

## Uncowed in Macao

Oharu Wei, Major Thomas Hawkins © Reese Dorrycott, Angelica Silfverlindh © Freddy Andersson

Being the twentieth part of Amelia Bourne-Phipps' adventures at the Songmark Aeronautical Boarding School for Young Ladies on Eastern Island, Spontoon. Amelia is starting the Spring term of her Third year... just two terms to go!

Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

Back to the grindstone! Actually it feels more like a real millstone we have been saddled with; our Tutors decided we all looked flabby after eating "too much roast turkey and Christmas pudding" all holiday, or so Miss Wildford said. She has a keen sense of humour, which Molly panted would be the cause of many riots in several places she knows. Our Christmas "holiday" was hardly relaxing – though unlike today we did not have to load our knapsacks with sandbags (wet, heavy) and jog around the dunes (loose, dry) half the morning.

For a change, it was not Molly or Beryl who had the idea of "evening the odds", that is, cheating. Madeleine X declared as soon as we were out of sight on the first dune that there was no point in hauling a pack full of sand along a beach full of it; she proceeded to dump her load with the intention of re-filling it out of our Tutors' sight before the final lap. It was Beryl who pointed out in a friendly tone that what she had poured out was not pure anonymous sand. The bags had been filled with something like tubes full of red brick dust and then the sand poured in around them; removing the tubes left a pattern of red and yellow running through like a watermark in a banknote. We did our very best to keep a straight face as we left her and her dorm trying to reproduce the effect, while they learned some energetic new words in French.

I had luckily remembered hearing from my brother about his military training, when the same idea was used with packs full of bricks – the first week the recruits thought they "got wise" and in their spare time laid in a hidden stockpile of bricks a mile from the finish point. Alas, the Sergeants were far wiser and the next week issued them with numbered bricks. Plus they randomly changed the finish point.

It could be worse; we might have to do the same in the Aleutians as we did a month ago. That was a nightmare, the part of our education where we learned what "trench paw" actually means. If any tourist agencies want to make postcards of those islands they will need hardy photographers with very good reflexes and a fast-draw camera; we had about an hour of good sunny weather in the whole trip – including one perfect dawn. But twenty minutes after that we were in a white-out blizzard, where one can hardly tell the ground from the snow-clouds. The one week "cast away" was extremely real, and Madeleine X almost left her bones there. Unlike previous years there was nobody to look after us however remotely; our sole help was being rescued at the end of the allotted time.

Back to our usual luncheon, hot Poi and a fillet of fish. One of the second-year girls from the Danish West Indies made herself very popular; her family sent her a crate of the family product, Caribbean "jerk" sauce which is basically chillies concentrated till one presumably needs a special corrosion-proof quartz glass bottle with gold foil coated stopper to hold it. Between her and Rumiko handing out the Wasabe, there are things one can do to make our usual ration interesting. The first-years have already taken the hint, and a range of Gentleman's Relish, Anchovy Essence and the like regularly appears on their table.

Madeleine X was grumbling that according to the prospectus of the Ave Argentum they have meat every day. We get it at least once a week, as several other girls pointed out – but in truth that is not a sit-down Sunday joint but more likely a corned-beef sandwich for lunch. Molly is no happier with poi than the rest of us, but she takes what she is given these days and asked fairly sweetly when Madeleine is transferring over. It would certainly raise the average cheerfulness of our year. The Church always say that in the end one gets what one deserves; should Madeleine transfer over we would sincerely hope so.

After lunch we split out to our various classes; back to small-boat handling on choppy waters, very glad I do not share Helen's seasickness! There was a fascinating sight as I tacked around Main Island, a Vostok "Balalaika" airship heading in towards Spontoon. This is a newer model, subtly different and rather faster as far as I could judge. Maria has been following Vostok's progress; they have been trying for ages to secure a supply of Helium from the Americans but so far without success. Having a ground-attack dirigible full of hydrogen is not a comfortable idea, especially as they fly too low to have a chance of getting out with parachutes. Although it is manifestly unarmed, we can see that the open crates on the stub wings that held a dozen rockets, have been replaced by boxed-in cowlings that probably keep the whole assembly from icing up in Vostok winters.

I could have sworn that one of the distant bowl-carrying Tiki statues was turning to watch the Balalaika go by, but distances and angles are hard to judge from a small boat in choppy seas.

Back for our first evening of term, after a very decent vegetable and fish stew with mashed sweet potatoes. The mash was rather like the potato version we used to have at Saint Winifred's, the juniors always called it "squodged spud." It is quite sobering to think the girls I left as third-years are sixth-form now, and will be graduating and gone this June. Our final full day here is July 16<sup>th</sup>, and our course here ends on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

After that we are on our own – all the Songmark protections and privileges our fees buy us will be gone. Our Tutors will have invested three years of their lives in us, and our parents and sponsors will have spent many thousands of pounds – it will be up to us after that to show if they made a wise investment.

Being the start of term we have some actual free time, not that we can waste it on relaxing – we could have gone out to Song Sodas last night had we wanted to, but now it will have to wait. Everyone had a pile of correspondence and magazine subscriptions waiting in the post room, ranging from Molly's "Criminal World" to Maria's Italian aeronautical journals. Though they are naturally in Italian, she generally spreads them on a library table and gives a running translation for those interested.

It seems the Italians are certainly holding their technical lead; there was an article on a whole specially built aeronautical city, "Guidonia", which her Uncle has encouraged as a thriving hotbed of invention and industry. Say what you will about him, "Il Puce" is doing a lot to develop Italy and her people. There was also mention of a special site near Rome, "Vigne de Valle" that is doing a lot of work on radio-controlled aircraft. The article mentioned them being used for remote controlled gunnery targets and the like, but Maria says the language is somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Something like "remote control, accurate out to a hundred kilometres. What could we do with those, eh?"

There is also another article on Signor Campini, who is still working with the Caproni company on a radical new engine that promises to beat all Schneider Trophy entrants next year or the year after. All these things take time – ten years ago most entries were biplanes, maybe in another ten they will all have those LeDuck engines. Actually getting off the water might be tricky; even in the Aleutians we never found the three hundred mile an hour headwind needed to start a LeDuck engine running. Then, we went in Winter and the equinoctial gales are said to be fiercer.

Molly was discussing her own journal with Beryl; one of the articles was complaining there is not a Nobel Prize category for the perfect crime. They had a lively discussion of what might win such a thing – Beryl starting off with the idea of selling the plans for a perpetual motion machine. If it fails to work they can just blame shoddy construction. Molly came in with packaging it as a motor-car engine that would run forever, for free, and having Henry Ford and Shellshock Oils go into a bidding war over it. Beryl's top bid was to sell it to both of them, who would lock the secret away forever and never build a test engine on the grounds that if it by any chance did work, word would leak out somehow. They would never risk it.

Actually, if Beryl put half the energy into legitimate business that she does into ingenious crimes, she would have no need to risk arrest. She seems to agree herself on occasions; as one of her sayings goes, "put a fur in prison and he will better learn how to steal your wallet. But put him through Law School and he can learn to steal the whole country."

There was a letter from Father, the first in quite awhile. The postmark explained why; he has been sent on another liaison trip with a selected team, to help the Norwegians fortify their colonies. Bouvet Island is typical of the sort of new development nations seem to be making these days; building up remoter possessions as communications hubs and last-ditch bastions. Bouvet Island is becoming "the Gibraltar of the Southern Ocean" and now is far better defended from its neighbours. The French are doing much the same on Clipperton Island off Mexico, making it a huge naval and industrial base with its own local version of the Maginot Line defending it. What the Germans are doing in Antarctica we hope to find out – especially why they include archaeologists when nobody has ever lived there.

It is encouraging to know that Bouvet Island is now secure against any land force liable to want to invade it. On the map it is absolutely strategic, guarding the whole Eastern Hemisphere between South Africa and Antarctica. The French are doing the same at Kerguelen, to where in the event of a disaster their government and much of their heavy industry could be evacuated. Just as we are always told to look for more than one way out of a building, nations keep their options open.

Father says he is being recalled to Europe, where they might soon need his talents nearer to home. What with Spain flaring up and threatening to drag in the rest of Europe it is a worrying time, to be sure. The League Of Nations does not seem to be doing much, but as Maria says, their ultimate threat is to expel a nation from their list – at which point the expelled government stops caring what the League Of Nations does anyway. In Spain we have "International Brigades" of staggering complexity; English furs are fighting on both sides according to their politics, while the Italians and Germans contribute "volunteers" who just happen to be on paid leave from their military. They have very generous "leave"; a cavalryman being allowed to take his horse home to graze in the family paddock is one thing, but the aviators and tank-furs are allowed to bring their aircraft and tanks across to Spain!

That was something Maria says she argued with Liberty Morgenstern in the big Althing debate back in December. Being a Red, Liberty supposedly cares nothing for pedigree or birthplace, and they accept all sorts nationalities if they only claim to follow the doctrine. Maria's uncle has quite a different idea – he will take anyone as long as they are loyal Italian. Their religion is not important nor their pedigree (unlike in Germany) but Reds, Freemasons and Anarchists are absolutely forbidden for being Internationalist. He does not like the Church much, but then the Church do not like the idea of Italy either. Maria says that priests ordered their congregations not to take part in national elections till 1928! And it was only her Uncle who got them to change their minds about democracy. \*

To bed, sneaking a glance through Molly's journal. There were actually some jolly informative articles on lock-picking and other means of unofficial building entry; the world is changing and only in the most unreconstructed stately homes can a larcenous fur now get down the chimney. With new technologies come new opportunities, though I had to hide a smile at the science fiction tale at the back. Surely nobody would build ventilator shafts big enough to crawl through! That'll never catch on with Adventurers.

\* Editor's note: Maria is perfectly accurate about this one.

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

A cold, dark day, certainly the most dismal of the season so far. But there was no sitting indoors playing Monopoly while commenting on the weather on the windows outside; Miss Wildford rubbed her paws briskly and announced that we were "all going for a nice swim". A stony silence settled around the class, followed by a mass departure in search of bathing-costumes and a rapid swallowing of chocolate bars by those who had the foresight to lay in a cache before the start of term.

Well, at least we were reconciled to getting soaked as we trotted towards the beach and the waiting water-taxis; surprisingly they were full of Natives apart from the usual nautical Spontoonie driver. Prudence and her dorm waved at some familiar faces, explaining they were pearl-diver and fishing girls, one or two of whom are in that formation swimming club they have.

The pearl-divers being aboard were explained when we got out of harbour and headed to the Northern tip of our island, where migrating shallows and sandflats make navigation tricky. The seabed is generally two or three fathoms deep at low tide, apart from the deep-water channels the tour boats try to stick to. We basically had a treasure-hunt, with the Natives placing pieces of crockery on the seabed and us diving down to hunt for them. Although we have done this sort of thing before that was in bright clear waters in Summer, not battling choppy waves, lashing rain mixing with the spray and a rather nasty rip-tide curving round the point! With so little light and the waves stirring up the mud it was awfully hard to find the targets, and I am sure there were some left down there for geologists to puzzle over in the far future.

I suppose it was good practice, but at least last time we had to do this the prizes were worthwhile cans of food, not cracked pots. Some of them were hotel ware proclaiming their home on Accounting Island, which dates them to the rather early years before the Casino was built there.

Rather than getting back on the water-taxis, Miss Devinski pointed at Eastern Island and gave us five minutes to get to shore. Just when we thought we had finished, we had to get in through the surf. Li Han almost got washed away; she is our smallest and the rip-tides on that beach are ferocious. Happily Maria managed to grab her before any points were lost, and soon enough we were packed in together on the beach, consoling ourselves with the idea the rain was at least washing the salt out of our fur. It is warmer being in the middle of twenty bodies standing pressed tight together than standing alone, but not much – and one soon gets pushed to the outside edge while others seek their turn out of the worst of the wind.

Naturally, Prudence and her dorm could take more comfort in the exercise than the rest of us. Prudence is wearing a new Tailfast locket, but unlike last term Ada is not. I never did find out who Ada was Tailfast to, if indeed her ring was a real one – Saimmi has said Ada has never been to Sacred Island for the official ceremony.

While our Tutors' water taxi landed, we started taking bets on what they would have in store for us next. The hopeful vote was for a brisk jog back to Songmark and a hot shower; the gloomier ones looked at the rock face two hundred yards away, streaming with rain, and prophesied we would be claw wedging and snout-jamming up the harder routes till dark. Maria and Irma are best at that; there is an "off-width" chimney that is just the wrong size for anyone except Beryl or Li Han to bridge their way up, but our bovines have the horns and the neck muscles to head-jam their way up.

Actually nobody guessed what was next; the brisk jog was right, along the coast to the Eastern end of the runway. There was a group there of uniforms, Rain Island types and Spontoon militia. Our dear Tutors had volunteered our services as the opposition in their unarmed self-defence classes!

I know it is now campaigning season for the militia; they exercise before the filming and tourist season gets started, and begin this time of year to dig trenches in the fields before the crops start to grow. There are always new recruits; we could just hope they had "enjoyed" a morning as strenuous as ours.

Just to break the ice, one of the Rain Island sergeants stepped forward and promised a meal at Mahanish's for any of us who could throw him. I think he was surprised at the response – we all stepped forwards, leaving Miss Devinski to choose who to send forward. Everyone expected it would be Irma or Maria, failing that Missy K (who certainly looks rather like a Samoan wrestler, though less than she did in her first year.) I would not have put a cowny on Belle being chosen! Adele might have been if it been a case of her choosing straws in which case she would have "won" and been used to wipe the floor with.

The scene: a very wet field just off the end of the runway, with one large Rain Island stallion flexing his muscles and a very averagely built long-eared rabbit girl dripping wet and soaked from head-fur to toe-claws. But Belle stepped forward gamely – and the show began.

One could see the Sergeant's first move; he was going to grab her, pin her then throw her with the minimum of effort. Things turned out rather differently – when he lunged for her she was already elsewhere, behind him in fact. Rabbits can certainly jump – she sprang about four feet in the air, planted both feet on his back and kicked again, with all her strength. Definitely not a move we have seen in the training manuals! As we have heard, “amateurs” are frequently hard to tackle as with a professional one has a fair idea of what they are going to try next.

It would be good to record that Belle bowled him over with the first move – and with a fur of her own weight she certainly would have. It went on for about two minutes, which is an awfully long time for such – the Sergeant could not get her in any sort of grip, and was nearly tripped twice. In the end he called it a draw and promised her the meal anyway, for holding out so well. Our unconventional bunny smiled and asked sweetly if he had a sister on the islands he could send along instead. Oddly enough, he had. One hopes the young mare will have been warned beforehand, or she may get the sort of dinner date she will not be expecting.

One could see Miss Devinski's logic, putting their best against our average. Beryl or Li Han are our smallest, though they have definite talents. Anyone deciding Beryl in her Sunday dress with elegant parasol looks a good hold-up target will soon find out their mistake; that hollow parasol handle flicks out into two pounds of chain as one unwise would-be robber found out this Summer (the judge reduced his sentence to take into account the time he had spent in the hospital until his broken jaw healed enough to testify in court.) Today she was unarmed initially; the sock full of grit she had rapidly filled was disallowed under the rules.

Then it was the turn of the rest of us; I was set to tackle a short but very stocky black-furred bear girl, possibly a Malaysian Sun-bear. I know from Missy K that bears are tough, but this was like trying to grapple and throw a boulder! The Rain Islanders do train their recruits rather well – possibly Mr and Mrs Fairburn-Sykes gave them classes too. Free-style Jude-Jitsu is very handy, but we are trained in rougher work in self-defence, and I found myself noting brief openings where I could have gone for eyes, throat and kidneys as Mr. Toshiro Finkelstein taught us. Not a ladylike occupation; I wonder how the Ave Argentum train?

By the time we had all gone three bouts against different opponents everyone was a mass of bruises; the rain-soaked ground was soft enough but some folk were hitting it rather hard. I saw Maria pick up one large canine and swing him in almost an “aeroplane ride” before crashing him down; had that been on concrete rather than mud there would have been broken bones rather than bruises.

Miss Devinski was in a brief huddle with the Rain Island officers comparing notebooks, then with a curt nod she announced we were heading back with them to Moon Island. We were hoping to head back to the plain but adequate Songmark showers. Only Molly was keen on the Moon Island trip; they have the only visible artillery on Spontoon and in the exercises last year she dearly loved firing it. Beryl spotted her slightly glazed look, and whispered to her something about “*triple turrets of eighteen inch battleship guns, illegally re-chambered for hand-loaded, wildcat rounds... just waiting for your command...*” The effect was predictable; she nearly swooned like a comedy co-ed meeting a film star.

Anyway, one water-taxi ride later we found out our fate. Military bases always have a lot of strenuous fatigues to be done; the average Sergeant-Major will always think of something to keep the troops busy rather than give them time off. On seeing the piles of coal near the wharf I rather feared we would be handled shovels and requested to move it from point A to Point B, just for the sake of it. At home, Father's butler McCardle (Reg. Sgt. Major, ret.) frequently has the servants up polishing the roof on a quiet day. But we must have done something right, as we were presented with the biggest set of communal baths outside the public ones in Main Island, already full and steaming! It was one of those that Rumiko tells us are standard in Japan, with showers to actually wash all the dirt off before getting in to soak. A sensible idea today, without which the pool would soon have resembled a communal mud wallow. We had brought enough of Eastern Island with us to fill a window-box or two.

I have heard a lot about the Rain Island armed services; they are “co-ed” to a remarkable degree, with mixed bathing and mixed dorms (though partitioned off, and partition-hopping highly disapproved of). But Songmark has a reputation to consider, and to some disappointment we had the baths to ourselves for half an hour of blissful soaking. There were two steam-rooms though, in which we could hear our former sparring partners relaxing. Well, we had towels and such for our modesty, and those of us who wished soon found room in the steam with company. Miss Wildford was there already and I suppose was the official chaperone, not that one is really needed. About half of us actually have promised themselves or their families to stay unattached till they graduate, at least.

As a “sauna” it rather reminded me of my trip last year to the Gilbert and Sullivan islands, in terms of the heat and humidity. The difference there was I was dressed in my respectable Songmark uniform, which is at least cooler than the Royal Air Force kit some of our instructors had to wear. Still, despite the far greater comfort I doubt the military would really go for wearing towels. Maria commented that being draped in togas never slowed the ancient Romans down, and in Rome in midsummer one never needs to build an indoor sauna.

I can see a steam bath being rather nice at Songmark especially in the Winter; Rain Island has them by tradition as their “sweat lodges” are used as part of their religion and suit a colder, damper climate. The fuel bill for communal baths of this size might be rather steep, but it is much cheaper to fill a room with steam

than hot water and nearly as relaxing. Carmen and Jasbir were all for the idea, coming as they do from much hotter climates.

Helen's ears seemed somewhat down considering – she commented that she had hated having to comb the Tailfast markings out of her fur, and scatter her Tailfast ring on the waters as tradition demands. She feels very strange without it. Of course, what with our Krupmark adventure on the Solstice when she should have renewed her ring then the hunting of the Three Moons, she hardly had time to think much about such. I consoled her that it is less than half a year to the next chance, and she can be Mrs. Helen Hoele'toemi as soon as she likes anyway. Our Tutors seem to quite approve of her and Marti, and I doubt they would raise much objection. One of Red Dorm is married, after all. But Helen has said she will wait till she graduates; she is determined to put all her energies into one thing at a time. Quite right I suppose; Songmark and honeymoons are things one needs all one's energies for.

Back to Songmark suitably clean and steam-pressed, having been thawed out and admirably relaxed after a strenuous day. On the docks of Eastern Island Beryl recognised a familiar snout; dressed in an Ave Argentum uniform was a vixen she knew as a junior at Saint T's! Rather a big change one would have thought. Beryl was unusually informative, saying this Maisie Thynne was from the famous "Happy Valley" in colonial Kenya, and was known at Saint T's as a lively combatant with some useful notions she had picked up from the Natives back home.

We have heard that the Argentum have an exception to their (often stated) policy of only allowing in girls of good pedigree and impeccable reputation; they have a separate rank called "Penitentes" who presumably are let in to act as an Awful Warning to the rest, and to be given the opportunity to reform and be accepted. The history of the Church is full of folk who started off as great sinners, turned round and made the very keenest and most energetic of converts. One could well imagine their "Penitentes" get given the dirty work – though Madeleine butted in and insisted that if it is officially sanctioned it cannot be dirty work by definition. Maria had a few interesting historical tales to top that one; one of her ancestors on her Mother's side was a Papal Bull at the time of the Borgias, when Popes settled theological debates using mercenary armies and poison chalices.

Back for a slap-up meal of mountains of cassava chips with enough curried vegetables to sate a quadruped elephant! Songmark might not have the Spanish ham and spiced chorizo sausage our rivals boast about on their menus (actually imported from Mixteca) but apart from the poi it is rather tastier than we generally credit, and one has to say there is plenty of it. Some of the first-years actually like plain poi without having been brought up on it like Missy K, which just goes to show it takes all sorts.

