

The Waste of War (and Visa Versa)

(Being the 6th part of the diary of Amelia Bourne-Phipps, studying at the Songmark Aeronautical Boarding School for Young Ladies, on Spontoon Eastern Island. Or more strictly she's staying anywhere BUT there, as it's the Summer Holidays!)

July 22nd, 1935

Dear Diary – the first entry in what promises to be a relaxing and uneventful two months of holiday. All my classmates have gone home – I waved farewell to Maria and Molly as they boarded the Italian Air Force seaplane yesterday – Songmark was saying farewell to students like a tree shedding leaves in an Autumn gale, as they scattered all across the globe.

Helen and myself are the exceptions – as I write, I am comfortably sitting in the shade of the Pandanus palm trees behind Jirry's family home, just to the East of Haio Beach on South Island. His mother was very pleased to have us over to stay – she says she prefers a full house, and Jirry and his brothers are so often away from home as tourist guides or working with the film crews (not so many films this time of year, as the tourists tend to get in the way by all accounts.)

If this is what Mrs. Hoele'toemi thinks of as an empty house, I will need crush-proof suits for a full one! Two of the brothers are here (working at the hotels on the northern beach in the day), the sisters Saimmi and Moeli, and six cousins over from Main Island to man the concession stalls and suchlike on Haio beach, ten minutes walk through the jungle. They have all brought their families over, leaving a round dozen kittens to be looked after through the day.

Of course, I offered to pay for our room and board – but Mrs. Hoele'toemi would not hear of it, pointing out I am Family now. Strictly speaking I am only Tailfast to Jirry, but I did not feel much like arguing the issue with the lady of the house. Anyway, all morning I was helping Moeli with the kits and cubs, all of whom are mercifully asleep for their mid-day snooze.

Certainly a relaxing time of things – that is, looking after cubs is hardly dull, but really nothing to worry about. Not the sort of thing one learns in Songmark, nor back at St. Winifred's, either. Having half a dozen crawling around me and snoozing on me wherever they reach is a most ... peculiar sensation.

(Later) Moeli helped me into fullest Native costume in the heat of the day, oiled fur and all. My Songmark shirt and shorts are neatly folded up and packed in my tin trunk (very necessary around here in the humid heat) and I hardly expect to be wearing them this side of September – somehow, that feels a somewhat reassuring thought.

Helen seems rather less enthralled by sitting around chatting and burping cubs as needed, and has gone off to the beach. Moeli persuaded me to match her costume, which is certainly the coolest I have worn – a grass skirt, a flower in my head-fur, sandals on my paws and Jirry's Tailfast ring in its locket comprising literally the whole ensemble. In her case it proved highly practical, especially when the kittens were hungry. To judge from her expression, she definitely enjoys the experience.

By her account, Moeli sees her husband and their daughter every few days, and promises to introduce me to the rest of that side of the family. Considering her daughter resembles them entirely as regards her looks, I asked if the reverse ever happened – it might be embarrassing for the Natives of No Island to discover they had a cub unable to swim! Moeli merely laughed, and explained that it was very much an all-or-nothing business, and that her husband's family line is what one might say quite overwhelming.

As evening fell and the cousins reclaimed their kits, Mrs. Hoele'toemi showed me round the family grounds with the various longhouses tucked in the jungle, each with its own garden-plot waist high with vegetables. She pointed out a small but comfortable one, and hinted rather broadly that I might learn native "housekeeping" in a few days well enough to move in. Helen, the Hoele'toemi sisters and the cousins are all cramped together with me in the women's hut, that being the one very decorously fitted for the younger daughters and relations of the tribe – a little breathing space would be nice.

July 24th, 1935

An excellent day! I have been taking lessons with Moeli and her mother as to looking after the guest longhouse – and they have passed me with flying colours as to keeping it tidy. Still, having passed Home Economics at St. Winifred's and satisfied the most scathing of our tutors at Songmark, it would be a poor show if I failed on this test. It is a good thing Maria was not the one being tested though – she had an awful first Songmark term breaking the habits of a lifetime where there were always maids around to pick things up after her, and frequently declared that if she had wanted to scrub a floor or iron a shirt she would have joined the Army.

