over just what we had been doing and saying.

(Memo to myself: Molly was complemented by various folk on her dress, which is admittedly very flattering. But I have one of my own nearly as good, and it is a waste to just keep it in the wardrobe. We really must get out more!)

8th July, 1935

A quiet week for us, but a definitely hectic one for the second-years, as next week will be for the senior year. Then – it will be farewell to Noota, Erica and Conchita, as they start scraping up money for their transport company. As our tutors are busy this week, the third-years have us under their wing much of the time, passing on some skills that are rarely mentioned in the timetable.

Quite an exercise – a sort of evolved version of “hide and seek”, with us tracking down an errant Songmark pupil on the island. For the first test Beryl was selected, amongst mouse squeals of outraged innocence (very realistic, and probably well-practiced.) She complained that Missy K would be a better candidate for a “runner”, as she knows the island much better. Considering she is easily twice Beryl’s size, I think our seniors got it right first time.

I had watched Father’s troops scouting on exercises over many years, but we have to work rather differently. Unlike other organizations we can hardly show up with search warrants, and are discouraged from interrogating passers-by. Discretion and thoroughness are the things we have to remember – and the fact that someone with just the same training may well not want to be found.

Anyway, Beryl was given ten minute’s head start – after which we split into teams and decided just how to go about it. A “wheeling” line of the twenty of us started out between the compound and the docks, and we swept around the island like the hands of a clock, just as in Maria’s manual (as we thought, it is an Infantry training guide.) Molly was complaining that we were on the outside of the sweep, and had twice as much ground to cover as some – but we are probably twice as fit as the rest, and managed quite happily. As it happened it was Jasbir who found our missing student – sunbathing on the roof of Mahanish’s, invisible from the street below, but not from half way up LONO hill.

Beryl was very sniffy when she heard Jasbir had spotted her with field-glasses – but nobody had said anything about what equipment we were allowed. The next stage would to have asked our tutors if we could have extra flying lessons, and spot her from the air – even so, had she been bending over an engine crate in mechanic’s overalls we would never have seen her at that range.

Ada Cronstein was next, as we all heard her running flat out for the gate – a smart move, as it was two hours before we found her still inside the compound reading “Spicy Island Adventures”, having doubled back before we started out after her. An interesting exercise, decidedly improving the wits as well as the stamina. One supposes it is an easy way for our tutors to keep us out of mischief – and it may one day be a very useful skill, knowing how to both find and not be found ourselves.

10th July, 1935

It has been quite a thrilling few days, with the third-years chasing us around the islands – today we were on South Island, with a hide-and-seek in a small patch of jungle – I lasted about ten minutes before being spotted. I had thought I was being careful, with cutting leaves to attach to my costume – but I should have moved well away from the tree I cut them from, which was suddenly a very conspicuous shape and led the searchers right onto me.

Beryl won the morning’s chase, having managed to dig herself a very rapid trench and cover it over – had Missy K not stepped on her, she might have stayed there all day. Helen had tried the trick one sees in

Tarzan films, of submerging in a pond and breathing through a hollow reed – unfortunately, if the pond is calm enough one can hardly help moving the reed enough to make ripples.

Beryl claims she had not noticed it, but was demonstrating a trick she had learned in her old school swimming pool – hitting the water hard enough within a few yards of a swimmer, is as good as “depth-charging” a submarine. Poor Helen came up spluttering with her paws over her ringing ears, and a spirited mud-throwing duel ensued.

On the way back, we fell in with some locals who had been doing much the same thing, by the look of the vegetation one still had fixed to his costume (their costume was mostly local vegetation anyway.) The oldest one explained they were junior tourist guides, and were practicing guiding naturalists around without disturbing the wildlife.

One certainly learns to concentrate ears and nose when being hunted – that part of South Island was old “ten-yard jungle”, so called by the furthest distance one can see in it. There are patches of “three yard” jungle further in, which are quite disconcerting – it is like being in a leafy room no larger than our bathroom and far more crowded.