It is rather a luxury to have as much food as one wants to eat – this time last month we were looking hungrily at frozen blocks of pemmican and a few hoarded chocolate bars, working out how long we could make them last. It is one thing to sit around under a tropical palm awaiting rescue; we are well-nourished and nobody is liable to starve to death in a week in such conditions. But out in the Aleutians with the biting wind and freezing temperature, as soon as one feels hungry the cold started to creep up from toes and tail-tip. That is bad enough – but if it reached any higher we would be in danger of perishing on frozen waists like so many explorers. As the official school exploration handbook by Messrs. Sellers and Yateman has it, "*Arctic travellers feeling hard-up for hardships to describe on the lecture tour afterwards can miserably refer to pummican, a concoction of pellicanised friable pumice-stone.*" Still, it could be worse – as every schoolboy can quote from the same chapter, "*select your companions with care; you may have to eat them.*" \*

After a day like today, even our unheated rooms and the (still extremely hard) Songmark beds feel very sweet. Looking out at the rain hammering on the window, we certainly feel for Jasbir's dorm who are out guarding the fence right now. Certainly, Songmark graduates will have to take on rough and desperate jobs to match what we got used to on the course! Having seen what two lots of third-years were like by the end of June, I can imagine many are going to take a holiday straight afterwards involving a lot of sleep on a comfortable bed, company to taste. Just being able to sleep without an alarm clock would be such a luxury.

Molly says she first came to Songmark with the aim of getting qualified to do more than start a business of "dirty deeds done cheap". I doubt her current idea of "Discreet services at reasonable rates" is really much better, though it would look more respectable on the business card.

- "And Now All This", © Sellers and Yateman 1936

Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1937

Two days of excessively hard grind and flying in miserable weather. The cloud level has been about three hundred feet, brushing the top of LONO hill, but that has not put our Tutors off in the slightest. Having the runway streaming with water is a real challenge for landing the Junkers 86; it is bigger and heavier than anything else we have, and takes a lot of stopping in the wet. Folk have experimented with parachutes for aircraft, which we could certainly appreciate as we feel the locked wheels hydroplaning and see the end of the runway looming in front of us. The airport staff had the end cable up as an arrestor just in case; it might have

bent the props had we run into it, but better that than collapsing the undercarriage running off into the soft ground at the end of the concrete.

Thinking of parachutes, Songmark brought over someone who has had more practical experience with them than any regular pilot would ever wish. They do have an impressive network of contacts, and we are always being given short-notice lectures and talks by folk who appear briefly on Spontoon and have a story to tell. One of the “old girls”, from the second ever year to graduate was passing through the islands, and was invited to lecture us. She is Hetty Wainright, a British lioness who we missed seeing by two years. Though some folk wondered about her ancestry, her family have probably been in Britain since the Romans came over (Maria points out that there were actually not that many Romans in the Roman army; a lot of the Legions came from what is now Yugoslavia, Palestine, Spain and Germany.) Lions are not a “Euro” species generally, but that is one species that arrived from North Africa and stayed when the last legions marched away.

Miss Wainright has that ultimate in exciting jobs, a Test Pilot! She has flown for Supermarine and Miles, and has even tried out private experimental racers – land, not floatplanes or we would probably have seen her around before at the Schneider Trophy races (perhaps she was; I have always managed to miss Speed Week, worse luck.) She has had some fur-raising escapes, all of which she got out of through forward planning and fanatical attention to detail. A real test pilot has more in common with the engine designer than with the “Hollywood” portrayal whose main job seems to be throwing aircraft into power-dives and seeing if the wings will stay on as he hauls the stick back yards above the waves. By her own description, only a tenth of her time is actually flying, the rest is planning meticulously in advance what they expected to do, and discussing with the designers afterwards how it turned out.

Having flown privately built racing aircraft, she has earned her parachute “Caterpillar club” badge a few times over. She says she may not hold the record of baling out at four hundred miles an hour, but she is probably the fastest one to do it and live to tell the tale. The instinct is always to pull the parachute as soon as clear of the aircraft; at anything like that speed the shock of the canopy opening would break the parachute, the harness or the pilot’s neck. Probably all three. She lived by spreading her arms and legs wide in a “star” like a free-fall parachutist, letting the speed bleed off until it was safe to pull the ripcord. This needs plenty of altitude, but she tells us one way of living to make a career as a test pilot is – do nothing experimental unless you really have got plenty of altitude.

We are not likely to need her advice in the Tiger Moths, but aircraft are getting faster, not only Schneider Cup winners but regular commercial flyers. There was a De Havilland “Dragon Rapide” passing through Spontoon last week, which is the way things are going. By all accounts it is getting quite hard to get out of some aircraft, and many established pilots dislike enclosed cockpits for that reason. Some airline pilots insist on carrying a large fireman’s axe so they can chop their way out of a crash!

I remember that idea we saw advertised last year of the airliner of the future. Every passenger is tightly strapped into a special parachute-equipped seat that in extreme emergency flings them out with a blast of compressed air – in that design, hopefully the mechanism guarantees the roof escape hatches open up beforehand. One hopes the switch is not too easy to mistake for the cabin lights on the pilot’s instrument panel, too. Personally I like the look of the current airliners, with their lightweight wickerwork or bamboo furniture, comfy bunk beds, proper galleys and such onboard. Being crammed in together nose to tail will never catch on, unless air travel gets as cheap as holiday charabancs – and that’s never going to happen. When Maria goes back to Italy in the big triple triplane Capronis, they have room for cosy bunks in that roomy houseboat-like fuselage. There is even room for maids and valets, an essential part of the service on the forty hour crossings from Alaska over the pole and Greenland to Europe. Only triple triplanes have the fuel to make such a crossing from Amundsen Field on the Magnetic Pole, and no longer have to touch down on Disko Island on the West coast of Greenland. There was very little to see there apart from a refuelling station, though the Disko natives had some quaint and unusual musical styles and folk dances.

We pointed Miss Wainright towards her former Tutor’s house; Miss Pelton as was, now Mrs. Voboel and family. One very healthy son and a sibling on the way this Spring, due to arrive on my count eighteen months after her wedding. Hmm. It is something to think about; Helen at least will be looking forward to relaxing completely after graduating, but we will have to think hard about just what precautions to relax or not. Unlike our dear ex-Tutor, we are starting our active Adventuring careers not retiring from them.

Our first night of gate guard starts tonight, and none of us are looking forward to it. The nights are awfully long right now, little more than two weeks after the solstice. It has been very wet, and Maria is parting with some of her allowance to Prudence’s dorm who have a rather strange waterproof suit that they say served them all well in the Aleutians. They were the only dorm who came out of that trip well-fed and well-rested, so Carmen’s idea of the thin rubber coating punched with thousands of pinholes may be a useful piece of kit. While we were trying to patch that rock shelter together with moss on the inside and frozen mud on the outside, we could certainly have used something like that.

Alas, although Maria has been measured up for the suit it will take awhile to make considering how much free time we have, and tonight is the night she wants it!

Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

At last, the end of an awfully long week. Although nobody agreed with the Tutors on Monday that they had got out of shape in the holidays, we are all ready to drop. Last night was a surprise. It started with Miss Windlesham telling us the guard dogs were having a night off, which is unheard-of. We depend quite a lot on their vigilant noses – the textbooks say that although a thinking fur may have the same size snout and such, our brains have the thinking parts developed at the expense of the bits handling the senses. Since the day we arrived here in 1934, there has never been a night the compound has been so unguarded. Anyway, Maria and me braced ourselves to the fact we are completely on our own for the first time ever, with the rain beating down loudly and the compound lights illuminating little more than cones of falling rain. Between the lights one could have parked a tankette and we would scarcely have seen it.

As Molly still insists on carrying my T-Gew on sentry duty, we had to haul it around till she was due to take over with Helen at three. All such things live in the Songmark strong room, which is locked at night and we are absolutely forbidden to have them in our rooms at any time, so there was nothing for it but to haul its forty pounds around all night, like it or not. I was carrying the ammunition, which was more a matter of sharing the weight than safety precautions as when Molly has the rifle. On a regular night we generally patrol separately, but in such rain we would get too separated. With the weather covering them an invader could “bushwhack” us one at a time when we went out of sight behind the buildings.

Our tutors have to approve whatever self-defence equipment we take to our night shift; I think they only approved Molly’s choice because it is almost impossible to use it in the circumstances. A pistol or carbine she might blaze away with in a heated moment, but the T-Gew has to be fired from its bipod on the ground, and whoever is with her on evenings carries the ammunition and is unlikely to let her have any however she pleads. Miss Devinski always checks it is unloaded before signing it out. I carry a Kilikiti bat myself; less intimidating than the anti-tank rifle with saw-backed bayonet but thirty-five pounds lighter, and can be used with a more flexible approach. A good thing too, as it happened.

About two in the morning we heard a sudden jangling of tin cans. This is an innovation someone probably put in from hearing about their Father’s experiences on the Western Front, where the barbed wire hides an alarm wire. It will not go off by itself in the wind. Each section of fence has a different sound with different tins – so in one second we knew something was happening on the Northern side facing the airport! Even then we might not have picked out the sound in the rain had we been wearing our oilskin hoods or sou’wester hats; the rain hitting oilskin next to the ears would have been deafening. We patrol bare-headed in all weathers now, admittedly getting chilled and soaked but hearing and seeing an awful lot more.

We could see very little of the Northern fence as the second-year blocks, the kitchen and dining hall were in the way. Maria hissed for us to head out, and I passed her a single round she chambered in the breech. It seemed sinister that the very night the dogs were away someone was trying to break in – as if they had been watching for a very long time for this chance. Nobody has ever broken into Songmark that we know of, unless you count that horror tale Beryl tells of the canine lady thief and what happened to her.

The staff duty bungalow is by the main entrance but standing orders are not to disturb our Tutor except for emergencies – and a Songmark dorm getting back in after an evening over the wire is definitely not an emergency. Maria checked she had the safety on, and saw that I had noted it too – then we were right next to the second-year dorm, just around the corner from the unknown intruders.

Though the rain was covering most of the sound and scent, I blessed my feline night vision as I saw a shadow cast at our side of the building; something was coming our way. Counting down on my fingers, we did what we had practiced so often – Maria rolled on the ground to finish up with the rifle ready to fire round the corner, covering me while I did the risky bit and jumped out with the Kilikiti bat, shouting “Halt!”

As it happened I timed it perfectly – there was a dark-suited figure there clutching something that might have been a rifle with netting furled round at one end. Definitely not one of our dorms coming home after a party. With a Kilikiti bat the natural thing is to swing it but that takes time and telegraphs one’s intentions – so instead I lunged with it like Molly has showed me with a pool cue, bringing a muffled “oomph!” as I connected with the intruder’s solar plexus and it went down like a sack of potatoes. The long rifle shape dropped to the ground and I stepped firmly on it while I probed with the bat tip, dislodging the hood. We are taught never to get too close, what with knives and such.

My ears and tail must have gone right up; I recognised the dark-furred bear girl I had been wrestling the afternoon before, who had a Rain Island jacket under her dark grey coveralls! Looking down I spotted the “rifle” was actually a pole with a small flag on the end; evidently she had been planning to plant it somewhere as proof she had evaded us.

While I stood guard, Maria looked around for any other intruders – finding none, we hauled her to her feet gasping, and marched her off towards the Staff duty bungalow. More for show than anything, Maria was prodding her along with the T-Gew and saw-backed bayonet – whatever the intruder’s motivation, we were determined to show how seriously Songmark takes its security. Unlike the prisoner, I could spot Maria wink as she growled that it was a good thing she was in uniform underneath or she would be shot out of paw as a spy.

Miss Windlesham was already awake and in a dressing gown by the time we pressed the emergency bell – it came as no surprise that she nodded pleasantly, and said she would take care of our visitor. The bear had recovered enough to gasp out her name, rank and serial number – Missy Rongahoa, Private, RNI 14730. So now we know!

Our Tutor asked us a few searching questions about what we had done and why, then nodded and wished us a quiet finish to our watch – before ordering us against warning Molly and Helen off. And indeed there were no further invaders; we got soaked but handed everything over at three without a word, except to complain about the miserable weather.

At breakfast time we heard about the fate of the second intruder – a stoat girl who had managed to plant her flag and made a run for the fence (where a thick blanket covered the wire and a rope-ladder spanned it.) Molly caught her by the first-year dorm and tackled her rather efficiently; by the time Helen arrived the unfortunate mustelid was in a triple hammerlock and tail hitch, with Molly sitting on her like a big game hunter with trophy. Stoats are very flexible, and by all accounts she was practically tied in a reef knot.

Quite an evening for us! I did worry somewhat about our “captives” but Helen says our Tutor explained they had been warned we would not be expecting them – and to run for their lives if spotted. I imagine whoever comes over on the next four nights, if it is that regular, will be doubly vigilant seeing how their comrades were handled. It is just as well Molly did not fire a warning shot – our anti-tank rifle could be heard on Moon Island on a still night, and would have quite given the game away to the other dorms.

We assured each other we would not tell the others; it is too much fun to spoil. If any of the Rain Islanders do get in and out undetected, the dorm that let them in will be in awful trouble – and we are sincerely glad it is not us. Molly speculated that if any of the intruders are male and personable, Sophie D’Artagnan or Susan de Ruiz will be happy to interrogate them, in terms of getting everything out of them.

Actually, I severely doubt any dorm but Prudence’s will find anyone they want to meet that way. Both of our intruders were female, and I am as sure as I can be that the rest will be as well. The only males we have ever seen in our compound are four-leggers, and even they are not here right now. Obviously that was why we were on our own last night; the Tutors have confidence the guard dogs will spot anyone, and want to test us on our own merits.

Back into classes, trying not to yawn our snouts off after a cold and wet but exciting night. Coming in off our freezing sentry duty soaked to the skin at three in the morning is rather a challenge. There is no hot water in the shower at that time of night, worse luck, but we do our best with towels and have a vacuum flask of something hot awaiting in our dorm. There is a rather fine curried soup we have tried at Bow Thai, and although our recipe might not be totally authentic, it is convincing enough for the middle of the night and decidedly warming. Getting Maria and Molly to cook in the first-year was more of a challenge than most of the things in the prospectus – Maria would far rather have infiltrated Krupmark alone than polish someone else’s boots, make a bed or cook their dinner. One wonders what sort of husband she will choose one day.

I suppose it is an interesting idea – Songmark definitely aims to take raw talent and turn out well-rounded Adventuresses – except for Missy K, who is about ten percent less round than the day she arrived. She looks a lot better in a cockpit than a cocktail dress, even now.

We were reminded of that in the afternoon, when Miss Devinski gave us copies of last year’s Songmark prospectus which includes articles done by the third-years now departed. With a nod she simply told us “improve on that” and left us to it. It is certainly something to think of; around the world there are hundreds and possibly thousands of girls who want to come here, and only twenty or so will in September. What with us and the Ave Argentum, Spontoon is definitely putting itself on the map year by year even without the holiday trade. If our Tutors were not so strict about nobody coming “on spec” there would probably be a refuge town of hopefuls camped outside our gate all year.

Our Tutors tell us very little about how they got Songmark started, but we have read through the accounts of the first ever classes, and can work most of it out. The school started off small, with a lot of bills to pay and more confidence than bankable assets. Aircraft were leased or borrowed from friends, and although the early years had lower bills they had less spectacular equipment to train on. No expensive Aleutians trips; the top of Mount Kiribatori had to suffice, and indeed in Winter that is far from tropical. Again, we notice the courses have changed – there was far more treasure-hunting back then. I wonder if Kansas Smith ever applied?

Maria had her typewriter out in a minute; it travels most places with her in a small tin box and she has another one to keep her papers dry. The trouble is working out just what to say – it would be irresponsible to paint the course as one big ripping yarn, with adventures and treats galore (though true enough we do get some.) On the other paw, telling folk about all the times we go to bed a mass of bruises and soaking wet fur is not too liable to get prospective first-years persuading their parents and sponsors to let them come. Some of the things we have been through would be sure to put anyone off – and yet the sooner a prospective Adventuress realises life here is not one long string of thrilling aerobatics and hula parties the better. We held off the Moro pirates aboard the Parsifal, but had the pom-pom jammed or the ammunition run out – it would have been a very different story. Not one that would encourage mothers to send their daughters this way.



An hour of head-fur scratching and rapid scribbling ensued, as we put our first thoughts down on paper. As Maria pointed out, any girl reading a copy of the prospectus already wants to come here, and knows her chances of getting in are slim. It is a tricky proposition for our Tutors working out the right approach – on the face of it there is little we have in common. Four years ago I would never have thought to have Molly or Helen as classmates!

Teatime was a lively affair, celebrating the end of our first week. Tomorrow we are back at the hula dance classes, along with Jasbir's dorm and half a dozen first years. We will be spreading our strains and bruises around, hula using quite different muscles from trotting around the beach with pack. Actually there are some activities it helps us exactly with in terms of flexibility and stamina – as Jirry, Marti and Lars could probably agree.

Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

Still a damp day, but after a full night's sleep and the prospect of Casino Island awaiting we hardly cared. Breakfast at half past seven as every Saturday in Winter gives us enough time to catch up on our sleep and not have to dress "on the bounce". Sundays give us another half hour sleep, a luxury we have learned to appreciate. Getting to bed at three in the morning, or worse getting up then, is something a third-year gets used to but hardly likes. Maria has reminisced that back in Italy when she moved with the fast set she was often up that late but those were wild parties and dances, not trudging around a fence in the rain.

Just before breakfast Maria collared Susan de Ruiz and asked her how her night went – she was on with Madeleine X, but Madeleine is rarely helpful or very communicative especially first thing in the morning. They had much the same as us, except that their second intruder got as far as the rope ladder on the way back having planted her flag right in the middle of the compound. Score highly for the Rain Islanders, and none too well for Madeleine! Tonight is Missy K, who is not the best for running after intruders but very good for sitting on them when captured. The trouble is, if she forgets herself and takes a good swing with that Kilikiti bat she is liable to take someone's head clean off. They are originally designed as war-clubs, after all.

It will be a real test of our resolve, for everyone to keep quiet and not drop any hints by the time Prudence's dorm are on Monday night. Prudence is a particularly sharp girl, and the rest of her dorm are no slouches either. Still, they are the only ones who are likely to enjoy their capturing a female prisoner – not that they would actually do anything, Captain Granite they are definitely not. I can imagine Prudence and Carmen speculating on what they are liable to do to an intruder, who has "evidently" come in to kidnap a Songmark student.

Off to Casino Island, straight after breakfast! First we had the luxury of shopping, Molly getting another pack of those Extreme Danger matches from Eriksson's Outdoors. They take "strike anywhere" rather further than is really safe, and cannot be put out with water. The matchbox they come in is airtight steel, packed with baking soda to absorb stray moisture and cut down the space for oxygen in case of too-enthusiastic ignition. Still, as long as they do not go off in one's pocket, it is good to know they are reliable.

Dance classes were as fine as ever, with our regular opponents from the S.I.T.H.S and quite a few off-islanders we had not seen before. On enquiry they turned out to be Rain Islanders posted here with the militia, who evidently are being sent to pick up local colour. That makes a change; colonial troops do not take much notice of local customs, except to write home with humorous articles for books such as "*Silly beliefs and senseless customs of many lands.*"

We have practiced our hula quite a bit over the holidays, as Jasbir and her dorm noticed. Then, Helen and me had a lot of compatible study up in the Great Stone Glen with the Priestess Oharu. Just as sailing is rather different from flying, both need a good set of reflexes and sharp judgement. We stepped through a very lively routine, then started showing off a few moves we have made up ourselves. Hula is like writing poetry; you can say anything, but it has a certain structure and form to be authentic. (I do not count some of these "modern" poets that have come along since the War. Everyone knows poems must rhyme and scan even if they do not all start off "roses are red, violets are blue.")

Jasbir is planning some more Adventures at Easter and asked us if we were interested in joining her. Not if it is back to Gull Island! I have never been there but heard all about her trip there in Summer – the place is basically a sandbank like a particularly uninviting and almost rainless Kanim Island that is deep in guano and raucous with aggressive birds. Presumably the settlements are on the upwind side, where all the Native foxes live and are rarely short of eggs and seabird meat if they risk being mobbed to collect it. Actually she is heading out to Yip-Yap Island next trip, where instead of vulpines there are mostly canines with a fascinating currency involving millstones. Perhaps everyone buys their goods "on account" and settles it once a year; it would be hard to give small change out of half a tonne of gritstone.

We had to disappoint Jasbir, and Maria's offer of inviting them to come to German Antarctica fell on ears rather chilled still from the Aleutians, especially Jasbir and Li Han. Still, Jasbir is keen on adventure, and we have never yet headed out with more than one dorm except for the Albert Island trip last year. She is one Songmark girl who knows exactly where she will be going after graduation – straight back to her Father's Court, where she will be building up the aeronautic side of the principedom. Before then, she says, she will have

to make the most of her last months of freedom here. Her family were going to have some retainers living on Casino Island keeping an eye on her for her course; happily she managed to dissuade them.

An afternoon of Hula dancing is a fine way to keep warm; we are now quite used to grass skirts and flower leis but they are rather bold wear for Casino Island in tourist season, official events aside. There are few folk around right now except locals, but still we have Standing Orders to dress before leaving the dance school. The hotel the Ave Argentum occupy is in the next street, on the North side of the island.

Thinking of such, on the way back Maria picked up the sort of thing she says she used to read every week, a European fashion magazine. It makes rather odd reading these days; we spend so much time in utterly practical costumes that the idea of fashion has rather faded for us. It seems that in the coming tourist season some of the swimsuits will be two-piece models, a decidedly daring move. We have seen such here, but mostly on secluded beaches on South Island where in truth the Spontoones wear still less when bathing.

Jasbir was unimpressed; perfectly respectable costume in her part of India has always had bare midriffs, and the Hindu temples apparently have some carvings that one would not expect on the equivalent of a cathedral. Very informative and inspiring carvings, from her description.

Maria says that Il Puce's daughter wore one in Italy last year; there was nowhere selling them in the whole country so one had to be secretly posted to fit her measurements from France. Certainly a trend-setter!