Apart from the house and garden, there are fascinating rituals that Saimmi is teaching me – small ones that take very little time, but which definitely add structure to the day. It all makes a lot more sense when surrounded by the forest, rather than having her explain them from a book on Casino Island.

Helen seems less content with our lot – I have pointed out that she can lie on the beach all day if she really wants to, and I doubt very much if the Hoele'toemis will throw her out for not doing her chores. Her reply was that she should be out flying – not wiping kit's backsides. I would hardly turn down a chance to get in the air myself, but we have been doing that most of the summer, and a change is as good as a rest.

Just as the whole family was sitting down to lunch, Jerry arrived! He had been away guiding tourists on Main Island, which is only open to guided tours outside the main villages. It is South Island that really takes the sight-seeing traffic, just as Casino Island handles the nightlife and Eastern Island most of the commerce.

A very fine afternoon at Haio Beach catching up on things – even the Natives who I have not been introduced to, seem to know who I am, and their gaze frequently lingers on the lockets we both wear. Although I had to somewhat cover up on the beach (there being Euro tourists about) everything felt distinctly natural, and indeed I felt as relaxed as I have been in ages.

(Written by lantern light)

A surprise after the evening meal – Mrs. Hoele'toemi announced there was more company arriving in the evening, and she was running short of space. Naturally I agreed when she suggested I head out and occupy the small longhouse (would that be a “short house”?) that I had been working so hard on. So I picked up my travel bag and departed – hardly into exile, but two hundred yards down a winding trail in “four-yard jungle” seemed quite a world away. Still, it is a trim little building, and far less crowded than we have had to manage with. It did seem rather odd that Helen did not volunteer to come over – perhaps she will be joining me later.

July 25th, 1935

So much for our quiet holiday! Things were going SO well until lunchtime today – just as I was about to put out the lights last night, I was very happy to discover the longhouse is perfectly suited for two. Jerry arrived, and indeed I was exceedingly pleased to see him. He was quite as pleased with how things had turned out (admitting his Mother seemed to be very keen on the idea as well) and a very pleasant evening ensued. And a most pleasant morning, for that matter. Well, we ARE Tailfast, after all.

It was a new experience, waking indoors in such a situation – one I could get very used to, and one I think would meet with universal approval around here. Jerry mentioned he had a week off, and we made plans for some trips around the island, and even to visit his kin on Orpington Island. Quite a holiday indeed!

We rejoined the rest of the Hoele'toemi clan at lunchtime – and I fear my tail must have drooped to the ground when I saw who the company was that had arrived last night. A familiar greying ferret was there – of course, I had volunteered our services to Mr. Sapohatan, and he had accepted the invitation last week – but it was rather a shock to see him in person right then. Farewell holiday plans – we have the equivalent of our call-up papers, despite nothing ever being written down.

(Note to myself – I had talked to Helen about it seeming rather odd, him being the only person of Authority we ever get to meet. She pointed out that the locals are hardly going to introduce us to the entire Department or whatever it is he is part of. He is the only one we ever contact, which of course is much better from their point of view.)

July 26th, 1935

It is a small world – when I met the Guide's School training in these jungles, I little suspected we would be joining them not two weeks later. Joining them is the aim, but they are doing their best not to be found – Mr. Sapohatan explained that they had a training programme to get through, and they need an opposing side in a hide-and-seek game very like the ones our Tutors already started us on. Further, he pointed out that they like to find non-natives if possible to test their Guide's skills – something about folk with the same training thinking too much alike.

Actually, it is more complex than just spotting folk in the jungle – we have to track them, spot them and try and run them down to “tag” them – quite exhausting in the heat, and certainly a sport suited to native costume. We were very glad of our hard work last term in the dance, swimming and running competitions, as many of the junior Guides put up an awful struggle. Of course they were not allowed to actually “resist arrest” when we caught them, but leading us over quicksand patches and through thorn bushes is fair game. Tomorrow we are warned there will be more of a challenge – just giving us time to pull out the thorns in time for our next ordeal. All this hunting is quite fun, actually, and it certainly keeps us in tip-top condition!

July 28th, 1935

Dear Diary – this hunting game is getting definitely on the rough side; what we discovered yesterday was the “Guides” are now allowed to work on the Main Island course beforehand, and lay some surprises for us. When I ran flat-out into my first rope stretched at ankle-height in the long grass yesterday I thought it might just have been the remains of some untidy camp site – but when Helen went flying over another one, we got the idea. By the end of the day I had spotted two brushwood “deadfalls”, not dangerous solid log ones indeed but certainly the thought was there. One assumes these Guides might be training to keep their charges safe should anyone insist on going somewhere like the Krupmark Islands.