The third-years are certainly more easy-going than our tutors, within limits – we stopped off on the way back to the coastal hotels for an hour’s break. Nootnops Blue all round, which many of them were predicting they could never get at home! Molly notes that it would be a fine product to import, at least until someone discovered what the active ingredients were.

Beryl seems to have a remarkable tolerance for drinking inflammable beverages, something she says was in full production in her old Home Economics classes – but I think I will take her cookery tales with a grain of salt. However, to use her own phrase she certainly has a “head like teak” to judge by the quantity of locally distilled Arak she got through and still walked in a relatively straight line.

Noota seems very downhearted at leaving Songmark, despite the interesting plans she and her friends have. I have never seen anyone get through a bottle of wine that fast since Archbishop Crowley came to dinner. (Memo to myself: the Archbishop seemed to be used to it, and could keep it down perfectly well, as well as the bottle after it. On the choppy seas heading back to Eastern Island, Noota did NOT. I should continue to avoid mixing wine and Nootnops, it gets very messy.)

11th July, 1935

An interesting excursion, though we did not have too far to travel – over to Superior Engineering, where some of the third-years have taken part-time jobs they are now finishing with. Although we have been there many times before, this time there is something new - there are half a dozen vacancies available to help with the wind-tunnel they are building on Moon Island.

Although I have of course seen pictures in books, this was my first sight of a real tunnel – about the size of a small longhouse, with the working section about four feet across by ten long. Most of the rest is ducting and a huge radial engine that came from a crashed French seaplane – after being salvaged from the bottom of the lagoon it will never be certified airworthy again, but should find a useful second career firmly bolted to the ground.

Quite a project! I suppose the tunnel can run tenth-scale models of most common aircraft (the only bigger ones such as the Caproni Ca60 and the Dornier X are already hugely successful and need no improvement). The specialist instrumentation is ordered and on its way, mostly from Switzerland, to Irma Bundt’s great joy. Our Swiss Miss rarely sees much from her home, as unlike most of Europe, Switzerland has very few colonies in the Pacific. Even Zara from the second-year sees the occasional flight passing through to her countryfolk in the Albanian South Indies.

Erica has worked quite a bit at Superior, which is a fine way of getting in practical experience and even getting paid for it. She pointed out the owner and his sons; a fine family business if ever there was one. It is a good place to make contacts, she tells me – all sorts of aircraft and boats pull in for repairs, and in a year of even part-time work there might be a hundred or more people floating or flying round the Pacific grateful that your structural welding is still holding up.

Out with passes to another organization we have heard a lot about from Erica, the Friends Of German Opera. It is an interesting experience, after seeing so much of the Spontoonie dancing and entertainment – a room full of “Hula Junkers” and such folk earnestly discussing ancient folklore tales of the Rheinland and the Black Forest. To judge from the pictures, there is a lot of interest in “Rhine Maidens”, who seem to have an awful lot in common with certain Natives the guide books do not mention. An interesting notion – were there once Natives Of No Riverbank?

Erica introduced me to Doctor Kubelsberg, who is not only a keen opera supporter but a very famous archaeologist; according to Erica they met up on the canine-only Yap Island last summer. The Doctor (or more accurately “Herr Doktor”) has been working in the atolls around Spontoon, where he says there are fascinating remains of unknown civilizations that will surprise the world when his great book is finished.

From what I had heard of the Krupmark Islands, they are certainly an interesting place – being full of smugglers and suspected pirates, they feature as a setting in many of the more lurid works of fiction on the shelves. Any actual films supposed to be set there are shot in Spontoon, where the film crews are less liable to be robbed to their fur or held to ransom.

Erica whispered that Songmark's most successful team have been known to pass through the Krupmark group, although they will not be invited back to give us lectures on how they achieved their success. Not that they have to, there was an article on the 'Air Pyrate Queen of the South China Seas' in last month's issue of Molly's 'True Crimes Illustrated' which had a full business plan for interested amateurs to look at.

Still, those islands seem a good place to avoid – unlike Doktor Kubelberg I have no reason to go there, for which I am quite grateful! Spontoon is exciting enough to explore, despite the hordes of tourists taking miles of (doubtless badly exposed) film of everything than moves, then starting on everything that cannot dodge.