Although in theory we could have spent all the evening till Songmark closes out having fun, with rather drooping tails we all headed in for the evening meal. Casino Island in January is none too thrilling, anyway. We have a stack of work to do, and after a quite decent meal (salt fish, fried aubergines and heaps of rice) we knuckled down to it for the evening.

Tonight Missy K's dorm is due on fence watch. It is tempting to wait up and see if we can spot the intruders coming over the fence from up in our first-floor window, but we need our sleep especially after last night – and the girls on watch would probably realise something was up when they spotted us gleefully watching them. Anyway, we are sure to hear about it in the morning.

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

A bright day! It is getting difficult to keep the secret from Jasbir and Prudence's dorms who are still to have their surprise encounters, but we found out what happened last night. I do not know if the Rain Island girls are being told details of how their comrades fared, but they are getting better at it. Last night one came in equipped with two dummies that she set in the shadows and looked quite realistic until Missy K tackled one. Beryl proved to be a good shot with a bolas, and brought her (real) intruder down at a run. The bolas is not a standard thing for us, but it seems she has prepared three rocks with holes bored through them, which with a pocketful of steel cable can be assembled into the weapon in ten seconds flat. Presumably she had them hidden nearby, disguised as plain pieces of Eastern Island basalt. One of her school chums was brought up in the Argentine outback as the daughter of a rich and successful cattle rustler, and at Saint T's there is a constant quest for a fresh edge for surprise attacks as ruthless as life in any savage jungle.

I would guess these would be fairly well-trained militia, if not something more special – the prospect of breaking into Songmark alone, with our reputation, is not something the average resident likes to think about. The Althing have raised no objections that we know of to our patrolling inside the compound armed to the teeth, and so far there have been no "incidents" to call down the wrath of the law on us. We just hope Prudence and Jasbir's intruders do not make us spoil our record! Luckily nobody has had decided to do the "halt or I fire" routine followed by (hopefully) warning shots – that would work and be allowable but quite spoil the surprise for the following dorms.

We could at least keep Prudence's four too busy to be suspicious as they took our measurements for those waterproof suits Carmen put together for the Aleutian trip. They are not conventional waterproofs, which try and keep the rain off while still giving maximum ventilation. These are sealed suits, quite close fitting and designed to keep water out from all directions even if you are up to your neck in it – we would really have appreciated it this time last month. Carmen does like this job; she certainly took her time with the measuring tapes on me. Maria is initially paying for these, while Molly is speculating Ericsson's Outdoors could be interested in a finished model if they could be made locally at a decent price. I remember the rain-coats we have seen in the oriental village near the delta on Main Island, made from a layer of rice straw tied around the shoulders and another one around the waist, with a conical straw hat on top. The wearer looks rather like a thatched roof on legs, but they are cheap to make and by repute are excellently dry when properly done. Plus one would not have to worry much about heat-stroke as would happen in a rubberised suit in the Spontoon summer.

Out to South Island, hurrah! It does seem a lot more than a week since we were at the Hoele'toemi household. This time we took Adele with us; apparently Clear-Skies Yakan on Main Island is busy this weekend, and I want to have a look at her curse near a sacred site. It is rather like having more illumination available to inspect it, though it is not light that any film is liable to capture. We have seen everything we can by the "light" of what is on Songmark territory, and need something better.

The days are definitely getting lighter. On the outskirts of Haio Beach there is an old sundial from Plantation days that was used to time the working day. It must have been very different, with no Spontoonies as such sixty years ago – a mixed bunch of farm-hands from all over the Pacific, with a Euro overseer ringing the bell to summon them to work every morning. The Plantations were there before the British government took an interest, and indeed there was a “commercial colonisation” of much of the Pacific long before any Governments discussed where to draw lines on the maps. There were similar plantations in the Bonin Islands further West, but Japan claimed that territory. Certainly, the Spontoonies could have done worse.

We were reminded of that when we met up with the Hoele'toemi family, who were busily drying what they harvested yesterday, a surprising crop for these islands – tea. There are no commercial tea farms here, but fifty years ago it was tested on South Island by some companies that later failed and abandoned the project. The climate is not really warm enough for good commercial yields, but the trees have mostly survived and Spontoonies get a few baskets a year from each of them. I never recognised these as tea when I first saw them; in all the books the plants are regular rows of severely trimmed bushes kept short enough to pluck from the ground – not thirty or forty foot tall forest trees! If the yields were better, one could imagine that where other tropical islands are famed for their tree-climbing coconut harvesters, the Spontoonies could do it with tea. Certainly it would be far less hazardous for the workers at the bottom of the forty-foot tree catching filled bags of fresh leaves rather than dodging clusters of coconuts.

My tail rose at the sight of Jirry – but it drooped again when hearing he was going to be heading out again on “import-export business” next week, for at least a month. Saimmi was absent today, but she had left word that we were to meet our other teacher Gha'ta down on the sand spit an hour before noon. Gha'ta is very precise on times by the sun; of course she is not the type who could wear a watch, and has trained herself to do without. As to longer time periods she seems a little evasive; she is young and sprightly as far as we can see, but sometimes refers to events that must surely have happened in her grandmother's time.

We wondered about taking Adele with us for this. Then again, although the Natives of No Island are certainly a secret, Gha'ta flew in on a scheduled aircraft from her homeland and indeed we have heard her relatives star in “Ponape Pool”, a Bushby Barklay hula and swimming spectacular. Adele would very much like to disbelieve in curses, magic and such talents, but in her circumstances she admits she has little choice in the matter. It was much the same with Angelica – I am only glad I volunteered for my move into this side of things rather than being booted into it as they were.

The sand spit may be wide open, but it has the advantage that nobody can sneak up on you – unless of course they are one of the Natives of No Island, who we have no worries about. Gha'ta was showing us some of the more ... spectacular rituals today, which I doubt we really have the power for. But all such things improve with practice, and she seems happy with our progress.

I took the chance to ask her about something Jane Ferris mentioned last week. Jane comes from near Boston, and says there are legends of Gha'ta and her people up the coast from her. This happens to be true, Gha'ta assured me, and indeed in some of the remoter seaports they have had quite friendly relations with the New Englanders for generations. Adele has heard something about that; her parents being treasure-hunters, they made a tour of the area in 1928 and came home with some very odd Native artefacts that the Government had seized and would otherwise have destroyed.

We even asked Gha'ta to look at Adele's curse, which she did. Not surprisingly, she agreed with Saimmi that it was one from the Amerind traditions, and though she can certainly see it she would not like to risk making it worse. Curses are not unlike we have learned about arrow and barbed harpoon injuries in our First Aid classes – trying to just pull them straight out will do more harm than good.

After Gha'ta finished up she waved and walked out into the Nimitz Sea much to Adele's amazement, and we went back to the Hoele'toemi household for an excellent late luncheon. Our “church” is rather an exhausting experience, and by the time we finish we have many keen appetites. While Adele was shown around by Molly and Maria, Helen took the guest house and I took a stroll with Jirry and a hammock. After all this is the last chance in quite awhile, and we made the most of it. We may not be Tailfast, but it is not through want of trying.

A final excellent supper with Mrs. H and then back towards the water taxis. Our Sundays here certainly count as our religious duty, but if Molly comes along she has to be on fatigue duties rather than relaxing. She takes them quite willingly on South Island; by now she knows every crevice of the Songmark kitchens from three years of scrubbing them, and is happier to help repair thatched roofs in the village than to stay in the compound all day – at least she has an excellent meal here and gets some fresh air on the way here and back.

Still, Molly is not a happy doe. Our two trips in the holidays did not go too well for her; in particular the trip to catch Captain Granite was far less of a relief than she expected, and indeed she seems to have learned several things to her disadvantage. She had thought long and often about taking her revenge, and when it happened it was not at all as she hoped. Not that she actually did take revenge; I have heard Captain Granite was shot in the back by one of her own crew. Not a happy crew, one imagines, or else very poor shots.

It would take quite a lot for Molly to turn down such a thing, but at least for now she has handed over to Helen that rifle Priestess Oharu gave her anonymously, and she only just discovered its source. Helen has

had words with her about that; apart from being extremely ungrateful (such matched sets are simply not available to buy at any price) it saved us from certain death and possibly worse on Krupmark Island having been blessed by Oharu. It would have probably saved us all on Cranium Island given the same treatment beforehand, when Molly found out there are things that conventional artillery are untouched by.

Helen is keeping the Mauser safe in the hope Molly will come round and appreciate it, however grudgingly. In fact they had quite a row about it on the way back – Molly saying that if Helen had such an unwanted admirer she would want nothing to do with gifts from them. Helen has almost the same opinion of Priestess Oharu's tastes as Molly has (she really, really disliked being in the queue behind Tahni and Prudence in the last 2 Tailfasting ceremonies) but rallied round and retorted that it applied to what Molly has said about money – as long as you can spend it, how you got it is irrelevant. Molly asked her flat what would she do if she had her problem – which Helen had to go and think about awhile.

Well, it is not exactly a new situation, us having Prudence's dorm who were always quick with an offer especially in the first year. They have settled down a lot since then, though they are always very keen to offer to scrub my back or comb my tail-fur. Had, say, Belle or Carmen done as much for me as Priestess Oharu has, I would be as chastely grateful as possible, and do my best to find her a more suitable replacement for her affections. Not something I can really see Molly doing. She would be far happier being told to break into the Kremlin solo than attend a party at the Double Lotus.

Back to Songmark as rather a divided dorm, a rare and unsettling thing for us. The other three elected me leader unanimously the first week we were here, and it is up to me to do something. Not a subject I have had experience in, willingly or otherwise, so I did the obvious thing and looked for expert advice. When we have a radio problem we go to Madeleine X, when we have a maths problem we seek out Susan de Ruiz – so in the circumstances I went for a quiet word with Prudence.

The good news; they are already very familiar with the situation, in fact I learned a few things myself. The bad news; they already thought of all the ideas I came up with months ago, and could tell me why none of them are likely to work. Further, it is rather getting in the way of our Priestess, and I know how Saimmi values her. If nobody else had got back from Krupmark, we had to make sure that Oharu did.

The worrying thing is how to stop Molly reverting to type, that is Chicago type. They say when the only tool you have is a hammer, all problems look nail-shaped. When the only tool one has is a Tommy-gun, most problems start looking target-shaped.

Tuesday January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1937

At last it looks like our "invasion" is over, at least this part of it for now. The guard dogs are trotting round the compound again, sniffing suspiciously at the fence where the rain has not washed off all scents of last night's "visitors." Whether Prudence's dorm guessed what had been happening is something they "neither confirm or deny", but they rained on the Rain Island team's parade, as Ada put it. Neither militia girl got as far as the nearest building before being challenged. In fact I am sure they must have heard something, as they officially drew Ross Rifles and bayonets from the strong-room, a first for them for evening patrol. They generally patrol unarmed, except Prudence has been seen to carry an Australian Rules hockey bat at times. I should think Ada decided on the hardware; she has a strong sense of drama, and probably enjoyed "escorting" the hapless intruder to our Tutor while mulling over what would happen to her in our (non-existent) jail.

We have a fine collection of Rain Island flags on the wall now, less the three that were successfully planted and we gave back to become honoured trophies in their own right. No intruder escaped, which is good, and none were particularly injured, which is better. Militia expect to take some hard knocks in training, they say. I expect if the word gets out Songmark will be safer than before – considering the well-trained intruders had a zero percent success in escaping.

Yesterday we went out to Main Island, where some locals now have a motor-bicycle club. It is a good qualification for an Adventuress, being able to control anything with wings, wheels or a hull, and our Tutors have found us something new to master. There are a wide range of vehicles, from quite substantial military dispatch-rider types down to a bicycle with a clip-on motor that looked as if it came from a model aircraft or toy boat.

Miss Wildford was taking us on this course; the first thing we did was divide up according to previous experience. Maria has not surprisingly handled huge racing machines, Helen has raced on dirt roads in Texas, and at least I used to be fair to middling on a pedal cycle though it is years since I rode one. Molly has never even ridden a bicycle! She explained that growing up in Chicago it is not a safe thing to do; the traffic was insane even when she was young and on the streets of "the Windy City" gusts are liable to knock even skilled cyclists off their mounts and under the street-car wheels. Besides, she came to Songmark to fly, and she is jolly good at that.

So: Maria got the fifty-horsepower racer, I chose a battered British Norton of manageable size and to her chagrin Molly started off on Miss Wildford's pedal cycle! One does not learn these things in a day, or a week either. There are grass fields that are soft enough to fall on, but they are very poor to cycle on, and the gravel road is a fine track but rather hard when falling onto it. I have a very dim memory of weeks of scuffed

fur and bruises in my Fairy Cycle days – but I was maybe six then and when one is grown-up one hits the ground a lot harder. Something like our leather Sidcot suits might help, but it would be awfully bulky and Molly is embarrassed enough as it is. At least the magnesium framed cycle is light when it gets tangled in a crash; with Maria's mount one tends to wonder about that weight falling on you. How it gets upright again should it fall over, is rather a question.

It is awfully embarrassing to see a full-grown doe repeatedly falling off a bicycle. Fawns certainly have not so far to fall, and are more likely to bounce when they hit the ground. I learned on the garden path in the orchard with my brother assisting me one long summer, and nobody criticising. Molly is not used to failure, and looked on with envious eyes as Maria demonstrated the nearest thing to a Bootlegger turn I have seen on two wheels. Much easier on gravel roads than tarmac or concrete, she assures us.

We will be taking at least one class a week in this, which given the range of abilities should be an interesting sight. At least we should be able to fix any damages; it is jolly ironic that though Molly could take the engine of a motor-bicycle apart in the dark and reassemble it working, she cannot ride it! Still, thousands of highly skilled and essential aircraft ground crew never get further off the ground than the cockpits they are working in, and nobody thinks the worse of them for it.

Today we were back on Main Island and messing around in vehicles. Actually, we had expected aircraft as we did have the padded Sidcot suits with us. Miss Blande introduced us to Mister Jenks, a tough-looking terrier who acts as a stunt-man in the filming season and was going to show us some useful techniques. He had a driver and one of those Vostok-built lorries the Althing use for public works, with the passenger door removed. The driver accelerated to about thirty miles an hour then Mr. Jenks leaped out, rolled about five times end over end and stood up, unharmed and dusting himself off! His first warning was we would probably break our necks trying that right away.

Still, there was a hundred yards of grassy bank alongside a straight piece of road outside Main Village with little traffic on it. We started gently at about jogging speed, Mr. Jenks trotting alongside and telling us when to jump and roll. He was a very hard taskmaster, and some of us took half a dozen goes before he was happy with letting them progress. Missy K, Maria and Irma Bundt obviously hit the ground rather harder than the rest of us, but Missy K at least rolls well, and has no horns to get in the way.

By the end of the day we had all mastered the art of getting out of a moving vehicle in a hurry, even when the door was reattached and needed to be opened first. Very handy if one discovers one has insufficient money to pay a taxi fare, Beryl says. The real difficulties lie in getting out of vehicles where the door hinge is at the back not the front, as in a lot of American sedans.

Even with the Sidcot suits we are a mass of bruises, especially Molly who had been falling off bicycles the day before. Happily, our dear Tutors recognised the fact. Main Island public baths for us! They are a rather extensive establishment considering the size of Main Village. Still, few actual Longhouses have much in the way of facilities, and Spontoon is rather far North for the usual Polynesian tradition of relying on sea bathing to keep clean, at this time of year. A lot of local furs from the surrounding villages rely on the baths for everyday use; just as miners have "pit-head baths" as part of the colliery provisions, the fisher-furs and such come here to shower and use full-body fur driers they could never afford to buy themselves.

There was rather a shock today – at the baths Missy K introduced us to her fiancé – who was not that very nice mink Mr. Tabodo but someone quite different, a Kodiak bear! She was engaged to Mr. Tabodo at least three years that we know of, and was always quite smug that unique among us the Tutors had agreed to accept her delaying her graduation a year should "family matters" arise. She is the first and so far sole Native girl in Songmark, which might have something to do with it.

Actually, one wonders just what our Tutors think of this. On the one paw it is entirely her business, except that nothing we do at Songmark can really be called that. This big Alaskan bear is far nearer her species, which makes everything very much likelier. Our Mrs. Voboelle being a feline having a child straight away from her equine husband, is the great exception to the usual thing with mixed marriages – that is, small families and generally years of trying. Plus a large number of ... disappointments. Plus, a Songmark girl is expected to be true to her word. Missy K having gone back on her promise to Tabodo, I wonder if she still has that promise from our Tutors of deferring a year if needs be.

Susan de Ruiz and Sophie D'artagnan perked their ears and tails up, as did Jasbir on hearing that a certain mink might now be free. Songmark girls are also taught not to let anything good go to waste and Missy K has been quite boastful about her mink these past three years, smugly enjoying the sight of certain tails twitching at her descriptions.

A very relaxing hour in the warm pools, steam room and fur driers followed, after which it was back to work. We helped the Althing's Public Works Department stringing new electrical cables into Main Village; there is a new power supply coming into town from Vikingstown, where that Professor Kurt von Mecklenburg und Soweiter has got his first full-scale "Bioreaktor" online and producing electricity twenty-four hours a day. The trouble is, in the small hours there is nobody using it. The plan is to link up the power supply to heat the public baths overnight; a big pool of water makes a super "battery" of heat and will be a real public asset. Apparently the Althing are considering his plans for another even bigger site further down the coast near the biggest plantation. It is much easier to carry electricity across the island than carry hundreds of tonnes of crop

wastes a month, even if the project to revive the railways goes ahead. The new plan actually does call for a few hundred yards of track around the “Bioreaktor” to carry wastes and finished compost at least part of the way to and from the fields. We have seen the old station buildings and engine sheds scattered across Main Island, kept maintained in decent condition and generally full of retired narrow-gauge track piled up in case it is ever wanted again. Hopefully Mr. Tanaka and the other Japanese scrap merchants will not make too tempting a bid for it to the Althing; once that goes the nearest supply is probably a very long way off.

Fortunately the Spontoonies are not using high-voltage cables for such a short distance. Adele Beasley got a hundred and ten volts through her, touching a cable everyone else had handled until the “intermittent fault” showed up. She was more hurt than surprised, but recovered well.

Back for a super evening meal, one large roast fish per dorm! Of course there was a catch in more ways than one; Miss Blande photographed us carving happily into them, and we recalled it is time to assemble the Prospectus for the coming year. The sight of our faces when confronted with a huge slushy pile of three-finger Poi is not something that would look good on Page Three. One might choose to focus on Missy K enjoying it, but considering her general figure that would not be a wonderful advertisement for three years on a Songmark diet. Our Tutors are honest, but they do have a business to run and always stress to us that one should use all one’s assets to their best ability. I am sure the prospectus will not dishonestly call this a typical meal, but neither will it say otherwise.

Thursday January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1937

A busy time as ever. Yesterday was the finest weather we have seen in weeks, so straight after breakfast we were down on the airstrip, and the Tiger Moths had a very busy day of it. It was much like one hears of “flight ops” in the Great War, with the aircraft taxiing up to the hangars, being rearmed and refuelled while being checked over, and a possibly wounded or exhausted pilot swapped for a fresh comrade before the next sortie. Not that there were any injuries, but forty minutes of formation flying interspersed with aerobatics is jolly hard work and one finds one’s paws trembling after stepping out of the cockpit.

It was our good luck to fly in a very unusual formation – the big Balalaika airship was going home, and by arrangement we flew alongside to give it an “honour guard” as far as Orpington Island! It was quite a sight; the big silver-grey Balalaika warming up its engines and gas cells, taking off possibly twenty tonnes heavy. Even so, once those five-yard propellers really start to spin it began to roll down the concrete rather more like a fighter than an airship, lifting off hardly a quarter of the way down the concrete. The engines swivel to give it more lift when needed – they are the first reversible-pitch propellers we have seen, and unlike any other aircraft it can slam to a halt and hover! It must be rather a difficult target for anti-aircraft guns doing that, despite its bulk.

The Balalaika “B” as we discover it is called, is really rather an advance on the model we flew in Vostok last year. It is faster by thirty miles an hour, at least. We have not been in the cabin, but looking at the details on the wingtips, there is a telescope arrangement that I believe is a range-finder. With that spread of survey points it should have definitely “sharp eyes” either as a fighter, a bomber or reconnaissance. Being an airship, one can imagine it ghosting through the night on the wind with just enough engine power to control its course, invisible and a very tricky target for sound-detectors that could spot a regular aircraft twenty miles away. The top surface is wide and fairly smooth, and with a little redesign and an arrester hook one could imagine landing an aircraft in flight there a lot more easily than those trapeze hooks the Soviets use to hang fighters under their Kalinin K7’s and “Maxim Gorki” bombers. Unlike a floating Naval aircraft carrier, this can maintain flying speed at least for a Tiger Moth to “land” at zero relative speed. And unlike a naval carrier, although the air around may be turbulent both the mother ship and the aircraft are being buffeted by the same medium.

Certainly one for the logbook! My dorm flew out straight over Orpington, the Balalaika keeping pace with us at five thousand feet when we radioed farewell, and it dropped a ton of ballast and went into a thirty degree climb on full power, heading for “angels twenty” and beyond, where we soon lost it in the clouds. Of course it had been heating its gas cells all the way; the exhaust system dumps all the heat inside the magnesium shell and even condenses out the water from the exhaust to generate ballast in flight.