Actually, I have asked the Guides about their routes – there are six boys and two girls, all a year or so younger than us in the group. One of the girls, Violobe, did a “double-take” when she heard my name. She was one of those I rescued (well, contributed to the rescue of) from that yacht back in the Influenza epidemic. She tells us that official Guides start off on tour boat groups in the more “civilised” bits of the Islands – only senior Guides show small groups parts of Main Island, or are hired to go further afield. Nobody goes to Krupmark – from what I had heard before, I supposed it was one of those places where the Police have to go around in pairs. Back home in Barseshire that happens too, but only because otherwise they would have nobody to talk to all day.

By Violobe's account there is scarcely any Police there at all, and if law enforcement really wanted to go there they would have to go in as Companies behind an artillery barrage. Possibly she exaggerates. At any rate, it is widely regarded as a place where nobody goes – or at least, the folk who do, are there for reasons they do not talk about.

On the way back we made an interesting discovery, just south of Lukapa Village on a natural terrace looking out over South Island. There was an overgrown footpath that seemed very broad and regular, running quite smoothly across the hillside. Not till we found a substantial little stone bridge over a ravine did we recognise it for what it was – the remains of a light railway, being quite swallowed by jungle. To judge from the width it must have been a very light one indeed, barely two-foot gauge and single tracked. Under the bridge Helen found an old cast-iron plaque, barely legible even after she had scraped the moss away. "Spontoon Islands Light Railway, Lukapa Plantation Line completed 1895 – Chief Engineer Mr. Hornby Doublo."

A sad sight in a way – the main road (if one can call it that) runs much nearer the sea these days, and takes all the traffic. Still, one imagines before motor lorries it would have been an awful task getting carts around some of the slopes, and crossing the spine of Main Island to reach the coast would have been worse still. Although even the railway would have trouble if it had to go over the top without expensive tunnels and cuttings – possibly a reason they no longer run on Spontoon. I had noticed what was obviously a station building in Main Village, but these days it is a Poi processing shed. Not an improvement, in my opinion.

July 29th, 1935

A tiring morning in full Summer heat, chasing a different group of Guides around the Southern mountain slopes of Main Island. A very scenic area, with waterfalls and lakes for a welcome lunchtime swim. It is certainly a "(bath)Room with a view", bathing in a lake basin perched a thousand feet up the side of the mountain. There being no tourists or Euros around, watching the Guides plunging in we discovered that the traditional Native bathing costume is conspicuous by its absence. Helen joined them without delay – and after a brief twinge of scruples I followed her.

It was a very fine lunch-break, looking out over South Island spotting a tour-boat coming in, possibly from New South Zion, or perhaps the German year-round winter resort of Neue Suden Thule in the Antarctic. Certainly, the regular tours tend to come in from the North or East of Eastern Island. Watching a Lufthansa Do-X flying past, I mentioned the surprise I had witnessing the arrivals last week of the Soviet formation – all the more so because they were automatically disqualified under the Schneider Trophy rules. (The pilots and "racing" aircraft were military, or at least they had not declared themselves as civilians.) It seemed an awfully long way to travel, knowing one would not be able to take the prize home.

Quite a hot debate fired up amongst the Guides – one would not have thought tourist leaders followed the overseas diplomatic situation so intensively. One pointed out that although the natural target would be Vostok, buzzing Spontoon a thousand miles further from the Red Russian bases is a more spectacular demonstration. Especially since the world's Press is lined up and ready to witness their new abilities.

Presumably, Ioseph Starling cannot "demonstrate" against Vostok without provoking immediate war, and if he did manage to overfly them without a fight, they would probably deny it to the rest of the world. Still, it has ruffled a lot of fur and feathers here on Spontoon even so, and even these peaceful young Guides seem to have already thought it over rather a lot.