13th July, 1935

A busy day indeed – we are no longer on our term timetable, having indeed finished with the exams – but we seem to be listed on someone's timetable for useful voluntary work (for which read, free labor.) The whole first and third year worked on the SIRA project today, helping survey the new course. Aircraft speeds are improving, and the old layout had too many twists and turns to give a chance for them to show their full-throttle performance.

Anyway, we were busy with surveying gear making sure the measured miles really are measured miles – it would be awfully embarrassing for someone to set a world record and then have to cancel it for the sake of a ten-yard error! Maria was looking rather wistful at the distant Schneider Trophy entrants, commenting that at least I should get to see them race even if I do not manage a flight in one.

Helen is definitely worried as to what we can do in the holidays, as we have really one week to decide. The third-years have their exams and in theory finish up next Friday, their certificates could be sent on to them afterwards although all are staying till the farewell party on the Monday after. After that – we fly off the edge of the map, one might say.

Actually, I took a deep breath and paid out ten cowries for a postcard – Mr. Sapohatan did say he might have some jobs for us, and it would be better to be on their side than wondering what we might stumble onto next. So Post Box Nine received our "application form" today, and we await the reply with interest.

Asking around, Helen and myself are not the only first-years who are staying in the area – Beryl is too, having engaged a room in what she says is a rather nice hotel on Casino Island. At least, she says it suits her right to the ground – which should be a sight worth seeing.

14th July, 1935

A piece of good news for Jirry and the rest of the locals in the film trade – Molly received her copy of "Film Frolics" today, and the next Little Shirley Shrine film * is not being shot on Spontoon. Molly is still downcast, as it is to be filmed in Cuba, where she will be passing through in ten day's time. Still, it is a big island and one doubts Little Shirley's agents and managers will be setting it anywhere Molly would want to visit.

Despite everything, Molly continues to be cynical about the honesty of the world at large. After we unwisely exposed ourselves to the first Spontoon screening of "Good Ship Sherbet Dip" she declared the film was not really about sweets at all. Although she has sworn to stay well clear of what she claims it advertises, she needed two bottles of Nootnops Blue to make her stop twitching after unprotected exposure to two hours of film.

A reply from Post Box Nine! Ironically, the very same design of postcard I sent yesterday, with just the message "Employment accepted – will be in touch" and nothing else.

Molly is in excellent mood, having also received another two tickets to a SIRA function on Monday – a more informal one after the first amateur races. She asked for and received passes for the both of us – Miss Devinski commenting that we should stick together, and unless we returned together there would be trouble. Certainly, Molly cannot trot around the place without a chaperone, especially not wearing that dress.

Dance classes were fine as ever, though Beryl did drop in and heckle somewhat. Our dance teacher Mrs. Motorabho is certainly very vocal, though referring to her as "Mrs. Motormouth" is definitely not respectful. Maria and Irma Bundt offered to teach Beryl some dance moves involving compressing a mouse into a ball and using her for Netball practice – at which she very wisely quieted down.

- Editor's Note: pasted in the diary is a faded clipping, identified as a review from Film Frolics. The reviewer notes – "Having danced and sang in exotic locations such as Eastern Siberia (The Little Commissar) and the Spontoon Isles (The Good Ship Sherbet Dip) the hopefully inimitable moppet is set to wreak havoc with the hearts and minds of Cuba with her latest project (Baby, take a dive). Sadly this is

not a cliff-diving epic according to the studio's pre-release notes, but *"a heart-warming tale set in the illegal sporting underworld of bare-knuckle playground prize-fighters."*

15th July, 1935

Just the kind of day they leave out of the tourist brochures – yesterday I overheard two tourists who Helen said were from California marveling at how green everything was in high summer – presumably they now know how it stays that way. (Radio LONO was reporting an inch of rain before lunchtime, and after that it got really damp.)