I would rather like to get back to Vostok sometime and see just what they are doing there. Molly has passed on hints of what business Lars has there – he has connections with various industrial concerns and says they are moving rapidly ahead. They have the great Air-power prophet Mr. De Seversky living and working there now after some years in America where they did not appreciate his grand visions. It is well enough to have a country that has the potential of putting grand ideas into practice, but only if they have the will to actually do it. As Molly says, it is not how much you can grab that counts but how much you get away with.

Having waved farewell to such an aircraft, the short and tubby “Osprey” of the R.I.N.S we saw heading out on anti-pirate patrol, looked slightly silly. But still; it does its job very well and uses technologies Spontoon can support. We have seen newsreels of the facilities needed to construct a Balalaika; precision welding of thin magnesium structural shells big enough to cover a hockey pitch is not something that can be

done outside Vostok. One mistake with the inert gas flood and the welder discovers (briefly) he has set off the biggest incendiary bomb on record.

Today, it turned out it was just as well we made the most of Wednesday's weather – the cloud came down to about two hundred feet, and the rain poured down. We were out on the runway helping with the emergency nets as a big Lufthansa G-38 came in out of the clouds, radio homing on the LONO tower and the new short-wave masts past Crater Lake. A jolly fine piece of navigating, one our Tutors would be proud of.

We had a shock when we saw exactly who got out of the pilot's cabin, while the passengers headed towards Customs or the passenger lounge. Our old friend Erica! She recognised us (with the usual "My, how you've grown" jokes) and after she finished formalities with the control tower we had twenty minutes to chat with her.

Erica does not normally fly passenger aircraft, but is familiarising herself with this design as the Germans are selling the licence to Japan as troop transports (she says) and she will be going to train their Air Force. That is common knowledge, in the aeronautical magazines. Nothing new there, and indeed our Junkers 86 has just such a pedigree. She is testing radio navigation equipment, and has a crew of radio technicians onboard. That makes sense; the G-38 is rather a large aircraft to fit the passenger traffic through here in January, and it has plenty of spare seats and load capacity for the equipment. The immensely thick wing has the first-class cabins in them, making it about the only passenger aircraft where the passengers have a forward view through the leading edge rather than twisting their necks looking through side windows. Erica mentions the technicians have the cheap seats back in the fuselage, but they have their instruments to watch and on a day like today there is nothing to see outside anyway.

Spontoon is a long way from Germany, but she has been all over the place since she last saw us. She whispered that she had been up to Franz Joseph Land on a ski-equipped aircraft last summer and met some very interesting people up there. What they have would surprise us, she says. The Nimitz Sea is not the only place with somewhere like Cranium Island, though very few people know about it.

Hmm. Franz Joseph Land is the sort of place we have only read about in pulp comics. The facts are plain enough as far as they go; it was the only colony of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before 1918, and the great underground mining cities fought on until 1926 against the Allies, even successfully invading part of Spitzbergen. According to the legends, in the last days of 1918 just before the collapse, the Hapsburg Monarchy sent its court Mad Scientists and a few key noble families on an armoured train out of Vienna through Germany to the Baltic port of Danzig where they boarded loyalist-crewed submarines that were last seen heading North along the Norwegian coast. The idea was to wait out the anarchy and rebuild the Hapsburg dynasty far in the Arctic beyond prying eyes before someday returning to re-establish the Austro-Hungarian Empire and raise the double-eagle flag over vast re-conquered territories. There has never been a published account of the Allies' campaign in Franz-Joseph Land, but all the recent books say there were no survivors left on the island. In which case, I wonder who Erica talked to up there. Some of those underground cities went on for miles under the icecap, dug deep enough that they ran into hot springs sufficient for their needs.

All too soon the refuelling was finished, the happy passengers returned having sampled refreshments and such (the departure lounge sells Nootnops Blue to non-flying crew as well as passengers here!) and Erica had to be off into the clouds again. Without radio navigation she would be stuck till the weather breaks, but she says at fifteen thousand feet her aircraft can pick up the beacons on Hawaii and Cap Maron Glacé in the French Sandwich Islands. I suppose an aircraft that size has the room to mount very large and sensitive directional aerials, and has the electrical system to run hundreds of valves in its amplifying equipment; a long way from the two-foot rotating loop that one usually sees on passenger aircraft.

So, that is what our old pal Erica is doing these days. I recall that postcard she sent showing the re-consecration of the Holy Woden Stone of Memel, a religious site on the Baltic that has a lot of sturdy local folk tradition to go with it. Actually I would guess she is doing a lot more than that; Maria mentioned we are booked to be going to New South Thule in Spring and Erica winked, hinting we might meet her there. Certainly a Songmark graduate gets around a lot.

Friday January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1937

Even after all this time, it is surprising the people our Tutors find to teach us. A lot of our timetable is made up on the fly, in that we can always reschedule the swimming or rock climbing (at least for a third-year, bad weather and darkness are no excuses) if someone interesting becomes available at short notice.

Today we were back on Main Island with a wolverine gentleman whom we were introduced to as Mister Nikolai. He is certainly Russian, though if he is from Vostok or elsewhere he did not say, nor did we ask. He had two definitely Spontoonie aides, one of them being a greyhound I last saw at about three in the morning when Molly, Lars and I chased those slavers across the rooftops of Casino Island.

This is certainly a cautionary exercise. Mr. Nikolai showed us what to beware of – his two assistants were walking across the road towards him, one of them reading a newspaper the other was talking about animatedly – when they very smoothly stepped to left and right of him, one grabbed his snout shut and the

other whipped out a cloth hidden by the newspaper and clamped it to his muzzle! This was just soaked in water, but in practice it would have been chloroform, we were told.

Having seen five variants on “grabs”, we were invited to try it ourselves. Of course, having seen it done nobody would be caught like that. Our Tutors, and perhaps the Althing, proved somewhat sneaky. The Guide’s School had a class that was (so we found out later) tasked with walking past a pair of us on the empty street and without looking exactly at us, memorising exactly what we were wearing and carrying. We were in pairs with rather different instructions. I can report that as expected the Guides are healthy and fast-thinking types, and more than a few of us ended up battered as they recovered from their surprise! We could hardly blame them. Happily we had our respective tutors step round the corner and explain matters before things got too heated, plus give us and the Guides our scores.

As Miss Blande told us on the way back, the object of this was not to train us as aspiring kidnappers but to show us how these things are done, and what to watch out for. One hears of folk “vanishing” by the thousand in Russia and China, and indeed Molly has tales of Chicago that make the tail bristle – it is just as well to know how it happens. One never knows where one will end up, and who might object to it.

Maria was speculating about Mr. Nikolai; the Tsarist Russian police, the “Checka” had a fearsome reputation and not all folk who fled the Reds went to Vostok – many went through there over the years who then fell out of favour with the current regime and have since scattered around the world. That is, I doubt Vostok would be sending their serving Agents over here, or that the Althing would let them. Vostok heads the ranks of nations whose diplomatic folk have “accidents” generally while poking into non-tourist areas; Japan, Kuo Han and France are not far behind. The Althing officially sighs, pays for their return in a box (a cigar box in some cases; the “accidents” may be extreme) and reminds folk just why Euros are recommended to take Guides when going off the tourist beat.

A scarcely more leisurely, though less cloak-and-dagger-ish afternoon, with a great treat – Superior Engineering let us work under supervision on some of their aircraft. It seems several of their mechanics are off-island right now at a wedding, just when a high priority order dropped in – which means that low-priority ones would not get done at all, without us. It makes a nice change from the Songmark aircraft that we know literally inside-out by now. Today I was working on the first sleeve-valve engine I have seen since we said farewell to that Handley-Page “Clive” that took us to the Albanian South Indies and back. The textbooks say they are unreliable in cold weather as the valves stick with cold oil, but even the Spontoon winter hardly counts as that. Depending on one to get us home from the Aleutians would be a rather different proposition.

Back to another splendid meal – roast chicken such as we have about once a month. The cameras were out, of course. It was rather disturbing to see that first-year swan girl Ingrid tucking into a large bird leg. Still, Maria eats beef (when she can get it; we have never had it in Songmark except out of cans) which is much the same thing. Ingrid Ledasdottir is from Vanierge, where they keep up the Norse tradition of not having consistent family names but naming girls after the mother’s first name and boys after the father. It must make tracing one’s family tree rather difficult. As Molly whispered, it must be a big incentive to get married. Any girl in trouble and not sure of just who the father is, must be praying for a daughter rather than a son to spare them both a lifetime of embarrassment. True, I have never heard the name Nobodysson, but in Norwegian it might be spelled differently.

Thinking of which, Saffina was telling us she was on Meeting Island for a class today, passing the Spontoonie registry of births, marriages and deaths. Some mischievous persons had put up an official-looking placard by the door – “Tourist ladies are reminded that for all refunds, they must return cub and a valid receipt.” The passers-by were laughing their snouts off, but it is just as well it is not tourist season!

Our contributions for the new prospectus were collected in, and our Tutors will be marking them and deciding which should get into print. I doubt some of the ideas we talked over went down on paper; “*The most fun I’ve ever had with my head stuck in a swamp!*”, “*I am rapidly becoming a world authority on the feeding habits of leeches in the wild*” and “*Just like the Army but no medals or promotion and you pay the officers’ wages!*” may be accurate enough but hardly please Miss Devinski. Few things do.

We could see a troop of Rain Island military heading towards the docks under the streetlight, evidently on the way to Moon Island from the airport. Indeed, it is that time of year again, and soon enough the second-years will be taking part in the exercises as well as saying farewell to little luxuries such as sleep for a few days. At least it should keep them out of trouble for awhile, both on the exercises and resting up afterwards. We will not be on crab watch this year, we are told. That would be good news, but it can only mean our Tutors have something even worse planned for us, probably without the consolation of crab soup after a long night’s work.

Saturday January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1937

A bright day after all the clouds, and indeed we felt our spirits pick up as we enjoyed our bonus half hour extra sleep. At Songmark there are so very few occasions when one can luxuriate in a nice warm bed and wonder if it is time to get up. Either it really is time to get up, or one is trying to get back to sleep again for just another precious quarter-hour or so till the alarm rings. Helen says she dreams of throwing her alarm-clock



away in July, and for a month just being Mrs. Helen Hoele'toemi, newlywed Spontoon housewife. Actually we know she would not throw it in the Nimitz Sea as she says but just put the clock in our tin trunk (it would not last well in a longhouse with the humidity) ready for the fast-approaching day she would go back to work and need it again. But I very much appreciate that dream.

Anyway, however much time we have in them, the beds still feel jolly hard even after three years getting accustomed to them and are still not really tempting for an extended lie-in. Maria says in the Alps the peasants traditionally have great sacks of dry hay they sleep between, which she has tried and says are an improvement on what we have. In newsreels of the North part of Japan we have seen an even more "rustic" custom, there is no bed as such but more like deep vats of softened rice straw that one burrows into. Very cosy no doubt, but one would spend half the morning combing out straw fragments.

Casino Island was nice; we shopped for various things including a gallon can of liquid rubber at a ship's chandler for Carmen to use in building our waterproof suits. Ship's chandlers are real treasure-troves of amazing equipment, everything from sailcloth and rope to emergency rations and flares. Molly was very tempted by the Verey rockets and flares, but surprisingly did not invest. She grinned unnervingly and said she had something far better than that. One wonders exactly what, though it might be a bad idea to ask for a demonstration. The rest of the shop was very comprehensive; amazingly they even have a line of lightweight anchors for seaplanes!

Our dance classes were very fine, and I think we impressed them with our interpretive hula tales. Maria writes the story like a radio script and we all work on translating it into hula dance. Although she was not on our Albert Island trip, Maria has heard enough about the Sturdey Boys to pen "*The film-director's brats*" which had the Spontoonies "rolling in the aisles" on its first performance. They even went for the bit about the Sturdeys digging up the graveyard treasure-hunting; though we made clear it was the old Mission graveyard and not a Native one. The tales of the Sturdey Boys has spread even before we made our version; of course the Spontoonies aboard the Liki-Tiki would have told their own stories.

Amongst the first-years attending were Svetlana from Crusader Dorm, and that mad shrew. It is hard to believe she is actually married to Miss Rote in Crusader Dorm. From what I heard they were married just before their first term started on Cranium Island, which she regards as a nice place to live. Having been there it might not quite be as the stories say, but then an island where the entire population goes around all the time chuckling as they tinker with souped-up Doomsday Devices would not get much Science done.

Helen has been reading some pulp comics in the holiday and whispered that we would expect anyone coming back from a wedding there would have a married name something like Mrs. It Came From Beyond, or Mrs. The Thing That Eats Eyes. Maria seemed rather affected by that idea – she had a contemplative expression most of the morning, not quite what one would expect regarding the horrors she experienced there. Still, the other three of us have partners who can help us forget such things – with Maria, her last encounter was on Cranium Island nearly five months ago. I do not like to ask if that is why she was asking so hungrily about Kansas Smith's mother and her condition. Lola VaVaVoom seemed entirely pleased with things, both when we met her out there and when we spotted her heading back at New Year.

Luncheon was very fine; the Missing Coconut was packed out with Rain Island types who are not exactly tourists but come from a rather different culture (actually very like the Amerind Spontoonies, the bark cloth not the grass-skirt wearing ones.) Being off-duty a lot of them were in what one presumes they wear at home; substantial lumberjack-type shirts and boots. Quite possibly some were the ones chasing us last Spring in the militia exercises.

Although in Summer the cuisine is typically long drinks mixed in coconuts, today we were feeling hungry rather than thirsty. Lots of eggs on the menu; scrambled, poached or hard-boiled and curried! Now that one really might disturb our first-year swan. Not that the Songmark menu is actually short of protein, but we have been working awfully strenuously this week.

On the way back, we had been happily chatting about our plans when a large chunk of them instantly evaporated. Our ears went down as a certain ferret we have not seen in awhile stepped out of a building just in front of us. He bowed and announced there was a fine display of Winter blooms in Tower Hill Park, and crossed the street out of sight.

We can take a hint. Though nobody saw us arriving together, five minutes later we were sitting in the park industriously feeding the wild avians while Spontoonie gardeners in the middle distance diligently swept the gravel paths and tended to bushes that already looked perfectly well-trimmed to me. Mr. Sapohatan was already there, looking much as we have seen him before. With a naturally grey-furred ferret one could hardly tell if the strain was turning his fur grey.

As ever, he was unfailingly polite and mentioned he had good reports of us. He noted that although our work with Saimmi and Oharu was not his area of expertise, he was most grateful we had helped out there so well. There was a long pause, while we felt our stomachs knot as we "waited for the other shoe to drop" and for him to let us in for some more fur-raising adventures.

Actually it was Maria he started with, asking her if she had heard any news of that famously independent vessel the Direwolf recently. That being the German commerce raider from the Great War that never surrendered but had a "shareholders' buy-out" and its crew vowed to keep raiding till their Kaiser told

them to stop. This is never likely to happen now, and a heavy cruiser has many expensive needs to satisfy, so they justify themselves by saying it is hardly their fault they cannot return their prizes to the Imperial Navy. What they think about the present German Government I have not heard; at any rate they are out here in the Pacific and not back in Kiel. Not that a 1913 vintage cruiser would count for much outside the Nimitz Sea; I think the Royal Navy scrapped everything of that vintage years ago.

Maria rattled off quite a history of official reports that have been in the newspapers; she then switched to more guarded tones and brought out things she had heard. The ship has been very successful hiring itself out to Chinese warlords and such; with the money it was months in Macao being refitted with new engines and various other equipment, and taking on crew. Germany had trading settlements in Tsingtao until 1918, and more of the crew in the lower ranks are oriental than Euro these days. Over the years the original senior crew have retired or become casualties, replaced by a scattering of Hula Junkers who know the area, and promoted Midshipmen who have actually had more solid experience than most Captains see in peacetime.

Mr. Sapohatan nodded and complemented her on her intelligence, probably in both senses of the word. He looked up innocently at the sky and asked her what use such a ship would be.

Maria thought awhile, and came out with some rather comprehensive answers; evidently she has been thinking about such questions for awhile. Technically it is a Pirate, though it flies various flags from tiny countries that like banking the registration fees and like having a "big friend" they could call on in need. Not belonging to any Navy, it can do things that would certainly start a war if nations sent their own ships in – and amongst the small nations of the Pacific it could do a lot of damage. Rain Island, Vostok and Kuo Han have ships that could defeat it, but they would expect to take serious damage in the process. Vanierge, Brisینگaland and Greater Fiji have nothing to match it, according to Maria's bedside reading of the various Jane's military digests.

He agreed with her, commenting that the time might soon be coming when it needed to be taken care of one way or another; it is a large "wild card" in the Pacific that somebody will want to play. I suppose the rules would change if the Japanese ever take the South of China. Whose side the Direwolf would be on might depend on who offers it the best deal in various ways; just handing it money would be little use if no dockyard can or will repair and upgrade it as Macao has been doing. Spontoon has docks that can take rather large cruise ships, and I know it has handled emergency repairs to those.

Helen growled that there are only two safe places for it to go; firmly on the side of Spontoon or to the bottom of the Nimitz Sea. As long as it keeps up its independent lifestyle, nobody can be sure who has bid highest this week for its services. Rather like Molly tells us of the Cowboy days, where independent gunmen roamed the West and hired on wherever there was a feud or a range-war. Most of them ended up shot in the back, quite often by their own former employers keen to reclaim their payoff.

The ferret indicated he agreed with her. Information was required, and although he had many other people on the case he asked us if we would be interested. Naturally I pointed out the little matter of us being exceptionally busy Songmark Third-years with one holiday left and that already spoken-for; he noted that and said that he would take it into account.

Well, we have done it again, volunteered. I tell myself I must stop doing this; it is probably bad for the health. We have faced Moro pirates on these "little trips" but they were not manning 14-inch guns with a quarter of a century of practice. I recall the Direwolf was involved in the chase then; it never found us, for which we are very grateful. The Pacific is a huge area to search even when one has an idea to start looking, and without aircraft the horizon of a single ship is rather limited. Maria says the Direwolf's upgrades have not included aircraft, though expendable aircraft have been "flown off" the turret ramps of cruisers before now. Exactly who paid it for that sortie from Macao is an interesting question.

Anyway, although we are not to expect any immediate calls, Mr. Sapohatan promised he would call on us if something suitable came up. With that he left us, and in ten minutes it was evidently the end of the shift for the Parks Department, as all the gardeners shouldered tools and headed out.

Molly seems very keen on the idea, but anything with large artillery is sure to appeal to her. She reads in bed those scientific journals with the ultra fast flash photographs of experimental shells ploughing through or shattering against proof armour, in millionth of a second close-up detail. In fact she reads them with a torch under the covers when she thinks everyone else is asleep. I have asked if there are any pictures in the series of large calibre shells vaporising does, as we are more likely to be on the receiving end of such things than otherwise. She is hard to deter, though I have not given up yet.

Back to Songmark to discover other folk have not changed their spots, so to speak. Beryl was collecting for her new charity, Alms for the Criminally Insane. At least I hope she said "alms." She keeps a list of people who have paid, which she sends along with the alms to the beneficiaries. She also keeps a list of those who have refused to pay, she says, which she sends likewise plus their photographs and addresses.

Sunday January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937

Pouring with rain! Molly went off with Beryl to their Temple of Continual Reward after breakfast; it is no day to be working on thatched longhouses on South Island, just to make notes on where the leaks are for next time.

Actually Molly has some honest business there and so does Beryl for a change; they are partners in their “fish log” project and are arranging with the farms on Main Island to collect more crabs for the pot this year. There have been some fields already sown with fast-growing tender crops that will be “sacrificed” to feed the crabs; on Spontoon the locals believe in give and take, and if the land crabs are going to be harvested on a larger scale, the survivors will at least be given more to eat. The fields will be re-sown with later maturing crops once the moon has set and the crabs return to the forest.

That is the good thing about tins; one can make them as ingredients are available and stockpile them. The Main Island cannery will be switching over to making the crab and Pastefish “fish log” for a week or two; it can revert back afterwards to its normal products when the supply of fresh crab runs out.

Beryl has a typical story of a military contractor who made a good living selling reserve foods to various armies, and buying them back if expected needs never materialised. He once bought a warehouse full of anonymous bully beef of uncertain age from a rival, and feeling hungry decided to open a tin for lunch – at which point he discovered it was totally rancid. When he hotly complained to his supplier, he received what Beryl says is a line of great folk wisdom – “Lew, my boy – that food isn’t for eating. It’s for reselling!”

Our own Sunday was interesting, despite the rain. Happily we could stay indoors and practice today’s Warrior Priestess rituals, none of which were liable to set the longhouse alight. Gha’ta stood outside the threshold in the rain, being an amphibian and preferring it to the (fairly) dry interior. We have described to her what we faced under Krupmark, and though she is working from a very different tradition to the Priestess Oharu, she has showed us the beginning of similar spells. Rather like my Sand Flea is “the same sort of thing” as Erica’s G-38, as both fly. There is a little matter of scale, though.

We mentioned our encounter with Mr. Sapohatan to Saimmi; she needs to know these things if she does not already. She seemed rather pensive at the news; she is of course a Priestess not a military strategist, but especially around here the two are not as separate as in Europe. Preventing the Fragments of the Great Tiki being reassembled and used in the wrong paws is much the same as preventing Cranium Island detonating twenty kilograms of allotropic iron over Casino Island, in terms of damage limitation.