As we gave them their head start and they vanished into the trees, Helen murmured that I seemed to be getting rather disloyally attached to an island that effectively sneaked out of our Empire while everyone's back was turned. Which might have been somewhat historically true, but the Spontoon Islands were a rather ill defined Dependency and never had a proper Governor, local postage stamps or any of the formal investments we made in the rest of the Colonies. Still, I must confess I rather nettled me, and I asked her what would happen if, say, Rhode Island decided Ioseph Starling was a fine fellow and democratically voted itself an independent People's Socialist Republic. She seemed startled at the prospect, and her immediate response was that Flanders 1918 would "think they got it easy" in comparison.

(Later) An afternoon of more hide-and-seek, then return home to Haio Village for one of Mrs. Hoele'toemi's excellent meals. She always insists I get through about a double portion, and fusses a little about how thin we are. Still, six hours a day of desperate chases around jungle trails and mountain slopes is awfully hard work, and I doubt I have put on an ounce all week. Plus of course there is my very nice longhouse for two, and although I come home on the water taxi tired – never that tired. I am quite sure now just how Missy K managed to burn off thirty pounds of "spare fuel" in the Easter holidays, and it was not by chopping firewood.

Helen has (almost) lost her objection to looking after kits in the evening – as she says, it makes a change dealing with folk who can only crawl away rather than sprint, and are less likely to lead you over a brush-covered pit (only six inches deep as it turned out, but she still stepped in it). She has discreetly asked me how I am enjoying domestic life – and certainly, I have been enjoying it quite marvellously.

She also checked up rather worriedly as to my keeping up with my Precautions – which I could reassure her on. Still – nothing is one hundred percent guaranteed against failure, and I fear I am putting them to rather a severe test. It is certainly something to think about – although watching Moeli playing happily with the village kittens, it occurs to me that it would hardly be the worst thing in the world.

It turns out that not all the kits and pups strictly speaking belong to the cousins – two of them are "adopted" you might say. That is, I had commented that they were a very photogenic crowd, at which Moeli winked and assured me that if they develop "film star" good looks later on, it will be no coincidence. All of which would have been highly shocking to me a year ago, but now I can definitely see the point, from both sides of view.

July 30th, 1934

Just as we had got used to chasing folk through jungles, we receive our “marching-orders” to go elsewhere! As Helen points out resignedly, I volunteered our services without adding anything about “unless uncomfortable or inconvenient.” Still, it was hardly anywhere of great danger or intrigue – merely back across to Meeting Island, to talk about the next job someone has dreamed up for us.

Helen is suspicious as ever, and is wondering why we were training Guides in such an energetic way when all the ones we have seen on Casino and South island have been guiding generally rather hot and flabby tourists from one beach to the next. As I pointed out, Guides have to be fit – they may need to drag one of their less attentive customers out of mud-holes or run to fetch urgent medical aid if their client insists on trying to climb Mount Tomboabo in the noonday sun.

Besides, Jirry has explained to us that being a Guide is not usually a life-long career – most stick to it for a year or two before their native supply of patience with the customers wears out. So the large numbers we are training is not a huge expansion in the workforce at all, but merely keeping up with natural turnover.

It was a strange experience to return to the Hospital on Meeting Island – we had been told where to go, and whom to ask for. The front desk was quite crowded, with several Euro customers there – but we had been told to ask in Spontoonie for “Old Mrs. Povic with the bad hip” which I think is a password rather than a real patient. At any rate, we were escorted without another word through the buried passageway into the courtyard where the scarred survivors of the Gunboat Wars rest away from the gaze of the outside world.

Although it was the second time we had met Jirry’s Aunt Millini, the sight of her half-burned face still raised the fur on the backs of our necks. She greeted us quite courteously, and as she motioned us to sit down, mentioned that she had been hearing a lot about us recently. Seeing that we were not shown the door immediately, I hope our character reports are good ones.

Anyway – she noted ironically that as we had shown an interest in certain local engineering projects, we might be interested in taking a look at something similar on Casino Island. Visions of concealed bunker complexes under the Casino flashed through my head, but the reality proved rather different.

I remembered hearing of Dr. Maranowski (formerly of Ulm, which does not seem to want him back) and his methane digester project – it seems the pilot plant is already well under construction on the Northern coast of Casino Island. But it was news to me that another eccentric German scientist had turned up with a promising alternative solution to the same problem. Professor Kurt Von Mecklenburg Und Soweiter has plans and funding for something that looks like a blast furnace, but is really an industrial scale compost bin. He claims he can solve the waste problem and generate enough energy to light up half Casino island for free – plus, there is the little issue of the pilot plant being built at his own expense and not the Althing’s.