The sermon was dull to the equivalent of Schneider-trophy level quality, and I almost nodded off myself, although I reminded myself that Helen needed waking up lest we miss our second religious lessons with Saimmi. She is always on time – and congratulated us that we were staying over for the summer. News travels fast around here, at least to some people – we had not discussed our plans with our Tutors, even! I feel sure Saimmi receives some of her news via Post Box Nine, though I hardly like to ask her about it.

We are learning quite a bit, indeed – I had left my second notebook with Saimmi last week, for her to check through my drawings and see if I have missed anything (the pictographs are really quite descriptive, and Saimmi notes that if one can read a hula one can get the general idea of these.)

(Later) Ada Cronstein seems to have just heard about our going to two "churches" on our Sundays, and is decidedly shocked at the idea. A somewhat flaming argument ensued, which ended fairly abruptly when I remembered last month she had sent off for one of those improved high-speed electric ouija boards one sees advertised in the back pages of "Unscientific American". Not that I am qualified to judge, but I should have thought that counted as an incompatible second belief system just as much as ours. Besides, a lot of the Spontoonie religion seems to be perfectly innocent and respectable folklore – that, or there is an awful lot going on we have not seen as yet. We had asked about Crater Lake, but Saimmi merely smiled and told us that its secret was a very different one than Sacred Island.

The wind was blowing from Moon Island, and we could hear the booming of the wind tunnel on test – unfortunately the tunnel turns out to resonate like a giant organ-pipe. G flat in major key, I believe. Our tutor Herr Bussmann is packing his notebooks and gleefully rubbing his paws at the prospect of doing some real research on vibrations – before the more practically minded engineers at Superior start experimenting with the outlet tube by cutting bits off.

Irma Bundt is cocking a bovine ear wistfully at the sound, reminded she says of the folk music of her homeland. An inspiring thought, though carrying an instrument that size must make life difficult for street musicians.

16th July 1935

The last Monday of term! By all accounts our Tutors are at their absolutely busiest – after all, this is the last chance the third-years get, and they are sparing no effort. Furthermore, as the second-years are still wandering around looking dazed after last week or vanished on "exploring trips" with native company, we are quite left to our own devices.

Prudence's dorm vanished after breakfast to South Island, where they have all-day Passes for a Netball championship match – anyway, there is Netball advertised today and they may indeed play a quick match, but I rather think they and their friends may have other plans for the day. At least, when Jasbir offered to come along and cheer, they hurriedly vanished towards the docks leaving "no forwarding address" as the old song has it.

We decided to head out for a swim, and watch the Schneider Trophy amateur races, their course running from a loop around Meeting Island to some tall poles specially set up on the northern tip of Eastern Island. Molly was rather scratching her head as she asked why they are not racing round the LONO towers which are already there – until Helen pointed out the contestants will head as close to the towers as they can to tighten the turn, and especially in the amateur events they are not quite guaranteed to miss.

A scorching afternoon, half of it spent in the water between races and half relaxing on the beach with our field glasses watching the competitors. Two very fine civilian Ecorsairs won the first round, and an M-4 "Hammerhead" the second, its wingtip almost brushing the marker pole as it went by not a hundred feet above us. I found myself wondering when I would see those "Sea Fleas" in action – they cannot quite turn square corners in the air, but come closer than any other aircraft I have seen.

While Molly amused herself setting fire to driftwood with a binocular lens, Helen and I decided on what to do next week as a backup plan. Even if Mr. Sapohatan has some work for us, it is hardly likely to be a full timetable such as Songmark's, and there is no guessing as to when we will be contacted. We have a standing invitation to stay with the Hoele'toemi family on South Island, which should certainly be fun. For the

first time we will be really on our own, our Tutors and the senior years not around to bale us out in emergencies – having Jerry's family about should make things much easier.

A fascinating sight off the West-facing coast, what looked like someone surfing on the almost flat waters! With the binoculars I recognised Daphne, who seemed to be balanced on a log but somehow making about twelve knots through the water. We shook the sand out of our fur and trotted down to the little beach just North of Superior Engineering – to see Daphne riding in to shore, where Erica and some of her class stood by with welding gas cylinders and a fuel bowser. It seems that even in the final week the third-years get an afternoon off – and are putting it to good use. Most inspiring - a good example to us of how to make the most of one's time.