Although she has mentioned the Priestess Oharu made a similarly risky trip to China awhile ago which proved vital, Saimmi says she did not like that much, and is not too keen on us heading out to Macao or wherever the Direwolf is found. Molly and Maria are best suited for that, she says. And yet, she concedes we did best as a team on Krupmark, Helen and I doing better overall than the two Priestesses she would have sent in our place. It is the old problem of risking resources; the pitcher that goes to the well gets broken in the end, but unlike pitchers Adventuresses need Adventures to learn and return tougher from. Assuming they return in one piece, that is. We did not train as Warrior Priestesses just so we could sit around South Island tending shrines and singing Morning Song, as Helen pointed out. It may well be that Mr. Sapohatan has more experienced and far better folk to handle the swashbuckling, but we have our extra abilities and one never knows when they will prove vital.

Saimmi nodded reluctantly; she could lay down the law on us but she can be persuaded by suitable arguments. Not that anyone has reported the Direwolf or its crew as having recruited any “ab-natural” capabilities, but it is not the sort of thing that would be listed in Jane’s Fighting Ships. Once embarked on the far shore of the Pacific Ocean, if the folk suddenly discover they need such talents it will probably take too long to telegraph to Spontoon to send them out as extras. Keeping us here and safe is sensible, but so is tackling any potential dangers at source, not waiting till they get within bombardment range of Casino Island.

It would be nice to think of us saving this job up till August as our “Apprentice Piece” after we have finished Songmark, but such things happen in their own time and not ours. There is little point in our telling Miss Devinski, as she probably already knows we have volunteered, and if she objects we will find out soon enough.

Though Helen and Marti vanished after luncheon to the guest longhouse, Jirry left on Thursday and will not be back for ages. From what I have gathered, such trips are not a matter of sailing from here to one destination, picking up the cargo and heading back – more a matter of A to B through to J with normal cargos, then picking up the real reason at K before heading back. Probably calling through X, Y and Z just to confuse the trail.

That left me and Saffina with the rest of the Hoele’toemi family, Saimmi having to vanish on her High Priestess duties. She takes them very seriously despite there being nobody to disapprove of her actions – except many generations of past High Priestesses buried on Sacred Island. Helping out with the household is quite a relaxation after a week at Songmark, and indeed is a small repayment for all their help and kindnesses.

Moeli was there, and I helped her with her fur patterning much as she did with ours two years ago – except this time I know what the markings mean. She is getting noticeably rounded now, although to the Spontoonies that is a sign of great beauty and good fortune. Stroking in the markings, I felt my ears blush in embarrassment as I imagined my own fur markings had I not only become Lady Allworthy but ended up carrying the family pups. It would be hard to decide which to inscribe, “hoping for a daughter” as Moeli’s reads or otherwise – neither Lord Leon nor Lady Susan were anything I would want a child to take after!

Moeli’s cub will take very much after its aquatic parent; I hear it is always the way with the Natives of No Island. I suppose it is a merciful provision of Nature, in that otherwise a kitten could be born unable to

swim, in the middle of the Pacific. Saffina says it would be equally unfortunate for an aquatic kitten in the middle of the Sahara, but only Pacific natives are liable to marry into that clan and they know what to expect.

Seeing Helen returning looking very relaxed and rubbing her neck-fur, my own tail drooped until I reminded myself that the days are getting longer already, and it is next Solstice I finally get to be Tailfast. I hope so anyway; I have been disappointed before. A lot can happen in that time; we have the most strenuous part of the course to come. No Songmark girl ever assumes she will pass, even though only one third-year has ever actually failed the course! We believe that was Zara, but even now we have never been officially told, and Zara was not telling.

Of course, there are other ways to not graduate. We have read in the library of one of the second ever class who broke her leg so severely it could never be properly reassembled; another had to droop out with an ear infection so drastic it left her half deaf and permanently affected her sense of balance. Modern Sulpha drugs could have treated that, if they had them out here. I have heard the Casino Island hospital now have some, but keep them only for truly life-threatening infections. Out in the Aleutians, Ada sprained her ankle as severely as I did in my first ever term; happily her dorm treated it as well as they have been taught and as a whole they gained rather than lost points for it. Miss Cardroy always says that anyone can make progress when all goes well; the quality of a fur only shows through when things are looking rough.

Still, for the folk who do graduate, a Songmark course is no finishing school and we are expected to head straight out and put our three years of very expensive training to good use. Helen is the only one I know of planning to marry straight away, apart from Prudence (Tahni being a spotted hyena, the fact she is female is rather an academic distinction. She is more male in places than many conventional males.)

Back to Songmark in the pouring rain, singing to keep our spirits up! On approach we saw Red Dorm on gate duty, who "turned us over" exceedingly thoroughly, all "in the line of duty" of course. I will ask Prudence and co. to return the favour; Red Dorm would hate that far more than if we did it. While Mrs. Wo and Brigit Mulvaney went through our fur with a fine comb and found nothing, I could hear that Liberty Morgenstern and Tatiana Bryzov derisively singing a typically Red song outside the guard room;

"I am the man, the very fat man,  
That waters the workers' beer.  
I am the man, the very fat man,  
That waters the workers' beer.  
And what do I care if it makes them ill,  
If it makes them terribly queer.  
I've a car, a yacht, and an aeroplane,  
And I waters the workers' beer.

Now when I waters the workers' beer,  
I puts in strychnine  
Some methylated spirits,  
And a drop of kerosene  
Ah, but such a brew so terribly strong,  
T'would make them terribly queer  
So I reaches my hand for the watering-can  
And I waters the workers' beer

#### Chorus

Now a drop of good beer is good for a man  
When he's tired, thirsty and hot  
And I sometimes have a drop myself,  
From a very special pot  
For a strong and healthy working class  
Is the thing that I most fear  
So I reaches my hand for the watering-can  
And I waters the workers' beer

#### Chorus

Now ladies fair, beyond compare,  
O be you maid or wife  
Spare a thought for such a man  
Who leads such a lonely life  
For the water rates are frightfully high,  
And the meth is terribly dear  
And there ain't the profit there used to be  
In watering the workers' beer \*

From what I received from the Allworthy estate lawyers, the family do indeed own a brewery amongst their other interests. Just my luck that somehow Red Dorm found out about it! Now apart from the family military connections being “lickspittle agents of State oppression” I am a “bloated plutocrat and absentee landlord” which is hardly my fault and indeed the very thing I am trying to rid myself of. Still, it would be wasting one’s breath expecting those four to be reasonable.

- Editor’s note; song © Paddy Ryan

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

A brighter few days than lately – which was good as we have been out all the daylight hours with the Tiger Moths. There has been some repair work on them as well; temporary whitewash markings on the runway have laid part of it out as an aircraft carrier, and we are practicing very short takeoffs and landings. Of course, we do not have the catapults or arrestor hooks of a proper carrier, but it is quite a strain learning to come in twice as steeply as we ever were trained to. I have heard carrier landings described as “a sort of controlled crash” and indeed there is no option but to hit the runway rather hard. Missy K burst a tyre, and there is a lot of general wear and tear. I can see why the Tutors keep this till the third year, the poor Tiger Moths are taking rather a hammering despite our best efforts.

Another reason for our practicing this time of year is the low ebb of air traffic using the runway. It would hardly do to have a DC-2 full of passengers following us down carrier-style, and of all the things we have done this is likeliest to have us crash-landed blocking the runway till the crash crew can get us off. It is just as well we are only in the Tiger Moths, which a dozen strong furs can pick up and walk off with in emergency. I have no idea of how those big Handley-Page Heyford bombers manage fully laden, the ones we saw on our super-carrier H.M.S. Lord Moseley last year. Still, unlike Eastern Island a carrier can at least turn into the wind.

The Ave Argentum were up as well today, with their second-hand Potez fighters making a quite decent show. Anything we might have admired them for vanished this evening, when Jane Ferris came in with her fur bristling and waving their new prospectus that she had “acquired” (along with quite a few points for her dorm, or I miss my guess.) There are only two printers on Spontoon apart from the newspapers and Jane happened to be at one of them when a friend there anonymously slipped her a printing proof. They are claiming they are “*The major establishment of its kind worldwide, and the longest established.*” If one counts by numbers they do outnumber us, but it is pure cheek calling themselves the major one! As for longest established, Songmark was set up first with its present charter. The Ave Argentum began as the aerial equivalent of a Lady’s Riding School, and only added the other adventurous aspects after Songmark became famous.

Various people are going around with their ears right down and muzzles wrinkled, and there is talk of issuing more public challenges – of course our Tutors have to approve such things, but from the look on Miss Devinski’s face I expect they will.

Other unwelcome documents today came bearing a British stamp; with sinking heart I recognised the return address on the back as being from the Allworthy family solicitors. They are asking me to release funds needed for the shipyard expansion; the warship trade is picking up and there is only a certain amount the current executors can do. All it needs is my signature on some papers; there are folk waiting for my decision and jobs are at stake in Barrow-in-Furryness.

Oh dear.

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

A busy day as ever, with a long day’s small boat handling session in a brisk and gusting wind. In March I am booked to take the exams for my Day Mariner’s Certificate, after which I can sign myself up as qualified boat crew should the aeronautical trade ever go into a decline. It is jolly hard work but so much fresh air and sea spray certainly chases the cobwebs away; I returned via Casino Island aching all over but feeling quite invigorated.

I even managed to smile at what the local cinema is offering; the latest Little Shirley Shrine epic, “*Baby, take a dive.*” I had to admit the plot is original; it is the first film I have heard of with an all-singing and all-dancing portrayal of professional bare-knuckle playground prize-fighting. Molly has mentioned it was filmed in Cuba where laws against such things may exist but are not actually applied very often; the current government there presumably has the vixen goddess of Justice portrayed not blindfold but with a keen eye out for the big money. Their idea of an honest policeman is one who gives his Boss a cut of the day’s bribes, by her account. Molly is still a big movie fan, and says Miss Shrine enjoyed making this as though her co-stars were never allowed to land a punch on her, the reverse was decidedly otherwise. “The Shrine Sockaroo” is actually a surprisingly catchy number I have heard Radio LONO playing.

There is one starlet the Spontoonies are not keen on having back; I remember Jirry telling me of her instant transitions between angelic sweetness on camera and howling tantrums the second the last piece of film goes through the gate. She may have fame and fortune but compared with being a barefoot puppy or kitten playing with friends all Summer in the Spontoon woods – I know which I would want for a child.

Supper was a huge helping of nicely spiced vegetable stew, which had even the less herbivorous of us very keen on polishing our plates. While the rest of my dorm were relaxing afterwards I was picking up a pass for Meeting Island and hurrying out into the rain and darkness with the latest letter from Home to see Judge Poynter. I took time to dress in my best rather than the Songmark uniform, with a white dinner frock I brought when I came out. It has had to be let out several times since then, as I have gained rather a lot of muscle since then. Still, the overall effect is quite pleasing. I know Jirry likes it.

I must say, the Judge's housekeeper keeps the place in very good condition considering the furniture and ornaments are mostly nineteenth century. While I awaited his arrival I looked around at the various mementoes of a very long career. There was one shelf filled with volumes of what looked like an unpublished manuscript work on the Gunboat Wars, and indeed the Judge was here all that time. The fire-lit room was very cosy after the rain outside, and looking around the polished wood and Victorian antiques I felt very odd. Everything in there had been sent out from England decades before I was born, and none of it is replaceable. Should I accidentally break a plate, the nearest one to match it is probably in the Gilbert and Sullivan Isles, but that is just as far from England and equally precious to its owners where it is now.

Judge Harold Poynter arrived about seven, dressed impeccably in a rather nice tweed suit. He spotted my drooping ears, and was most sympathetic when he heard the latest complications. It makes quite a change after living with Molly for three years, to talk with someone who always believes in doing the right thing rather than going for the main chance. Even he had to admit it was quite a dilemma; unless a rightful claimant to the Allworthy inheritance turns up to challenge me, I will be stuck with it. There are people in England expecting me to help them, and the only way I can do that is by either finding a proper claimant to the title or actually declaring I am the true and documented Lady Allworthy, willing mate to Lord Leon and wearing his ring even now. Ouch. Ouch with knobs on, as Prudence says. If that star-nosed mole Isabella in the first year questioned me in front of a court I would have to admit those are the facts, however unwelcome they look.

Harold promised his continuing support, and he has yet to hear from the various Law Lords back in England. Even if they could make an instant decision, it is easily a fortnight's airmail both ways and the courts only re-convened after New Year. A search for other claimants to the title could take awhile; from his enquiries so far it seems there was always a discreditable streak in the family, and it might be the real claimant has been living as a remittance man somewhere a very long way from the family estates. Finding such folk takes time. It would be a supreme irony if he is one of the ones on South Island that Maria says are exiles sent out to avoid embarrassing their respectable families back home! They generally leave their names behind them, and do not read any announcements we might put in the Times requesting they come home.

From the few things Harold has found out about Leon Allworthy's family it is not one I would really like to be allied to. Naturally a good country-house weekend in the social Season must have a murder, but what I keep impressing on Molly is there is more than one sort of casualty than the one found in the library or drawing-room. If the guilty party (always exposed by the visiting Amateur Detective at suppertime on Sunday evening) has conducted an energetic and imaginative crime, he or she tends to end up sent off on Imperial Service to the North-Western Frontier of India, where they tend not to come back from. Several of Lord Leon's family did go that way, and even if there are some Eurasian mongrel hounds or other mixes claiming direct descent from Allworthy stock they will never be allowed within sniffing distance of the title. For all I know Lord Leon has platoons of pups somewhere across the globe, but without a Pedigree they could never claim anything from the estates.

It was a great relief to have Harold's support and indeed it is very good of him to put himself out for me. The room has one working legal desk with an old-fashioned clerk's high stool (engineered so if one dozes off one noisily falls over from a great height) but that is unsuitable for two people to look over documents. The leather sofa is very comfy, with the sort of decorative cloths on the back one associates with grandparents' homes. I have not seen antimacassars on chairs since one issue of *Weird Tails* with that Mad Scientist who reacted antimacassars with liquid Roland's Macassar Fur-Oil and blew the island off the map.

I can report that as before, some canines do indeed like having their tummies rubbed. And as before, that was absolutely all that happened before I left. I had taken Precautions in advance, too. I should be grateful I suppose that they were not needed; as I often tell myself I am Tailfast to Jirry in principle if not in paperwork terms, and should not even think to look elsewhere. Still, if rubbing tummy-fur is what Harold wants, that is what he will get and very grateful I am of his work for me. It does leave one feeling a little disappointed, though. Had Lord Leon the virtues of Judge Harold Poynter, I doubt I would be trying to scrape off the title like something accidentally trodden in.

On the water-taxi back I realised just why I must be feeling this way now. Last Spring I was down with another handsome canine of excellent family and excellent character, who wanted to do the right thing for me. Canines are noted for being loyal and dedicated to others, with the occasional exception as the movies love to cast as a Bad Dog. I have thought a few times about how things might have been had Kim-Anh Soosay

taken up Mr. Leamington's offer on the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands. Being installed as his Native girl in the "hill station" of Wellington Wells high on Mount Mikado, I might have let Nature take its course and presented him this month with our mixed kitten/pup. For Kim-Anh Soosay, that would not have been a bad thing at all – but she is not a Songmark student.

Actually, from what I hear about the current Governor there, it might not have turned out too happily even for Kim-Anh. Mr. Leamington would be probably reassigned to Northern Newfoundland, the South Shetlands or somewhere without tempting Heathen girls in tropical costume, and any "unemployed undesirables" left behind might tend to get booted onto the first guano-boat heading out of the Empire. Which goes to show – not all stories one reads in "Extra-Spicy Pacific Tails" are particularly good career plans!

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1937

At last, something we have been waiting for! As the Ave Argentum challenged us in public to the aviation contest last time, Songmark have returned the favour and invited them to a series of public "friendly contests" – as any two schools might challenge each other. We have not heard what the athletic events will be, though we are strong in swimming, climbing and anything involving rough terrain; a steeplechase rather than a flat track race. Beryl has volunteered to train us in original Classical Olympic "Pankration" boxing, which she says the new Ave Argentum "Penitente" Masie "Masher" Thynne was always keen on back at Saint T's. This may turn out like the original revival in England, the "Olympick" Games held on Dover's Hill in the Cotswolds centuries before the current Olympic organisation started. \* They had a good deal of vigorous rustic sports such as wrestling, shin-kicking and swordplay that could get extremely out-of-order. Let alone not winning medals, not everyone came home with quite the configuration of ears, tails et cetera they arrived with. Our current national sport of cheese-rolling on a 50 degree hill is a sturdy survivor of that tradition; only the sturdiest furs tend to be survivors of the event.

Belle and Carmen had their suggestions in the box straight away. Well, in the original Olympics the athletes really did wrestle in their naked fur; a tradition Carmen was loudly disappointed was not revived last year in Berlin in front of the cameras. I expect there is nobody of their tastes allowed in the Ave Argentum, and Prudence's dorm has a natural edge in intimidating the opposition that way. Plus they are all jolly fit, as indeed we all are. We have not seen our rivals out on the sand dunes with knapsacks full of wet sandbags or hauling themselves up greasy rock slabs in the rain. Perhaps all that physical culture would spoil their dainty figures, and they are expecting to hire Cape Buffalo henchmen by the tonne to do the heavy work when they graduate. Still, one can go too far, as witness some of those lady wrestlers in that "Health and Efficiency" magazine that Prudence subscribes to. Mrs. Oelabe has cautioned us that taking things to that extent can actually harm one's chances of carrying a pup or kitten - fortunately, that is the last thing Prudence and her dorm are liable to worry about!

As before, the events will be refereed by neutral Spontoones, in this case the Guide's School. They should be good at spotting traps and trip-wires on the course, at any rate. The Guides know an awful lot about traps, as we discovered training along with them last year. Molly often carries a feather with her for opening doors a crack and checking for trip-wires and electrical contacts; the Guide's school often send members along to her classes in demolitions. As to non-aggressive sports it would be quite unfair to challenge the Argentum to a hula dance; therefore some of us are eagerly suggesting it. A respectable Senorita would not wear that sort of costume in public or move that way, though Susan de Ruiz has told us interesting things about the fandango and I have seen it danced on Casino Island very passionately. Possibly not by the "respectable" Spanish, though.

Miss Devinski is going round with a sort of grimly satisfied look, so there should be plenty of woe and lamentation in prospect for the opposition. Ten times more for us should we disappoint her, of course. Folk say that yellow Labradors are the calmest and gentlest of dogs, and many indeed do take up careers in teaching, preaching and nursing. Folk also say the exception proves the rule, and our dear Tutor is certainly that!

\*Editor's note: Amelia is quite right about this, for a change. The first modern "Olympick Games" were revived in England around 1612 and included cudgel-play, throwing sledgehammers and iron bars, and a good deal of cheerful minor bloodshed. Far more in the spirit of the original than the current incarnation, actually.

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1937

A lively day indeed. We were shepherding our first-years to a class on Casino Island (they have a morning with the grizzled prospector we had, tutoring them as to telling Fool's Gold from the genuine article and such) when we ran across some familiar faces, or beaks as one might say. It has been awhile since we saw any of the Orpington Island duck-cult in town; possibly the Allthing had banned them for three months again, finishing yesterday. Anyway, it was our luck to have that Ingrid Ledasdottir with us, who is certainly a fine figure of a swan maiden.

It is a good thing we speak Spontoonie, and know something of the duck-cult! From their excited chatter I gathered Ingrid resembles some ancient cult-figure allied to their own, who they have been seeking for centuries. Knowing how these things work, it is more likely one of their ancestors carved a figurine of a pretty sailor-girl he saw onboard Captain Cooked's ship when he first explored the Nimitz Sea two centuries ago. These things pass into legend, and if a century passed before any more swans were seen the locals could spend the long evenings building up all sorts of mythology around an unnamed exotic statue their Grandfather left them. Swans are not a native species around here and there are few Euro families of them on Spontoon even now. A very average swan towers over any of the drakes, and I can well imagine the appeal.

Anyway, while Helen briefed Ingrid on what they were saying, Maria and I turned to the broad-billed flock and told them to keep their wing-tips off, in no uncertain terms. Although the idea of a Euro girl being grabbed for cult reasons by admiring Natives is mostly pure Hollywood, this is one flock who might actually think to do it. In which case, Maria's suggestions involving bread stuffing and orange sauce might come into play. It is perfectly true as she said that the Songmark diet is awfully short of fresh meat, and to look at the ducks' reactions our reputation does precede us. Though many of the Spontoonies know by now that we speak their language, it evidently came as an awful shock to the Orpington birds.

Ingrid looked more amused than startled, and commented that ducks and swans are distantly related, though not distantly enough for her. Rather like third cousins several times removed by the bouncers and told not to come back, by her tone. I must check if swans really are in the *Antidae*, the scientific term for the duck family, and if not how close they are. Molly's comment was she thought the scientific description of a duck was "Professor Duck." Happily we are talking of Orpington, not Cranium Island. The duck-cult are not liable to pop up through the fourth dimension and carry her off to enthrone her in some fowl temple to be ritually married to their Drake-Spirit incarnate. At least I don't think so.

We left the first-years about to find out that gold and diamonds are even rarer than they thought, but a seam of ten percent iron or two percent copper ore can really buy one the famed house on the hill. Still, a Songmark girl should be able to spot a promising quartz seam when she sees it, even though it is liable to be hiding worthless uranium rather than good copper ore. Beryl is still trying to sell shares in companies exploiting that phoney Trautonium ore deposit on Cranium Island – a quick look at the periodic table shows there is no such element. Maria jokes it is refined from impurities in deposits of Balonium, Unbelievium and Unobtanium.