Helen protested that we are hardly engineers – or anyway, if we are engineers it is of the Aeronautical and not the Sanitary type. Aunt Millini nodded calmly, and explained that was not the point – it is the people and not the mechanisms we are going to be investigating. One wonders if there is a local Mad Scientist’s Union, which needs to vet them? There certainly seem to be “Unions” for everything else around here.

It is quite a shock to us, that we are being trusted with such an important mission! Our character reports really must be convincing. Or as Helen grumbled on the water-taxi back – if you want to keep a troublesome trooper busy, you give him latrine duty, which is one step (or at least a flush) away from our current project.

I wonder if we will get any official Documentation to help us – recalling the last time I did some impromptu investigation, I was in the cells of the Casino Island Constabulary some six hours later. We studied the French Revolution back in St. Winifred’s, where all the hard work was done by masked figures waving blank declarations saying “whatever he has done, it is for the good of the State.” – or as in that wonderful new game Monopoly, a “get out of jail free” card.

Helen doubts this severely, assuring me that if anything goes wrong we will be absolutely on our own. You can hardly imagine a Government saying that sort of thing to their Agents – it sounds as likely as an Agent checking into a hotel and loudly announcing himself by his real name.

July 31st, 1935

Another fine day of hide and seek, this time on the far side of South Island, the Eastern slopes of Mount Tomboabo. I assume we will get our orders soon enough for the other project. This time we had a quite senior group of Guides, who proved hard indeed to spot. I only found one of them by scent; he was quite invisible two yards away but really should avoid having pickled fish for breakfast. (A piece of advice he heartily thanked me for. It is nice to be appreciated.)

Having spotted an unnaturally taut liana, which proved to be linked to a bent branch and net, I took the chance to ask the Guide leader where he had received his training in nets and snares. He explained he had been educated on one of the other island groups at a very practical Mission school run by monks. Possibly they were Trappists.

On the way back we stopped off at Haio Beach, where a boat load of tourists was noisily partying with their gramophone turned up to full volume. One of them, a porcine “gentleman” in a loud shirt and deafening shorts, caught sight of us and was immediately over with his camera. Before I could object he had fired off about half a dozen shots of me – I would normally have covered up when Euro tourists are around, but had no time to think of it.

I could see Helen sizing him up for a ju-jitsu throw and some of the less sporting moves Beryl has been teaching us (there really IS a “Cheltenham Death Grip”!). Happily for the Tourist Board, some of the other Guides took the situation in hand and firmly steered him off towards the beach, ignoring the fist full of dollars he

was offering me. One supposes the locals get used to it, even from tourists who keep coming back for more. Which he certainly had – I remember hearing about last year's local fashion for selling obnoxious visitors shirts and hats inscribed with Spontoonie language sayings the wearers never had truthfully translated – and it was some satisfaction that he was walking around the islands wearing a bright and cheerful hat declaring "I AM A MONG."

After getting sunburned at the start of the week, Helen and I had used the sun-screen dye on ourselves – leaving me looking very much like one of Moeli's sisters, I should think. At any rate, I am glad I look very different from my normal "Euro" look, if some stranger is going to be putting me in his photo wallet.

Actually, the leader of the Guides rejoined us a few minutes later and announced that a tourist had suffered a mishap with his film. He had been photographed sitting with one of the girls on each side when the Guide taking the picture "accidentally" opened the camera back. Much discomfort of stout party, as they say in plays, who went off snorting about ignorant Natives who don't know one end of a camera from another.

Being Tailfast with Jirry does not of course mean I cannot hug someone in gratitude, and indeed I did so most energetically. Today has been a definite lesson in Custom: sometimes the locals earn their tourist income the hard way.

One wonders if in all the cowboy films, all the traditionally impassive Red Indians are really watching the Euros in much the same way, and are just trying very hard to keep a straight face? In Sippy Forsythe's old dictionary the section on their languages has the phrase "Kemo'sabe" translated as something to do with the tail end of a riding animal, and I seem to remember hearing it used most inappropriately in some cowboy film matinee.