One lives and learns – if one “borrows” a practice torpedo from the Naval base and empties the sand from the dummy warhead, it rides nose-up and quite buoyant enough to support a (very skilled) surfer. I assume Daphne has a friend or two over there who are not too bothered about her taking a last chance to borrow their inventory so long as it comes back with the oxygen and petrol tanks as full as when she started.

Molly insisted on having a try, but anyone could have told her a flat board rather than a smooth metal tube would be better for a first lesson. Falling off is what I would call predictable – indeed, Helen comments that the phrase “easy as falling off a log” could use some modernization.

(Later) Molly and I received our last passes as first-years from a rather harried-looking Miss Devinski, who waved us off and dived back into a pile of marking. Of course, we were in our pressed and cleaned Songmark uniforms, notebooks and cameras very much in evidence – which we then dropped off at the dorm before heading out carrying our dresses and accessories in somewhat larger bags, heading for the water taxis.

Meeting Island was as packed as I have seen it, as this is a semi-public event with all the racing teams, their support crews and anyone else who could argue a ticket to talk to the intrepid aviators and aviatrixes. We were introduced to the owners of the Ecorsair that had won the afternoon's race so handily – and to the owner of that fascinating home-built “Spirit Of Yucaipa III” that had flown the course at about twelve feet above the waves, sticking to “ground effect” all the way.

This time round, I had made up my mind to match Molly style for style, as best I could. We dashed into the powder room and emerged ten minutes later looking very different – having looked at her new dress, I felt almost jealous. Of course, I could afford one quite like it tomorrow; although certainly it would cost about three weeks' allowance, there has really been very little I need to buy at Songmark. Molly is as well provided – as she says, it would be one thing for Lars to make such a present to a poor girl, but quite another to choose it for her. It is the thought than counts this way, not the price.

I had wondered why her new Rachorska was in oiled silk, unlike my plain one – until someone jogged an elbow and spilled wine over Molly. The oiled fabric does not show staining or dampness at all, and is very sheer. It is very plain indeed that there is nothing under it but Molly.

A most splendid evening – Lars turned up “fashionably late” as they say, and had the first three dances with Molly – who seemed quite entranced, more so than usual. To judge from her scent it is just as well the dress fabric is oiled. Indeed, to save embarrassment (mine, not hers) we stepped out into the cooler air of an arbor looking across to the lights of Casino Island. Even so, there were various snouts twitching at the trail of perfume she was leaving, a scent she definitely did not buy from any shop. Lars is a wonderful dancer, and makes one feel as if there is nobody else in the room with you.

I definitely remember we had a most delightful time, and it feels like we danced till dawn – though the clock only read eleven when we returned to Songmark, to find Helen waiting up for us with a worried expression. Helen took one sniff at Molly and frog-marched her off to the showers, and to my surprise suggested I follow her. Still, it was a decidedly warm evening for dancing.

18th July, 1935

A day of great surprises, not entirely welcome ones for many people. The land-based aircraft races were scheduled for just after breakfast (Racing aircraft tend to be poor at getting off the ground in full afternoon heat) and most of our year were sitting on the slopes of LONO hill looking out over the runway.

I had my radio with me, now disguised as a parasol, with the battery concealed in my hand-grip (Beryl's idea, as she pointed out a lead and acid-filled handbag can be put to a variety of uses.) The radio announcer was running through the contestants, and mentioning there was a Russian team scheduled who had not turned up – when we might have been the first to spot his error.

Prudence was the first to point out an unexpected dot on the North-Western horizon – she had been looking out over Main Island to Tahni's village, discussing with her dorm what to buy for her friend's birthday tomorrow (what do you give the girl who has Everything?). I saw her tail twitch, and heard her give a yelp of surprise – not the only one from our group as everyone with binoculars trained them that direction.