Oddly enough, that mad shrew Alpha Rote claimed the material was perfectly real, and that Cranium Island has the only known Trautonium deposits, They also have unique deposits of elementally pure Illinium, Alabamium and Virginium \*, she says, that were discovered by one of their exiled American Mad Scientists (a change from the usual German ones) and are used in many fascinating experiments. Exactly what she regards as a fascinating experiment is a question better left unasked and especially unanswered if one values one's peace of mind and sleep at nights. It is better to ignore Alpha Rote, we have discovered – in our book, Cranium Islanders should join the select ranks of policemen and lunatics as being folk it is pointless to argue with. But she does have a most remarkable mind, and seems to think not just sideways but twisted through the sort of angles they never showed us in trigonometry lessons. Alpha has a way of finding solutions that nobody thought of – and of running into problems to match. Still, she is the only person we know to own a tesseract-shaped slide rule, though she says there are certain physical reasons not to bring it to Spontoon.

Our own trip was to the hospital, where we have advanced classes in medicine. It is one thing to read the books, but actually spotting early signs of Distemper, Parvo Virus and Peruvian Sarcoptic Mange rely on how the patient feels and behaves rather than anything a diagram can show. We keep our immunisations up to date, of course, but some of us are booked in for boosters. The first-years came in through there in the afternoon to have their own "shots", so we could escort them back.

As if we did not have enough trouble with Crusader Dorm, today their Eva Schiller was kicking up a fuss. She is normally the best behaved of that bunch, but apparently over her holidays in Germany she has been told immunisations are basically Wrong, with a capital W. She rarely mentions politics and indeed this is more of a social religion; artificially preventing Nature's epidemics means that packed urban areas with "an unhealthily polyglot population mired in their own filth" can exist, which should not. Which hardly applies to Casino Island, I would have thought myself though it is far more "polyglot" than anything her Chancellor has complained about. Just as she refuses to use cosmetics beyond plain grooming and washing, the use of artificial immunity is a deception and a mockery of an inherently healthy Pedigree body of high quality (unquote.) She has a definite lack of compassion on the subject, and talks a lot about "Social Darwinism" where the weak should make way for the more resilient. Personally I can take every advantage I can get; I just wish there had been a vaccine last year for Pacific Marsh Typhus.

I have seen glowing depictions of what Eva means of the city of the future, a rather idyllic scene of updated village life with sunshine and fresh air with clean-furred pedigree pups playing in the light of a bright (probably swastika-shaped) sun. Exactly how they will fit this with still having somewhere like the Ruhr valley steelworks or the Hamburg shipyards, will be interesting to watch. Happy peasants in the fields produce potatoes, not ships and aircraft.



Back for a fine meal of egg fried rice and salted fish, definitely all local produce. Even the rice is grown in the “Formosan” village on Main Island where the river from Crater Lake comes out in its delta. Susan de Ruiz says the Argentum have found out about our diet; quite possibly some first-year complained about it. At any rate, one of the Argentum’s third-years turned up her muzzle and pityingly announced to Susan that personally she was unused to cheap food, and the Songmark staff were evidently lining their own pockets out of the food budget.

I would trust our Tutors with my life, let alone my allowance, and would bet all of it that Miss Devinski “salts away” about as much as the Songmark cook manages to save on her salary. The food is, as everyone keeps reminding us, plentiful and wholesome, and even a carnivore girl gets used to it in time. And the Spanish can hardly boast about their corruption levels; from what we have heard about their military one would guess Beryl was in charge – except she has a sense of style and would not get so blatant about it. The cheapest, shoddiest goods of all kinds the Spanish merchants call “de munition” – for the troops – and in some regiments on either side of the conflict, half the troops themselves do not actually exist. They are registered for pay, which their officers pocket, and issued equipment and rations, which the officers promptly resell on the black market and probably ends up with the opposition. This is, Susan says, so long-established and commonplace that nobody even tries to reform it.

Out tonight for guard duty, again. Hopefully no more Rain Islanders will be coming over the fence at us. On the other paw, knowing our dear Tutors they just might. The guard dogs are back patrolling, but if someone really wants to try parachuting in at night they might get past them. We have met some of our “intruders” since, and it is a case of “no hard feelings” for the various hard knocks they received. They volunteered to test us, it turns out, even knowing our reputation. Medals and promotions all round should be in order for that! Though Molly was brought up to shoot first and ask questions afterwards, she has calmed down a little at Songmark. Not enough, though.

\*Editor’s note: although they were known to exist as late as the 1940’s, none of these can be currently found in the periodic table. Evidently they got lost in the wash in one of the periodic clearings of the table. The elements of that name on Cranium Island are not necessarily the ones our science books reassigned to replace (e.g. Alabamium=Astatine) the original names!

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1937

Out today with an unusual addition to the Saturday group, Adele Beasley. True, Miss Devinski has been dropping darker and darker hints about her Curse still not being fixed – and on top of everything else I am expected to fix that one way or another. Still, we were booked for our morning dance class and that is as sacrosanct as anything on our timetable.

We had rather a surprise seeing today someone we have only met on South Island, our visiting Priestess Gha’ta, who showed the class some fine old dances. In fact, though she speaks Spontoone very well in a very old form, she surely has a poor grasp of the language’s dates and numbers as the ages she told us were quite unbelievable. Certainly she is a very exotic girl, the only one we have ever seen here with naked skin rather than scales, fur or feathers. Mixtecan Hairless canines occasionally appear as tourists, but only another of their unfortunate species could possibly find them attractive. That star-nosed mole in the first-year is a similar fright to look at but at least has nice glossy fur. Not having any themselves, Mixtecan Hairless have to keep covered up or sunburn awfully – one can normally scent them coming by the quantities of zinc paste they have to plaster on.

Gha’ta danced a surprisingly sprightly hula that had everyone clapping along to it; really we must learn “*When He rises from the waters*”, evidently one of the religious dances from her home near Ponape. The event she describes sounds rather a jolly occasion; at least everyone has been looking forward to it for a very long time. A most improbably long time, in fact. Possibly Gha’ta is counting in a different number base than we do.

Adele has not specialised in the hula dances, but swayed along with plenty of enthusiasm. We finished at lunch time then headed out to Main Island, where the folk live who specialise in Red Indian styles. A rapid hike up to the North coast to Chikloota brought us to the Yakan household where Clear-Skies Yakan was expecting us. We are all very keen to help Adele; even Molly.

Having surveyed our friend’s problem before, Clear-Skies has been doing some research on such curses and asking her elders. Unfortunately it seems it is a curse of a very old style, such as is rarely used now – and the more traditional practitioners stayed in their ancestral lands rather than move out here to be near at hand for our consultations. Just as Molly boasts about the highly conservative hillbillies of the Appalachians and such places who have changed little in two centuries – those are the radicals and renegades who crossed the globe; the countryfolk back in Barsetshire are the true holders of the traditions.

Just when we were steeling ourselves imagining returning to Alaska or the Aleutians to search for a witch-consultant (one step up from a witch-doctor) Clear-Skies mentioned there is a community in Tillamook that far pre-dates the general settling of the island and are known to practice the most ancient of rituals. She

has written to the elder shaman there explaining the problem, and hopes for an answer soon. Mind you, a lot of these Red Indian languages are not at all suited to being written down, and she says it will be surprising if she has quite made herself plain enough to be helpful.

An interesting afternoon while Helen and I studied along with Clear-Skies, and the rest took a look at Vikingstown over the ridge where Professor Kurt von Mecklenburg und Soweiter has his first full-scale "Bio-reaktor" that is eating twelve tonnes of mixed waste a day to power the Main Island baths and much else. The reactor itself is smallish, they tell me, but he has an extensive and growing array of storage sheds for wet and dry wastes. After a big storm the Northern beaches are black with seaweed that local children now collect; this gets mixed in with the dried crop wastes from last year and ferments furiously along with the fish cannery waste and everything else available. Every day it swallows twelve tonnes of organic waste and delivers about a tonne of finished compost for the local fields and gardens; a major effort to wheel around Main Island. One can quite imagine why Professor Kurt wants the Allthing to restore some of the old railway lines.

By the time they had returned, we had put together a plan of sorts to show our Tutors. It will need polishing, but a trip to Tillamook with Adele seems to be in order. If Miss Devinski tells me to fix Adele, and Tillamook is the nearest place, we should be able to swing it with our tutors. Besides, it will be more miles on our logbook in a good cause – last year Molly and Maria went out to Mildendo to "rescue" that school-chum of Beryl, and this is a far more legitimate trip.

Back via Main Village, with an hour to spare for a change. Maria mused that we will not know what to do with ourselves after graduation; one sees pilots and aircrew relaxing in Mahanish's with a Nootnops Red or a Pensa-cola (the Florida flying-boat pilot's drink) awaiting incoming aircraft. The airport has a library of light reading for air travel; highly coloured editions of "Extra-Spicy Pacific Tails" are always popular. The idea of wondering what to do with a spare half hour is rather exotic these days – as Miss Wildford put it, "If seven twenty-four hour days a week aren't enough to do it all, work nights as well."

Rather gratifyingly, when we got to the gatehouse we passed some of Red Dorm being most enthusiastically searched by Belle and Carmen. Serves them right! Though no contraband had been found yet, Carmen assured me they had hardly begun to search, and had another four hours on gate guard to put to good use. I think Brigit and Liberty are going to get rather chilly standing there like that.

Molly was in a good mood, discovering her monthly subscription to "Criminal World" had arrived. Considering its subject matter it is in a remarkably standard layout, with articles, editorials and even a comics page. Some of the articles were definitely interesting, including the regular one "Effective bribery around the world." Now I know Chinese warlords and their staff like "Broomhandle" Mausers as presents, especially that strange clumsy variant with the drum magazine that turns it into the world's smallest machine-gun. Molly says it is hideously inaccurate with the muzzle climb so extreme the usual technique is to hold the pistol sideways and expect it to spray in a horizontal fan. Breaks the ice at parties, no doubt.

The comics section is equally strange, with the adventures of "Rick Traceless." A handsome and square-jawed wolf, his adventures around the world are portrayed exactly like those of a regular comics hero, except for the plots. Where the regular all-action hero would be foiling pirates and gangsters, Rick Traceless is robbing banks and foiling Detective forces left right and centre. There is even a comedic love interest, a Police Commissioner's daughter who he is taking great satisfaction in gradually corrupting. When she asks him what psychologically motivates him to constantly rob banks, at least he has a good reply ready – "because that, my dear, is where the money is."

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

Maria deserves a medal! It takes extreme bravery to tackle Miss Devinski before breakfast with a request, but that is just what she did – and got grudging and conditional approval to start planning Tillamook. This will have to wait till the shaman writes back and we can arrange things with Clear-Skies Yakan, but in principle we can go ahead, possibly borrowing the Junkers 86 for the job. It will be somewhere new to see, and if it does not quite have the tourist facilities of Spontoon, at least we are not going there on holiday. A cold, raw day today, and the prospect of spending time in a Red Indian "sweat lodge" was rather appealing.

We heard last night of another appealing idea; the Ave Argentum have taken up the gauntlet and agreed to our sporting challenge. On scale, I think the gauntlet will be rather like Beryl's white dress gloves; full of surprises with half a pound of lead shot sewn into the knuckles. Our Tutors are working out the details, as it should be a fair match in front of the Spontoonies. That is, if Father Dominicus is not training his flock in the finer arts of Samoan Wrestling, that will probably be off the programme (much to the disappointment of Missy K and Prudence, albeit for different reasons.) I expect this will be third-years only; we are about as fit and practiced as we are going to be, and quite relish the idea of putting a few high-born noses out of joint. Not literally with Olympic "Pankration" contests though. Even if one of their "Penitentes" is practiced at it courtesy of Saint T's undeniably athletic education (and this Masie Thynne was disqualified a few times for cheating, Beryl says, even though the only hard and fast rules in Pankration relate to not using weapons, biting or eye-gouging.)

Anyway, we will have to find out about that one. Today we went out to South Island, where Gha'ta put us through a few exercises in the tradition that were quite as tiring as anything we did in hula dance class yesterday. Although it does leave us feeling drained, our abilities are certainly increasing. We feel like a Songmark first-year being introduced to the delights of running along the beach with pack and collapsing like a washed-ashore jellyfish – but getting a hundred yards further than the week before. It is slow going though; at this rate we will be a fiftieth as qualified as the other Priestesses about the year 1957.

Back to the Hoele'toemi household, in time to sample the first locally brewed tea of the season! The islands are scattered with similar failed experiments from the Plantation days; we have spotted cinnamon and vanilla bushes by their scent and indeed someone fifty years ago must have planted most of their kitchen cabinet in the hope of getting a bumper crop of something. The plants being able to survive and slowly spread is not the same as a Plantation being able to get an economical crop yield.

I helped prepare the meal as usual and took the chance to have a long talk with Mrs. H about my Allworthy title problem. The trouble is, if I accept the title I would have to be officially “invested” in the House of Lords, and that hardly fits with staying on Spontoon being Mrs. Amelia Hoele'toemi. There is no word as yet from Judge Poynter on finding proper claimants, and indeed it would be too much to hope for that one of the “Remittance men” on South Island stands up and waves a tattered but valid Allworthy Pedigree.

Mrs. H says I might be better off publicly claiming the title, knowing nothing can be finalised before I get back to England – and with such a shaky legal claim the Press are going to be all over the case. Not something I would look forward to. Except if Maria gets to write the story first, and slant it in such a way that the inheritance will be grabbed off me by the first better claimant to grab me at the airport. I could certainly live with that – and in the meantime I could sign those papers. It is not as if I would be taking money out of the business; investing Allworthy funds on the Allworthy estates is something that the rightful heir is unlikely to feel defrauded by.

Of course, there is the embarrassing bit of how I ended up with the whole mess. I would have to smile and tell folk that I was going to marry Leon of my own free will, and only the odd circumstances of Krupmark prevented us doing so more formally. Actually I am sure he could have got a vicar over there if he wanted or even a qualified ship's captain; my whole Krupmark trip started when he summoned a doctor over for consultation and I was the pilot. I doubt he could have got the Reverend Bingham to agree to wed us, but there are less scrupulous clergy available if one reads and believes the Sunday papers. At school I remember Salome and Jezebel, the daughters of that defrocked Cardinal; their father claimed “once a priest always a priest”.

Mrs. H nodded, and pointed out that Jirry knows the truth about what happened – had Leon Allworthy been as advertised, there would be no complaints about my spending a week that way with a lonely and victimised gentleman. Polynesian traditions are nice like that. Any wrongdoing was entirely on the other side, Mrs. H says. So she agrees that I can take the Allworthy name to keep it warm – and to help furs back home who are depending on their being someone at the helm of the estates.

Not what I wanted to do at all, but if they teach us one thing at Songmark it is how to make the best of bad situations! At least I can rely on Maria to drop the right article in the right quarters – I can almost see the indignant articles demanding I be stripped of the title and the newspapers scouring the globe to find a rightful claimant. In six months I hope to be again wearing a Tailfast ring, which should give me some moral support and probably inflame the Society journalists past boiling point (“*Gold-digger to marry Savage in Heathen ceremony – deliberately makes mockery of our Sacred Traditions!*”). According to Officialdom I am a Spy in the service of a foreign power, so at least I will not be worried having a reputation to spoil. Father knows the truth, Jirry and his family likewise – and the rest of the world can think what they like. It would be useful to know just which Enemy Nation I am supposedly working for; as it is, this makes it rather hard to disprove.

An excellent luncheon followed, with Saffina complementing Mrs. H for an excellent “fufu” such as she likes best at home in Ubangi-Chari. I suppose there is only so much one can do with boiled and mashed cassava; despite being a world apart the African and Spontoonie dishes turned out very similar. Mrs. H says she likes cooking for an appreciative audience, and certainly we get through everything put in front of us. The Songmark average diet is about four thousand calories a day, the same as Captain Scott ate pulling sledges by paw in the Antarctic. Unfortunately for him, he was burning about ten thousand, and without the healthy fresh fish, fruit and vegetables we thrive on.

Saffina is hoping she gets picked for the athletics challenge against the Ave Argentum; certainly she is one of the sports stars of the second year, if any second years are chosen. She is one of the main players in the Kilikiti team, being a full-grown lioness though looking very distinctive in her tabby markings. What with her Mother being a Missionary's daughter marrying a Native and converting to “traditional pagan beliefs” in the heart of Africa, that would really unsettle Father Dominicus. Hannah Meyer was telling us similar things about that New South Zion long-jumper in last year's Berlin Olympics – he was absolutely the last person the organisers wanted to have to present a gold medal to. They had to, but somehow the cameras all developed a “technical fault” at the critical moment and the footage never got into the official “Olympia” film. According to the doctrines of the folk involved, neither a New South Zion Olympic champion nor Saffina should even exist.

Mrs. H keeps up with the Althing news more than we have time to do, and points out that the Argentum was officially only given a year on Spontoon. Its future will be decided sometime in May, giving

them time to arrange a new venue for the September term should they have overstayed their welcome here. Still, they are working hard at keeping their reputation as a quiet and respectable bunch, with no scandals that we know of. Living expenses are fairly low out here and indeed they are putting a lot of money into the off-season local economy with than number of students and a rather more lavish accommodation budget. The Northern Star Hotel has single and twin rooms, they say, not our rather barrack-like wooden dorms. I rather doubt they have to build their own water heater if they want a bath.

Helen naturally vanished off for the afternoon with Marti, to the accompaniment of envious sighs and twitching tails from the rest of us. Molly whispered that Lars was back in town, and next week she hopes to see him – no doubt “diverting” her usual Sunday trip here. Our Tutors are going to really hate that. I have never lied to Miss Devinski yet; with what our Tutors know it would be silly to try anyway – but if Molly vanishes and I am asked where she went, I will be able to honestly say I did not see where or whom she met. Where she intended to go, is not what they call admissible in court; I have intended to be Tailfast three times for that matter. I certainly did not intend being Lady Allworthy.

A most pleasant afternoon; about the only time we get to relax in term time. Of course, the average tourist watching us would probably say we are hard at work – but hoeing the taro patch, helping with the neighbour’s kittens and help maintaining a longhouse is sheer laziness next to our Songmark course. There is nobody standing eagle-eyed behind us with a stopwatch, a slide-rule or a micrometer, as appropriate.

All good things come to an end, and as Helen reappeared smiling and rubbing her neck-fur we had to make our own farewells. It is definitely getting lighter now in the evenings! We passed the old Plantation sundial on the way back to Resort Bay; the sunset does not quite alter by two minutes every day as they taught us at Saint Winifred’s – its rate of change is rather more of a sine wave, flattest at the solstices and steepest at the equinoxes. The sundial is a very nice piece of work, and by my chronometer and the published times in the Daily Elele, it is spot-on. No doubt on Cranium Island at the time they built radium-dialled sundials one can read in the dark.

Arriving at Resort bay, I was last in the group – when I heard Helen quietly growl “speak of the devil...” and saw Molly’s tail twitch excitedly. It would not take Sherlock Hound to deduce who we had bumped into – Lars Nordstrom, just as Molly had been looking forward to meeting. Actually I did not recognise his silhouette against the waterfront lights for a second – he has shed his horns for the Winter, and has two smallish velvet-covered bumps not unlike bulbs starting to sprout for the new season. I blushed somewhat recalling the matching set of last year’s horns.

Helen was all for going straight back to Songmark; there was a water-taxi just coming in. But I persuaded her to leave Molly behind for the next one, and I stayed of course as chaperone. It would have been rather a squeeze with five passengers on that water-taxi anyway.

There is a tourist shelter looking out over the bay, that is thronged with furs seeking shade in Summer; it was empty and provided good shelter from the wind today. Lars explained he had been busy at work, on Krupmark and elsewhere – and congratulated Molly on having brought Captain Granite to justice. Apart from kidnapping and such, he claimed Captain Granite had permanently altered the ... preferences of many ladies, who were left disliking the idea but unable to change it.

Actually I don’t think this is possible, as I am sure Prudence and her dorm would have mentioned it by now even as something to try and avoid. On the other paw, Angelica hinted that she had a curse with a rather similar effect. Lars’ comment certainly had an effect on Molly, whose ears went right down. She suddenly got extremely ... affectionate, as if wanting to prove nothing had been altered. It is a good thing the beach shelter only looks out over the open lagoon, and there was nobody around!

Afterwards, we got a surprising piece of news. Lars has volunteered to head out to Macao, somewhere he does a lot of business with anyway, and seek out the Direwolf. He winked and mentioned you could probably hear a certain ferret’s teeth gnashing from Meeting Island, but Lars has put himself forward as the obvious candidate to do some “trade” out there, being well known in the military side of the import and export business. There are things that are legal to own but cannot be exported without various special permissions – he mentioned the Direwolf has put requests out in the trade for up-to-date military radios, hydrophones and such. Not the sort of thing one can buy in Herr Rassberg’s store! I should think the profit margins will be large, as will the risks – but those two go together for anyone trading on Krupmark.

Molly was very keen on going along for that trip – after which she demonstrated that she was very keen, again. Our Tutors are going to go completely off the rails when they hear about this as an idea for an excursion – not that I will tell them, unless Miss Devinski asks me directly. We had enough to do with planning Tillamook, and we are booked for New South Thule in March – from what Mr. Sapohatan said, the Direwolf is a rather more urgent mission.

It was already well past dark by the time I managed to persuade Molly to part with her stag and we just got into Songmark before the gates closed for the evening. Fortunately I got her upstairs and into the shower before anyone scented her, though Mrs. Oelabe was sniffing around our trail. Carbolic soap is jolly useful stuff and no mistake. Maria and Helen had saved us some supper, as we need every meal we can get.