All we saw at first were four dots, heading almost straight for us – in three minutes they seemed little bigger. Another five minutes resolved them into two large flying boats, and two aircraft we have seen before – the unmistakably huge Kalinin K-7s, one of which just stretched the last of its fuel and a following typhoon

tailwind to get here in our first term. Everyone was wondering how they had got here – when Madelene X spotted something very strange. One of the flying boats was flying about a wingspan above and ahead of the giant 7-engined bomber, linked to it by a hose pipe that looked thread-thin from that distance – and we remembered the story of how the K-7 which arrived last year was going to attempt to return home using mid-air refueling.

As if that was not enough, as the formation approached we could see there were more aircraft in the group than we had thought. Under the each wing the K-7s carried a sleek-looking fighter of a model that had us flicking through our recognition manuals in vain – four in all, which as they wheeled and separated over the central lagoon, the carrier K-7s dropped into free flight.

It may be an unorthodox way of arriving, but the Soviets have definitely studied the rules. Each fighter made a “touch and go” on the runway, then flew the course at what looked like record speed, before climbing to rejoin their flying aircraft-carriers! The rules only say that the flight must start and finish on the runway, as nobody had been thinking of this approach.

Looking at the four main aircraft, one can imagine how the Soviets probably did it – position flying-boats along the route with a fuel tanker ship to provision them, and meet up with the Kalinin flying overhead. Which gets round a lot of problems, certainly – assuming they can refuel reliably. It would be awfully embarrassing to get the hose knotted or suchlike half way over the Pacific, though of course the flying-boat crew would at least be on hand for rescue. The Kalinins have what look like long lances protruding from the wing outboard of the outermost engines, presumably linked to their fuel tanks. Not an easy exercise one would have thought, and the prospects of getting a trailing fuel-filled hose caught in one’s propeller must make even their boldest pilots pause for thought.

This could quite change things – putting most of the Pacific within range, however tenuously. The radio announcer seemed definitely impressed and shocked at the same time – much as Father told me everyone was when Bleriot flew across the English Channel for the first time. The difference being, Bleriot was not flying the world’s largest bomber under the orders of the Red Bird, Joseph Starling. The notion of a bomber force that can not only reach here but also bring its own fighters along for the ride must be a very uncomfortable thought for anyone underneath it. “Good fences make good neighbours” as the saying goes, and I expect a lot of folk in these islands will be wishing the Pacific was a bit wider.

19th July, 1935

Our Tutors are certainly keeping us busy, in a remote-control sort of way – our class returned to Superior Engineering, taking “exams” in various aeronautical crafts and skills. They have four vacancies left to fill – and with their reputation they have to be exceedingly careful to keep high standards in quality and materials.

Luxury indeed – a fully equipped workshop, with electric welding torches and every tool known to aeronautics – we all got in some practice on metal scraps and offcuts. A very different experience than my own efforts back home – I thought at the time that there had to be a better fastening for Flying Flea #1’s main spar than cow-heel glue and sixpenny nails.

Although one of the Schneider trophy entries was on the slipway having a float repaired after hitting some driftwood, no part-time apprentices will be working on such a prestigious project. It seems there is another price class of repair – guaranteed quality but not guaranteed delivery time. We were shown an old Junkers F13 that was in for the economy service – it was decidedly battered, and someone had added insult to injury by applying a paint scheme that is simply painful to look at. Possibly an anarchist painter decorated it, at any rate it is a riot of colour.

Helen was all for showing our keenness and cleaning it thoroughly with a sand-blast, but alas the owner had specified the decor was to stay as it is. Instead, we were invited to look around the old airframe, maybe 15 years old – mercifully all aluminium, or it would surely have succumbed to rust and rot by now – and suggest what we would do for it. (Molly’s suggestion was not too helpful, although I would like to see Superior’s new aluminium smelting furnace in action myself.) I pointed out various stress cracks and dents, and marked where I thought of drilling “crack-stop” holes – that or fabricate new parts entirely.

A fine lunch in Raving Jake’s Bistro, on the waterfront. Prudence was greatly cheered by hearing her favorite singer being played on the victrola, the ukulele-torturing George Formless. His latest record is all the rage back home, which makes staying here on Spontoon more palatable. “I’m looking for a lamp-post on the corner of the street, in case a certain little lady comes by” is of course a song that appeals to canines (especially ones such as Prudence) though she hints that the original music-hall lyrics were rather cruder.