Though our Tutors did not call us to the carpet tonight, Helen nearly had a fit when she heard the news. It is all the worse for being apparently approved of by Post Box Nine, and indeed seems to quite fit the

bill Mr. Sapohatan laid out for us. Molly was rather smug about it all, I must admit. As she pointed out, it is a perfect mission for Songmark third years, and being officially approved of our Tutors are very likely to let us go, or at least some of us. One hardly knows whether to be pleased at the prospect or not; although Macao is not Krupmark it has a lot of the same elements, and far more substantial military force in the area. The one good thing about Krupmark is its lack of intrusive government; by all accounts the Portuguese just look at the money the place brings in and tell their Governor not to do anything to decrease that. In Macao there is the extra hazard of external military intervening; I expect the Royal Navy would rather like to see the Direwolf following the rest of the Kaiser's Navy to be scuttled as happened to the rest in 1918. And what Japan would do as it rolls through China is anyone's guess, though the results are not likely to be pleasant.

Maria is practical, and comments that our adventures have not got us thrown out yet, and if we do come back with our tails on and a properly written-up report, it will be all valuable experience. She commented that Molly probably misses bright lights and big cities – true enough, the last one we visited was in Vostok last year, and that was rather dour for someone used to Chicago. How much Maria herself misses the social whirl is something one sometimes forgets; Rome and Casino Island are not really comparable.

To bed early, Helen threatening to wipe the smile of Molly's muzzle with a scrubbing brush and floor soap. At least Helen is Tailfast; should she discover she has Marti's kitten on the way she will have somewhere to go even without finishing the Songmark course. And as a look at the calendars shows me, if any of us get such news after Easter – we might get to graduate regardless. But it is not something to risk.

Monday 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

Back to hard work with a vengeance, hard work on two wheels on Main Island again! There is a motor bicycle club being formed by the Spontoonies; no other island has enough road to make it worthwhile and Euros tend not to be allowed over without a Guide. Though side-cars and pillion-riders could answer, it is hard enough learning without the extra load of a passenger. One of the Spontoonie enthusiasts had a despatch-rider coat with an inscription on the back – *“if you can read this, my pillion rider has fallen off!”*

As before, Molly grimly straddled Miss Wildford's plain bicycle and wobbled along the smoothest track we could find while the rest of us started engines and filled the air with the scent of two-stroke fuel. Hardly impressive next to the hundreds of horsepower most aircraft use; in fact some of the smaller motor bicycles have engines I would have looked doubtful about powering my Flying Fleas! Yet they have a decent turn of speed, and being within shin-grazing reach of the ground with no altitude to play with, does concentrate the mind most wonderfully.

Molly was not the only one to fall off, and indeed most of us had spills of some sort. At least in Molly's case the magnesium framed bicycle was not much to get tangled with. Adele Beasley lost some tail-fur in the chain drive when she and her mount parted company on a bend; the cycle flipped and ended up on top of her. Definitely there is a cursed bunny! A film studio trying to do that as a “stunt” would probably take all day and a dozen “takes” before it happened the same. Sidcot suits at least cover up all exposed fur, though they are so clumsy to wear the doubled chances of having a crash on a bicycle probably outweigh their protection. Real dispatch-rider's clothing is expensive, and as this is not the Songmark Cyclists Boarding School for speedway-riders, it is hardly likely we are going to get any made specially to fit our varying sizes and species. It is tricky enough with the helmets; those who could not find one to fit had to make do with flying helmets, which are hardly designed for the job.

One could do worse. It is a blessing that apart from Maria and Irma none of us have horns. That Miss Stella, Nuala Rachorska's friend and colleague, has Impala horns that would be a definite challenge for any milliner, let alone helmet maker! Lars has a very customised helmet, and he is quite modestly antlered next to some stags we have seen. The Oryx girl in the first-year is likely to be sorry open cockpits are getting unfashionable, and indeed she is hardly likely to fit into a Schneider Trophy canopy even now.

By the end of the morning we had swapped mounts several times, getting used to the feel of different designs. Maria even demonstrated how well they can work across country; the most powerful machines are not always the best, especially since lighter ones can be paw-handled much better over walls, rope bridges and the like. Though noisier than a bicycle, one can imagine the extra speed more than makes up for it – a force of motor-cyclists could make their way through any decent trail through three-yard jungle, and appear from routes not marked on any common map.

An hour of maintenance followed, where we rediscovered the greasy labours of taking engines apart and keeping blowing dust entirely out of them. Still, we are only borrowing the motor bicycles and owe it to return them in a better state than we found them; this way the club gets its servicing free and we tick off yet another box in what seems like an endlessly long list of What Adventuresses Need To Know.

Back for another few hours in the classroom, where we refresh ourselves in the essentials of expedition foodstuff supplies. As Miss Windlesham pointed out, it may be boring to sit down and calculate how many tins of corned beef someone else is going to need a week from the nearest road – but that someone is depending on you to get it right. We have done similar things before but this time we had “supply problems” and half the essentials had to be made good locally. That is, instead of proper tinned fish and bully beef, there

was local fresh cassava and taro leaf, which will not keep so well. It was like that old riddle with the fox, the hen and the bag of grain on a ferryboat – how to balance the trip with available resources. Living totally on cassava and taro leaf was not the solution, in our class had five “bearers mutinied”, four “food went off” and three “starvation” results handed back in red ink to their despairing authors.

Just to rub it in, tonight the main meal was boiled cassava and taro leaf. No bully beef, even for the girls who kept their theoretical expedition properly fed.

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

A busy two days of classwork, and this morning a rather low cloud ceiling had the airport closed to all but emergency traffic. We still flew though; the one Tiger Moth equipped for “blind flying” did a lot of that today. The gyro compass and the radio direction equipment had to take the place of one’s eyes for most of the flight, though the flat calm meant at least no wind drift errors.

I found myself wishing I was back feeling my way around the Radio LONO tower in zero visibility, when Miss Devinski called me to her office and asked if there was anything I felt she ought to know. Rather the sort of open-ended question our dear Tutor specialises in; I expect she hears some interesting confessions which have nothing to do with the subject she really wanted to hear about.

I started with mentioning I have the paperwork underway to actually be set up as Lady Allworthy, soon hopefully to be challenged – but she waved that aside, saying she knows about all that. I have signed the legal papers witnessed by Judge Poynter, and the solicitors in Barrow-in-Furyness have received the telegraph days ago now. The next possibility was Mr. Sapohatan’s briefing us on the Macao trip – not that I have ever mentioned him by name, but I am sure Miss Devinski knows who our contact is. She nodded, then asked the one question – “And?”

It is always a very bad half-hour for me when our dear Tutor asks us about Lars Nordstrom and the trips we take with him. The fact that Mr. Sapohatan had approved both our excursions cut no ice with her; she snapped that our Government contact would spend us like a ten-cowry piece if it suited them. I rather doubt it, and in any case we are volunteers and could have turned the mission down.

After I had done my best to flesh out the basics of the plan, travelling out separately and acting a part as supposed a competitor to Lars in the bidding (somewhere the Allworthy identity really will be handy, bearing in mind they have shipyards and military contracts) Miss Devinski nodded once, coldly, and beckoned for me to follow her. We went out into the main open compound and towards that central mound – the one that has such a strange feel to it, rather like the Great Stone Glen. It is certainly the heart of Songmark, like the North Pole of a planet.

Oh my. I knew there was something under that mound, but I did not know it was inhabited. The workings underneath are not the sort one could find with the usual treasure-hunting methods, but apparently Miss Devinski has been looking after a “lost” Songmark girl for some time. She is a skunk, though smells a lot nicer than any skunk I have met, especially in close quarters underground – I was about to ask if she was a mix and had inherited her other parent’s scent, when Miss Devinski told me she had been de-scented, and some other things that had been done to her. Henrika Polychronopoulos is her name, though she barely recognises it – there is almost no Henrika Polychronopoulos left, though physically she is as healthy as anyone.

According to Miss Devinski, Henrika vanished years ago – she was a second year in 1934, the last time anyone saw her on Spontoon, and she ended up on Krupmark and Kuo Han. Our Tutor rather pointedly added that I had been to Krupmark more often than was good for me, especially in certain company – and Henrika is a living warning of what is liable to be a Songmark girl’s fate if she gets it wrong. She was as good a student as any of her class, probably destined to become a fine, free-spirited Adventuress – which is an idea some people absolutely detest, and would pay any sum to demolish. According to Miss Devinski, the dearest wish of some furs would be to see all Songmark girls end up like Henrika. And Miss Devinski swore on what is under Songmark that cost what it may, she would bring whoever did this to her student, to justice. Probably involving crabs or tiger ants, is my guess.

Hmm. I know she has rather a down on Lars, but there is such a thing as being innocent until proven guilty – not that Krupmark uses rules like that. Molly and I have been quite at his mercy several times, but nothing happened we did not both approve of and (I must admit) rather enjoy. The merchandise Lars handles is of the military kind; Molly has seen his warehouse in Krupmark and I saw what was in the hold of the Parsifal. Not what was found in the holds of the Three Moons! Knowing what happens to slavers around here, Mr. Sapohatan would hardly be approving Lars to go on Government missions if there was any clear evidence against him that way.

Although I did not say so, Miss Devinski spotted I was not eagerly agreeing with her – she threw up her hands in disgust, saying that if Henrika could not warn me, she knows of nothing that can. She mentioned a ludicrously high price on the head of any Songmark third-year; enough to pay for three years of Songmark training. In fact, she says she has turned down applications from three girls who have had “mystery benefactors” this year alone; that might be entirely innocent but she is not risking effectively fattening them up for sale. She escorted me back to the surface, and suddenly the mound was exactly as it had been before.

Not even Beryl with a map and a treasure-hunting team would have found their way inside there unless what was within wished it.

A most disturbing encounter! What with the timing of her disappearance I never met Henrika at Songmark, but she should have been in the class graduating with Erica and Noota. Everyone thought she quit suddenly and ran off to get married; her fate was rather different and our Tutors would lay down their lives rather than see it happen again.

I called Molly, Helen and Maria up to our dorm and briefed them. Helen looked definitely pale around the nose, and asked if I was going to learn a lesson from this. Molly looked less shocked than one might expect, commenting there was a very similar “ship’s cat” found on board Captain Granite’s ship – who is presumably Chinese by species but no longer speaks any language, as if she had reverted to a primitive state with less in her head than some guard dogs that we know. Maria’s comment was that she was definitely coming with us to watch our backs, regardless of what our Tutors say. If she has to go over the wire, so be it.

We sat down and started planning seriously; one thing that is in our favour is very few people outside Spontoon know I am Lady Allworthy – it is a title rather than a family name, just as Lord Nelson was not the son of any Mrs. Nelson. So it is a disguise in its own right – I will not be heading out as Amelia Bourne-Phipps plus title, but someone unknown but verifiably genuine as the owner of a shipyard. If the Direwolf’s commanders present me with a few chests of unmarked gold bullion to build them a sister ship, in theory I can have that in a Macao bank within the hour and telegraph Barrow-in-Furryness to start laying the keel the day after. I could really do that. They would be cheering me in the streets over there if I did, too.

Obviously, having me in respectable dress and three Songmark dressed girls carrying a Fedorov Avtomat apiece would rather give the game away. A traditional Lady Allworthy would need a maid, a secretary and a guide at least, no matter how far or secretly she was travelling if she expected to do serious business at the far end. I put the posts open to argument; Maria grabbed the secretary role and Helen the guide, which rather left Molly in the role as my maid. She is about as undomesticated a domestic as one can imagine, and mutters that there should be a post of bodyguard. So there would, if our Tutors would let us take Saffina along. Despite her sterling performance on Krupmark I hardly dared to ask; Miss Devinski looked as if she was about to bite me as it was.

I have seen my share of folk of good family, being invited to school chums’ estates over the holidays outside the Murder season. Even so, I will definitely need some coaching on this, to play my part well. It is a long way from home and there will be no help available if we get in trouble! A postcard was drafted immediately to Post Box Nine; we shall see what Mr. Sapohatan wants us to do exactly.

Helen seemed fairly happy to be going along with the expedition – as Guide she will be expected to be tough, practical, and sensibly dressed. No acting needed on her part, then. Maria speaks six languages and has her own typewriter, so a secretary is a natural cover for her. Imagining Molly as a respectable lady’s maid though – the mind boggles. We are going to need some help on this one.

Friday 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1937

Dear Diary – our Tutors may not have thrown us out just yet, but they are extremely unhappy with us. Not in the sense of docking us points – as Miss Devinski said, if we are not here at the end of term points will be irrelevant anyway. Yesterday we received a telephone call, telling us the view from LONO hill is rather fine today – which it is, but our Tutors rarely grant us passes to go and look at the scenery.

We did have an afternoon pass, and headed out up the hill with the big radio mast, looking over the airport. The transmitters are up on the hill but the radio studios are down just North of the airstrip; at this time of year they are presumably interviewing jugglers, contortionists and acrobats for the local radio entertainments of the coming Tourist season.

Something that is not likely to be broadcast was our meeting on the far side of the radio compound, where the buzzing of transformers made it impossible for any eavesdroppers to overhear. Mr. Sapohatan was there with a pair of binoculars, a lunch bag and a book on wildfowl, evidently practicing his bird-spotting. He soon extended that to Songmark student spotting, and invited us to discuss our trip.

We were up there two hours, a substantial time for someone in his position to give us, and hammered out the basics before we left. Next Friday! That is all the time we have to get ready, and our Tutors are not going to be too lenient in giving us spare time out of our classes. In fact, some “facilities” are made ready for us right away, and others will be alerted today. Travelling out directly from Spontoon might be a bad thing as we are meant to have come from England, so we suggested staging through Tillamook, where we can possibly drop off Adele and pick her up (hopefully cured) on the return trip.

Maria has with her the “biography” of a Lady Allworthy who would be credible talking shady business deals with semi pirates in Macao. Mr. Sapohatan had a chuckle reading it, and announced that he could have supporting documents ready by next week for us. In return, he gave us some very clear questions he needed answering about our target and its crew. Aircraft flying over a dock can say where a ship is and give an indication of how ready she is to sail; they cannot photograph what its captain is going to do next, or why.

We are to act on our own, keep our eyes ears and noses open and not worry too much if we have to return empty-pawed. Establishing this Lady Allworthy as a presence in such a market will be valuable in its own right, no doubt. Whatever we do or do not find out in Macao, this is someone who is better than an assumed name and can be used later on – she really exists, even though I am only borrowing the part. It is like being Assistant Pope or the Elder in charge of the Protocols Of The Elders of Zion – they are job titles, but real people fill them.

Maria was looking unusually thoughtful on the way back, and while the others went back into Songmark she invited me into Song Sodas; true enough, the Songmark desserts generally leave something to be desired. If I was really going to be Lady Allworthy in charge of shipyards and such, she mused, there was a lot I could do. Indeed, there is a lot I should be doing if Barrow-in-Furryness is going to keep employed. A lot of the world's fleet has been built and repaired in Britain; South America is mostly defended by Export models that frequently equip both sides in their rather frequent skirmishes. Not that Spontoon could afford a battleship, anyway such things take years to build. A lot of the naval vessels that launched in 1918 had been ordered in 1914 and that was with full wartime crash priority regardless of costs; dozens were completed years too late for the War and many more were scrapped half built. Which partly explains why the Direwolf's sister ships of the Imperial German fleet were scuttled in deep water rather than sold off; the market too was flooded in 1919 and we wanted to make sure any export customers bought their war-surplus ships and years' worth of spare parts from British shipyards rather than Kiel and Hamburg.

It is certainly something to think about. On the other paw, I am trying to clear my name and providing foreign nations with unlicensed military equipment will not reassure folk in attics and back rooms of Whitehall where such things are decided. Actually there is one person I can talk to about that. It is awhile since I have met Major Hawkins, but I believe he still has a roving commission based around Spontoon.

I mentioned him to Maria and she agreed wholeheartedly; I cannot walk into the British Consulate these days but Maria practically has the front door key to the Italian one and diplomats have little to do this time of year but talk to each other. Though she rarely has occasion to use her position much less abuse it, I cannot see her being refused anything by her Consul here (unless he wants a ten year posting somewhere unsettled and unpronounceable in Italian East Africa, that is.)

One strawberry soda and much to think about. It was almost a relief to get back and start wading into all the class-work out Tutors had ready for us; just because we have an afternoon pass does not mean we are excused the work everyone else did today! Up till lights-out finishing it all, but we finished with minutes to spare. Cutting things fine is an art they teach us around here – as Miss Wildford has pointed out, people soon forget whether one wins the Schneider Trophy by a minute or a second, provided that you do win.

Saturday January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1937

A desperately busy day, the last Saturday here we will have in awhile! For a change Molly was not going to dance classes but vanished behind the high walls of Madame Maxine's establishment all day. We went out with Jasbir's dorm and some of the first-years to our usual dance classes, and a fine and strenuous time was had by all! That Eva Schiller was there; she is always keen on learning about the island's culture even though it feels to us rather like showing Beryl the family antiques.

Some of the first-years were rather good; Svetlana from Vostok may have been trained in a rather different ballet tradition but it all seems to translate rather well in terms of balance and suppleness. She has told us tales of ballet training that have our neck-fur standing on end; Maria whispered she would probably confess anything after eight hours of "training" that sounds more like something the Spanish Inquisition made up on a wet Wednesday when feeling out-of-sorts.

Ingrid Ledasdottir is another one with promise. Between her species and Svetlana's classical traditions they could probably demonstrate "Swan Lake" if the Spontoones wanted to see what the rest of the world builds giant opera houses for. Spontoones are always very keen to see what tourists will spend money for; that is why they have the only Limbo dancers in the entire Pacific. Svetlana says on Vostok they are experimenting with new art styles the rest of the world will look on in awe; with all those tankettes they have a need to exercise their crews and commanders in ways nearer Bushby Barklay than a standard cavalry general. I have heard of Swan Lake performed on ice; Svetlana says many operas now are performed on tracks. One expects the sound track is dubbed onto the film separately, unless they are doing truly remarkable things with tuned exhausts.

It is nice in a way to see the first-years have quite as much to talk about as we ever did; three girls from Vostok, Vanierge and Germany respectively coming together to learn Polynesian dancing. Rather odd that none of the second-years ever stuck to it, though some took a look at the classes in their first term.

I asked Eva about the rest of "Crusader Dorm" and was told they were busy on a case. Amateur detectives do solve most of the high-profile crimes in England, but that is mostly the country-house murders. They never investigate the commonplace sordid crimes; the paid Police pick up all those. I hear in Spontoon Crusader Dorm have an almost unique position as being approved of by the Chief Constable; the local regular



Police are unappreciative of having a team of eighteen-year old Euro girls solving crimes on their beat. One can appreciate their position, especially as the less than diplomatic Miss Nancy Rote leads the sleuthing team.

A fine luncheon at the Missing Coconut, with the Rain Islanders still there and everyone talking about our contest with the Ave Argentum. It will be next weekend, and we will miss it! Still, there are four other dorms who I would bet money on. Apparently the Guide's School named five events after talking with our Tutors and Father Dominicus; there is a swimming race, a cross-country run, an orienteering challenge with compasses, a gymnastics contest and one other that will be revealed only on the day. I doubt it will be original Olympic wrestling in the bare fur, unless Prudence has influential friends in the Guide's School. The rest are all athletic sports an Adventuress would be expected to know; nothing too Unladylike such as Jude-Jitsu as Mr. Toshiro Finkelstein taught us. Besides, both sides must be seen to have a fair chance, and Mr. Finkelstein never taught them.

While Maria and Helen went over to the Italian Consulate to ask about conditions in Macao and try to find Major Hawkins, I kept my own appointment over at Madame Maxine's. The usual huge tigress at the gate bowed and let me in; although it might not rank in any pedigree list of finishing schools the establishment deals with all sorts of social training as well as physical changes. At least it was a respectable "polishing" I was booked for today; I recall Nuala Rachorska recommending I go there to learn various things when she thought I wanted that Hunting Licence. I never did find out who paid for that. Nuala said that as I had never signed and validated it, the document would stay on file forever in case I ever changed my mind. And I thought being Lady Allworthy was bad enough!

Madame Maxine herself arrived to spend a few hours going over various social points I have had little occasion to practice at Songmark. Whether they will be strictly needed on Macao is doubtful, but one never knows. Having a good background, I proved a quick student and by teatime Madame Maxine seemed quite satisfied. I have much to be grateful to her for; she is the "Mother" of Kim-Anh Soosay or at least her author and the girls here evidently liked making me into a half-breed Siamese.

Thinking of transformations, when the tea arrived I had rather a shock. One of the maids arrived and put the tea down, stepping quietly in and out and standing attentively off to one side of the room in case anything more was needed. It took about two seconds before my nose twitched at a familiar musk. Molly! I nearly spilled my tea as I went up to inspect her – in a respectable maid's black dress with white apron and head-dress, she could have passed for any Lyon's corner tea-house waitress. She did not grin or wink at me, but stood civilly while I checked it really was my Tommy-gun toting tomboy friend under that uniform.

Madame Maxine smiled and explained that she often had Hotel Staff to train, and it was something she was quite accustomed to – though then the process would be making a grass-skirt wearing Main Islander into a sophisticated cocktail waitress or the like. She dismissed the servants; Molly bowed and left without a word, which transformation was quite a frightening sight to anyone who knows her. I could hardly help remembering Henrika, who Miss Devinski says has been left with various talents but no independent will over whether or not to use them.

Another hour of tuition completed a busy afternoon, and I took my leave in time to see Molly stepping out in the courtyard with a neat black valise presumably carrying her costume. She looked pale and shaken; I think she was happier fighting off those Moro pirates aboard the Parsifal, but she gamely stuck to her job. Having a broad Chicago accent is less of a problem than might be expected; in the stricter households servants only speak when spoken to and besides Chicago has its own "bon ton" with associated local maids serving them.

Still, someone has to do the job and she admitted she does not have the languages or typing speed of Maria to take the secretarial "cover" and I think Helen would probably just shrivel up in embarrassment given Molly's job. She actually does look rather imposing in the uniform, though she swears she would far rather put on a Foreign Legion kepi for a career than a maid's apron. That or being Racketeering Advisor to some Chinese warlord; a lot of them make substantial incomes on smuggling, being effectively independent rulers of their own pieces of territory. I doubt she will have to do too many "duties" and we can always provide her with a deadly sharpened tea-tray or some other reassuring weapon she can carry in public.

Sunday January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1937

A whole month over, our final January here! In less than half a year all this will be over – it is up to us to get ready for what will happen afterwards.

Maria has been telling us about Macao, having all but ransacked the Consulate for reference works and talked long with its staff yesterday. Being a Portuguese colony it is as nearly neutral as such places get, and Italian diplomats often stage through there when world politics (such as Ethiopia, or Italian East Africa as we should now call it) make them unwelcome guests at other ports. The Japanese are on the Chinese side of the border already; they are ruthless in stopping Chinese getting into the colony, but have made no move against Macao itself. The local inhabitants tend to shrug and get on with business; they have always been precariously perched on the flank of an overwhelmingly major power, whether controlled from Peking or

Tokyo. As long as they are making money, little else matters. I can see how Lars got me my Macao passport as Kim-Anh there; just about anything can be bought and sold in Macao.

Although she does not have specifics on the Direwolf, Maria showed us the “lading list”, or the shopping bill of a similar sized Italian cruiser. One quite understands why ships that size do not normally lead an independent career. Even without ammunition and battle repairs, the sheer daily appetite of a ship that size is horrendous; just sitting in harbour they need a hundred gallons of oil fuel a day keeping the generators running for desalination plant, lights, radios and pumps. At flank speed on the open ocean her consumption is such that one wonders how she manages without having a string of oilers passing their cargoes like the baton at a relay race. Not surprisingly, she was re-engined only three years ago with something rather better than the 1913 models she began with, the “mixed firing” system that has a compromise of readily available coal sprayed with hotter burning oil. Molly tells me that a bunker full of yards of coal is a surprisingly good armour (at least to armour-piercing shot) and unlike oil it does not leak out if there is a hole shot in the sides. A cubic yard of oil fuel has a lot more energy though and takes less stoking and boiler care.

The trouble with Macao is it is not a major industrial base; the kind of small nation who are the Direwolf’s customers tend not to be able to help much that way. The only small independent Industrial power nearby is Vostok, but the Imperial German Navy would probably be rather unwelcome there. There is Rain Island, but I doubt the Anarcho-Syndicalists would be happy with such a customer either. The only nations comfortable with supplying an independent mercenary warship either have their own adequate Navy or no coastline. Having all the gold in China hardly helps if there is nowhere one can spend it – which presumably is why the Direwolf would be happy to talk to Lady Allworthy who owns a shipyard and Lars (who can “obtain” bits on demand from other people’s shipyards, as the Parsifal trip proved.)

The weather was quite fine as we headed out to South Island, for some final preparation with Gha’ta. In fact we discovered it is our final lesson; she is returning to Ponape soon and says we have learned all we can of the theory – the rest is practice. Which is rather like having a searchlight battery run by a bicycle dynamo; the potential is there to light up the skies but our pedal-power is rather lacking.

Just as Kansas Smith has “unusual” assistance in the form of the thing that travels with and sometimes speaks through Half Ration, what Gha’ta teaches us could be used in quite a few ways. Basically a Warrior Priestess is not limited to calling on the local Spirits, but uses her own power. This is handy, but means we are something like battery-powered rather than mains driven – more portable but always liable to run flat just when most wanted. And considering we are the battery, that is liable to be unhappy for us.

A busy morning left us feeling distinctly drained, barely staggering up the beach after making our farewells to our priestess, who says she is taking the long way home looking at various of her relatives on the way. It may take a few months to swim and walk to Ponape, and most people would say life is too short not to take the aircraft when available. Not so for Priestess Gha’ta! We never did work out her real age, and there is obviously something wrong with her modern Spontoone language or mathematics when she tried to tell us how old she really was.

Mrs. Hoele’toemi was pleased to see us, and we all helped prepare a fine Sunday luncheon. Something one of her neighbours brought over from “Vikingstown” yesterday was a pound or so of Hakarl, that Icelandic delicacy that is the fish equivalent of very high game. It is one of the fascinating features of Spontoon that different villages keep their traditions alive in terms of food and costume; presumably it adds variety to the Tourist experience not seeing grass skirts and coconut brassieres at every stop. I am not sure about the fermented fish, though. Some cultures have fraudulent “delicacies” that they only serve to tourists they dislike; do the Chinese really eat bird’s nests and hundred-year old eggs when nobody is watching? A little Hakarl certainly goes a long way – Molly and Maria were whispering that only the Goddard Club are likely to find ways of sending it far enough.

Anyway, I grated some of the Hakarl for anyone to sample who had a mind to – Molly and Maria predictably passed on it, but Helen finished her sample as I did myself. We have eaten worse things on Survival exercises, but most of those were still wriggling. Nobody was keen and Mrs. H disliked having to throw food out especially that given as a gift, so I volunteered to take it back (wrapped in an air-tight oilskin bag) to offer to Prudence, who I know relishes such things. Then, Prudence likes a lot of things other folk would not. I have heard rumours that she and her dorm have appeared in the sort of films that one would not expect the average Odeon on the High Street to show, but I can hardly believe that of a good English girl. \*

A pleasant last Sunday spent in traditional pursuits, with most of us helping get the gardens and main longhouse tidy while Helen and Marti make the Guest longhouse messy. The chance would be a fine thing! As it is, we might have two weeks or more before returning here; Jirry will hopefully be back by then and the weather warmer for swimming and other outdoor sports. One wonders if Gymnastics classes in Spontoon schools involve a hammock; there are some uses of one that certainly need gymnastics training for.

Back to Songmark uneventfully this time, though one could see Molly’s tail flicking as she passed the spot where she encountered Lars last Sunday. We might not even see him in Macao, depending on how the crew of the Direwolf arrange matters. Having all the bidders in one room driving down the price is one way of doing business, but so is sending in sealed bids. I must remember I am really going out there to lose; Lars may be able to obtain the components they want but I cannot, and it would be highly embarrassing if I bid lowest!

We will be missing out on quite a bit; the teams are already picked for next weekend's athletics match against the Ave Argentum. Not being able to include Molly is rather a blow to the running and orienteering events (she is rather good at those.) There are no real surprises in the other teams, with Sophie D'artagnan and Susan de Ruiz swimming, Li Han and Beryl in the gymnastics and similar. The "Mystery Event" has a wide scattering of talents; it includes Irma Bundt who is in it to add muscle if required, while Jasbir Sind is as fast and flexible as we can supply. We will only find out on the day if it is a tug-of-war or a tightrope walk; one would suit Missy K and the other would be a sheer "walk-over" for Li Han! Actually "we" will not find out till our return from our Macao trip. It is a bit much, our missing out on being Tailfast, the New Year, the Schneider trophies (twice) and now this as well. Any Hawaiian-shirted tour-boat tourist sees more of Spontoon's great events than us, and we live here.

Prudence greatly appreciated the ten ounces of Hakarl, which she says she will eat and think of me. I am not sure I want to be associated with a chunk of salted half-decomposed shark, but it takes all sorts to make a world. I am sure judges never accept that as a plea, though.

\* Editor's note: in his classical work "Stage-Land" of the 1890's which categorised the various social classes in absolutely 100% true and thoroughly scientific detail, Mr Jerome K. Jerome described the Wicked Adventuress as "... always of overseas extraction. They do not make bad women in England, so the article is entirely of foreign manufacture. She speaks English with a charming little French accent, and French with a broad English one..."

Monday February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1937

Back to work with a vengeance; our Tutors say we can have the time off to Macao but will have to make up the work, in the Easter holidays if necessary. Maria whispers that Miss Wildford had expressly warned her against ever going to China, which is in the middle of a Japanese invasion and a civil war at the same time. But that was not what Miss Wildford was worried about, Maria thinks. It must be something rather horrible if our Tutors want to keep us clear of it, knowing what we have faced up to on Cranium Island and Krupmark.

All morning we spent over at Superior Engineering, some of it doing drudge work cleaning up engines before their top mechanics start work, but some of it looking over rather interesting arrivals. There was a Severski twin-engined "mail plane" from Vostok that has variable pitch propellers that it can not only feather in flight but slam into reverse pitch – just the thing for landing on an icy Vostok runway with the wheels locked and skidding over the ice. Then, we have seen similar technology if not so close up; that new model Balalaika had the same design by all accounts, and could swivel the engines through ninety degrees as well.

No sooner had we washed the oil out of our fur than we were back at Songmark tangling with the second-years in self defence classes. This time we had our work cut out (and risked having fur pulled out) as they were teaming up two then three to one against us! They learn teamwork and we get a real test of our abilities. I recall Mrs. Fairburn-Sykes telling us that in a real confrontation when outnumbered, one should try to escape rather than fight – but if unavoidable, try and decisively demolish the first one to come at you in a way that spoils the morale of the rest. Not wanting to inflict any permanent harm even on Red Dorm, that was an approach we could not use today.

It was just my luck to be teamed with Florence Farmington's dorm – the one which shares Prudence's tastes, except for their leader. Florence is still highly embarrassed with having the others absolutely worship her, willing to do absolutely anything for her (which is itself the problem.) They are an athletic bunch indeed, and I ended up with quite a few bumps and bruises. At three to one odds I lost the final bout; though I threw Florence flat on her back so hard it knocked the wind out of her, the other two were fired by vengeance and had me in a double nelson hold before their beloved leader finished bouncing off the floor.

Moral: stay clear of three to one odds, unless you are better armed and get a chance to use your weapons first. But our Tutors have been telling us that for years already. Molly's idea of "self defence" starts at the maximum range of a T-Gew, which is accurate at about a mile for fur-sized targets but could reliably put a hole in a boat or vehicle at twice the range. As she says to our Tutors in her sweetest available modes, she believes only in self-defence these days – but usually ruins it by adding the best form of defence is attack, and the best form of attack is surprise. No wonder they never let her carry any ammunition on gate patrol.

A letter for me, from the British consulate! Well, using their notepaper at least. Major Hawkins invited me to Song Sodas tomorrow evening, if I am free. For once, Miss Devinski did not seem inclined to bite my tail off when I asked for a Pass. She signed it, and recommended I listen to the Major. Could it be there is one Euro our dear Tutor actually approves of me meeting? There is a first time for everything.

Tuesday February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1937

A busy day on the sporting front – just to make sure nobody feels left out of the teams that will be upholding Songmark's name at the weekend, today we all practiced in all four events – Miss Wildford adding that my dorm needed the practice, as we were skipping the hard work at the weekend. Molly really should be in the

team, she can run like the wind and came first in the orienteering that for a change we staged across South Island. Running flat out up the trails on Mount Tomboabo while navigating with map and compass is quite a challenge; one cannot stop to look at the map yet the moment one's attention leaves the footpath it is sure to put a loop of vine or tree root right in front of one's paws.

For the gymnastics we went over after lunch to Moon Island, where next to the firing range there is that training course with log walls, hoops and suchlike. We have thrown ourselves and our dorm-mates over those from all directions, in the rain and dark, with packs and without them. This is the first time we used the top of the wall as a gymnastics bench – it is a long way down, and it certainly concentrates the mind. The sand pit at the bottom of the rope slide was handy for practicing somersaults and similar showy manoeuvres, and just to round things off we had more rope climbing than a hand on a sailing vessel sees most watches.

Exhausting stuff all round – we were very glad to drag ourselves into the shower and catch half an hour resting flat out on the beds. Maria fell fast asleep in about two minutes; she is the first of us to have mastered that art one sees in soldiers and sailors. Of course an Adventuress in the field has to keep watchful and not nod off except when it is safe to do so – but being able to grab half-hour naps is a very useful talent. We never used to appreciate the sheer luxury of sleep, till we discovered it was not a default or a right but a luxury. And to think I used to complain back at Saint Winifred's when we had to draw the curtains on a warm Summer evening and "lights out" by nine-thirty! It is a pity one cannot save sleep up or export it for another to use, or I would write back to my old school and ask them to send a week's worth apiece over here.

Having brushed, groomed and changed into my best Songmark uniform I headed out to Song Sodas, glad we need no passes to go out in the evenings now. I could head out to Casino Island and spend all evenings watching the (un) dress rehearsals at the Coconut Shell or the other tourist venues, if I wanted. Any of us could, but to the bafflement of the first-years hardly anybody does.

It seems Miss Devinski does know of Major Hawkins; there was a private room put aside for us and he was awaiting me in it. The rooms are not available to the general public, and having a Songmark girl meet gentlemen there un-chaperoned is usually too open to misinterpretation (especially now the Ave Argentum are around.) He is a rather nice old bulldog gent, but one does not get to the rank of Major including the Great War without being a lot more than that.

Major Hawkins was as polite as ever; he mentioned he had been keeping an interested eye on what he could see of my career – and asked if I wished to be known as Lady Allworthy from now on. I put him right on that score; Leon Allworthy probably dropped that title on me as a cruel joke. I hardly know whether I should think of the other alternative; I happened to be the only socially suitable girl on Krupmark he really could have married in other circumstances and he wanted to do the right thing for me.

Anyway, I brought the Major up to date on some things that have not been in the Daily Elele; finishing with our "testing trip" to Macao. I did not say why we are going or who is authorising it; quite truthfully I pointed out Songmark Third-years go out on a lot of trips putting their experience into practice. If Major Hawkins is anything like as sharp as I believe, he can put the pieces together. I am technically a Spontoon Citizen right now and if I happen to be working for any Government it is Spontoon's own, via Mr. Sapohatan.

He nodded and sat back, contemplative over one of those strange Mixtecan chocolate and chilli sodas that are a speciality of the house. Almost idly he pointed out that if the claimant to the title who takes it off me is typical of Leon and Susan's family, the tenants of Barrow-in-Furryness are likely to be sorry for the exchange. He added that a true Secret Agent would hate being thrust into the limelight (not that I like the idea myself much.) On the other paw, supposing I really do get invested with the title, various folk will be happy to quash the charges against me in return for my influence. It is rather a chicken-and-egg situation though; until I am cleared I cannot get to England to clear my name!

He did warn me about Macao, and advised me not to get into any official trouble over there. People unofficially vanish from their prisons, never to be seen again. He rather confirmed that Songmark graduates are "in demand" but he has never heard of anyone managing to successfully entrap one. I hardly knew whether to mention Henrika or not, but plumped for caution and kept my snout shut.

As to anything I might do with the Allworthy shipyards, he had one reassuring thing to say. Provided we are not actually at war with the customer at the time the contract gets signed, it is a long-standing tradition to sell anybody anything they want – provided they are Euros. Back in the last century it was perfectly "respectable" to arm the Paraguayan dictator President Lopez who made war in all directions and decimated his own population, but letting Natives buy anything but worthless and tenfold overpriced Birmingham "trade" shotguns was absolutely forbidden.

So, if the Direwolf wants to lead a pack of submarines into battle I can place the order to build them. It is awfully hard to believe, but it is looking as if such things could happen. The difference is timing; swapping over updated equipment as they want is a matter of some weeks in repair harbours, but building ships takes years. A similarly sized replacement or "Daughter of Direwolf" might be just about ready by 1941, and the way the world is looking right now, it might get overtaken by events. I recall in my Brother's stamp collection some never-issued issues that were meant to be used by various White Russian armies and provisional

governments; by the time the stamps had been designed, paid for and printed in Paris the customers were no longer in business. \*

Back to Songmark, feeling slightly better for the reassurance about being able to put work towards the Allworthy shipbuilding firms. Thinking of rush orders, we are groaning ourselves under the weight of all the extra work our Tutors are piling on us – they are making their displeasure definitely known, but stopping short of actually forbidding us to go. Hopefully we can catch up on sleep on the road to Macao!

\*Editor's note: See the Denikin and Kolchak Siberian provisional Government issues of 1918-21 (Stanley Gibbons or Michel catalogue, European section). The Editor's collection has a used stamp with full postmark on partial envelope, despite the official story being "prepared for use but never issued." So there!

Thursday February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1937

A busier two days than ever, no time to write yesterday as last night we were doing fuel calculations till we heard Miss Devinski call for lights-out. We are starting to dream in numbers, as Susan de Ruiz says she always does. Mind you, she is the only person I have ever met who doodles calculus equations. Our Tutors had the idea of putting her to coach that Mad Scientist shrew Alpha Rote – or visa versa, it hardly matters to the Tutors as long as at least one of the students benefits.

Today we were on Moon Island on the firing ranges, much to Molly's delight. Certainly it is a long way from the decorous paper targets a first-year starts off with; we spent most of the morning jumping round corners to face a varied number of life-sized figures, of which only the ones wearing armbands were fair game. Molly lost some points by emptying her magazine into one of the "bystanders" – her claim that the genuine villains would not go around blatantly uniformed, fell on deaf ears that had nothing to do with poor ear protection.

I was given a treat today – my third Webley Mark VI .455 revolver, this one officially loaned to me by the staff at the ranges. I certainly hope not to lose this one like the last two on Krupmark – it is heavy but jolly accurate for a revolver, and I am quite used to maintaining that model. There is also the box of "hunting shells" still sitting in my tin trunk that I have been warned are illegal almost everywhere, but Krupmark and Macao seem to be places nobody checks up on that. There had to be advantages somewhere.

Molly almost lost marks offering to grind down the hammer so I can "fan" it; some things look much better in Hollywood cowboy films than in real life, and if I wanted to randomly spray lead around I would prefer one of those Bergmann "trench brooms" with a magazine to match. Not the sort of thing a lady carries in her handbag, and the old violin case is becoming just a little clichéd these days.

It is awhile since we had any extensive self-defence lessons on Moon Island, but hardly a coincidence that our big trip is coming up. We did not need this particular training before the Aleutians, as the climate was the trouble and not the locals. Helen and Maria were practicing with the sort of grim determination one only really expects in wartime – Maria having researched Macao quite thoroughly by now, and signed for various official-looking sheaves of Diplomatic notes a junior official came round with from the Italian consulate.

For a change, tonight we are excused gate guard. One of the second-year dorms has been "promoted" to it; whether they will be happy with their new responsibilities at three tomorrow morning we shall find out. I do not keep track of the other years' points; either they are the top of the league and are being given responsibility early, or are at the bottom and being given it as an extra fatigue duty. I suspect the former; at Songmark our Tutors instil in us the need to be vigilant and not walk around brooding with a chip on each shoulder.

(Later) Back to Song Sodas, this time meeting Violobe, who seems to have got the job of go-between with us and Post Box Nine. She handed over our papers and tickets; Lady Amelia Allworthy and party, first-class from Tillamook to Macao, with convincing looking used tickets and receipts all the way from England! The used parts we might want to get stolen, assuming folk over there will be suspicious, which they probably will. We also have flights booked to Tillamook tomorrow, including Adele. Fortunately the local shamans there have agreed to treat her; Clear-Skies Yakan persuaded them that Adele is innocent of what she is cursed for, and that has piqued the Red Indian shamans like an Artillery officer being told his shells were falling on the wrong front line. At least Adele is not wanted in the sports trials against the Ave Argentum this weekend; the rumour had it that she would be most useful if we had had to exchange one player a team with our rivals. The best bit about that would be the inevitable accident would be obviously not her fault – it would just Happen, as things Happen to her.

It is two and a half years since I saw Tillamook – just as it is a very different Amelia who will be arriving in Macao than me, I have changed an awful lot since last I saw the pine and redwood forests slipping away into the mists as the boat pulled out on the way to Spontoon for my first arrival. I left friends like Angelica and Mabel to finish their final year at Saint Winifred's, and by the time they did that – well, my first year here was eventful. It looks like my third one is set to be so, as well!

Friday February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1937

We were very glad of the second-years taking our gate guard last night – our Tutors really put us through the wringer today, and we needed all the rest we could get. Six hours on the Moon Island range! We got through more ammunition in the past two days than we have burned in the rest of the term combined; hopefully we will not fire off any more before we are next on Moon Island, but the word “hopefully” does not feature large in the Songmark philosophy.

A rather rushed final afternoon, Maria signing to return all the highly secret material back to the Consulate’s clerk (not that many Spontoones speak Italian) and our valises being packed with suitable outfits. I am taking my Rachorska dress, but nobody else is – a secretary could hardly afford it, let alone a maid. Molly has only the clothing “suitable to her station” which depresses her immensely – I keep telling her it is all just disguise, and we expect to have our cases searched thoroughly by people with various motives. Having a lady’s maid carrying a trench knife and a collection of stick-grenades in her valise is a little out of character, unless of course her mistress was the Head of Saint T’s.

(Later) Our bags are packed, the scheduled Tillamook flight is due in half an hour, and our stomachs are full of “butterflies” at the thought of this trip. Adele has the easy bit; she has a return to Tillamook where we will hopefully meet her – or if we are not back there by the 18<sup>th</sup>, she returns alone. That would be unlucky for her – and it would mean something unlucky happened to the rest of us.

Still, we make our own luck at Songmark, as our Tutors frequently tell us – now to find out if we can make it at Macao!

(And they found out, in “Dire Decisions”...)