Everyone else was talking of their trip home, indeed many are heading out on Saturday. Quite a few were wishing they could stay on Spontoon, especially Carmen and Belle from Prudence’s dorm. Carmen hails from Mixtexca (chief exports, raw rubber and pickled chillies) and Belle is from the American Bible Belt (chief exports, belts and bibles) and by their accounts neither of them have exactly fitted in with polite Society back there. I recall Belle walking around somewhat dazed in our first week having seen the minimal fashions

sported by some of the native girls – at the time I assumed it was just culture shock, before I spotted her tail hardly stopped thrashing all day.

Beryl is very quiet as to her plans for the holidays – evidently we will find out all in good time – though preferably not in the newspaper headlines. I have no idea what she will do, except she has been expounding various “sure-fire” strategies folk at her old school had worked out for blackjack and “chemin-de-fer”. Which translates as “Railway” in my French phrasebook – most mysterious, as I am told there have been none working on these islands in the past ten years.

20th July, 1935

The last day of term! Strictly speaking we are officially here tomorrow, but the third-years are the only ones staying through the weekend – they are all holding a major celebration as they graduate, whereas some of our own class are leaving on evening flights tonight.

A splendid last day, with absolutely scorching weather tempered by a brisk breeze from the West. We had a surprising aeronautical encounter that was not listed on the Schneider Trophy timetable – in about half an hour a dozen two-meter size silk balloons touched down on Eastern Island, and a couple could be seen floating in the bay. Jasbir swam out to get one, and discovered it had carried commercial confectionery samples all the way from Japan, including a worldwide reply-paid postcard to let its senders know how well they had aimed it. Quite an achievement, to reach these islands with only an altimeter and release timer, although I am sure several missed completely. The samples were a type of oriental pickled plum that I sampled myself, and hurriedly donated to Li Han who dotes on them.

(Later) Our Tutors were decidedly busy on marking and discussing the third-year’s final scores, and only a few second-years were to be seen running Song Sodas. Missy K already has her name down for that job next year, though I fear she will leave little ice cream for any customers. Still, it is a pleasantly cool spot at this time of year, and one quite pleasantly scented, unless someone orders the locally produced Durian Ripple. I can generally spot when Prudence and Tahni are in the place, as the Hyena girl is a great fan of extra-ripe Durians.

I was taking shelter in the cool shade by the ice boxes just scenting the wares – when I scented something, or rather someone very familiar. Of course, Lars had come to say farewell to Molly – what could be more natural? Still, she could hardly go out unchaperoned – something neither objected to, which always surprises Maria.

The southern tip of this island is most scenic, with a small farm and plantations of sugar cane hiding the beaches from the main settled area, and a pleasant view out over towards Sacred Island. Molly was quite keen to make sure Lars did not forget her before September, though she had whispered to me earlier to keep an eye on him if I could.

It is most odd, looking back through the past terms and seeing how I have quite changed my mind about Lars – who certainly has an explanation for everything. Molly admiringly says he could sell ice in the middle of a Chicago blizzard, but Molly is always using sordid commercial sayings. If he was as guilty as I once thought him, we two would be absolutely the last folk he would want to spend time with – it would be like a burglar setting up house next to a Police station. * Of course, I would have to see him together with his ne’er-do-well brother before I could quite clear him – at least, I have a strong impression it was a brother he mentioned, though the details seem most curiously vague. The more he explains things to me, the less clear they seem to be – a most unusual state of affairs. Still, either one is innocent till proven guilty.

An excellent evening, all back for the final meal of term – roast chicken all round and not a speck of Poi to be seen!

* Editor’s note – Amelia has evidently not read the back issues of Molly’s “True Crimes Illustrated”, or she might have heard about the 19th Century master burglar Charlie Peace and his choice of address.

Amelia’s adventures continue in – “The Waste of War (And Visa Versa)”