1st August, 1935

Off to Casino Island! Rather a wrench for us, washing out the oil and combing out the patterns from our fur in preparation to put our respectable clothes back on. Although of course it is easily replaced, I really disliked rubbing in the special soap and wiping off the "Tailfast" symbol above my heart. It is the only one Helen and I do not share, the others being "Unmarried" and "New Arrival". I doubt anyone actually uses the ones Moeli playfully inscribed on us when we first tried the style – "Available" and "Not Fussy".

The trip was uneventful, and started with another meeting with the Friends Of German Opera – where Professor Kurt Von Mecklenburg Und Soweiter was expounding his artistic views against an orchestral leader fresh from the Winter Gardens of Neue Suden Thule. By all accounts our other interviewee Dr. Isaac Maranowski does NOT attend this society, having some petty political prejudice against it.

A fascinating gentleman indeed, Professor Kurt – a silvery wolf, a head taller than Helen, and apart from wearing round wire-framed glasses, he looks far more of a sportsman than an academic. He has a most powerful handshake – quite unconsciously so I am sure – and speaks excellent English. (Better than my Father's cockney chauffeur Crumley, by a mile.)

Professor Kurt pressed on me a useful little gardening manual, which presented with almost frightening keenness the various schemes of making the deserts bloom, wastes saved etc by a liberal use of his "Bio-Reaktor" and its products. I had been presented to him as a local researcher and journalist – which is true enough as far as it goes, as we will certainly be investigating and writing up our articles – though probably we will never knowingly meet the ones who read them.

Our task might be much easier than we had feared – Professor Kurt admits freely why he is here – first to test his Bio-Reaktor under tropical conditions, and secondly to professionally tweak the tail-feathers of his arch-rival. So much for our clever plans to worm the truth out of him!

2nd August, 1935

Something more of a challenge today – our interview with Doctor Maranowski (formerly of Ulm) did not go quite as smoothly. We found him busy on a building site, not far from Student's Bay on the Northern shore of Casino Island. The two salvaged boilers that had been repaired and modified by Superior Engineering were already in place, and we spotted the Doctor on top of one, waving his wings expressively and shouting irritably at some of the local workmen. (Helen explained some of the words; "Meshuggah" is not really as rude as it sounds.) The Doctor is a raven person, black-costumed and with a definitely impressive beak.

As intrepid journalists we should have probably have strode right up with notebooks ready – but the chances of getting booted right off the boiler looked rather high. We waited to collar him when he came down, but he was in no mood to expound on his projects, irritably waving us towards Meeting Island where the Althing have posted detailed technical plans already.

I tried my best, though it rather backfired – trying to get him to open up to us, I mentioned that we had already interviewed Professor Kurt yesterday and that he had been very helpful. This was on reflection the wrong tack to take. I can confirm to the Althing that there is a definite rivalry between their two candidates, and that Doctor Maranowski is not at all happy to discuss it. (Which is rather like saying a tonne of dynamite makes a bright flash and a loud bang – perfectly true, but it hardly captures the extent of it.)

Still, we managed to interview the workmen, who confirm that he seems to know what he is about – the first digester is almost ready for testing with a lorry-load of assorted wastes (superannuated palm-leaf roofing and assorted vegetable wastes from the hotel kitchens.) By all accounts the process gets more efficient as the quantities increase – looking at the loading schedule, the pilot plant alone is set to swallow five tonnes a day.

This is just about what Professor Kurt reckoned for his own project – and one of the Engineers tells us he estimates there is not enough fuel on Casino Island for the pair of them. This project is looking more interesting all the time.

3rd August, 1935

A sad parting this morning – Jirry is off for 2 weeks with a film crew! Helen has taken over the small longhouse, as she says she could use some privacy, and a few days of her waking up without having been used as a couch for two or three kittens would be welcome.

Quite a wrench really, cleaning up the house alone as I made it ready for Helen after a most memorable evening. Certainly things are very different from back Home – I was forwarded a letter c/o Songmark yesterday from my school chum Mabel, who was presented at Court at the start of the social season. She writes that she is off to a finishing school on Switzerland in September, where she hopes to acquire any social graces she may be lacking.

Had I been a little less passionate about aviation I might have joined her (though no doubt sneaking out of department lessons to watch the gliders soaring off the high alpine meadows) and possibly starting to think about who in the social whirl I might one day become engaged to. Respectable tea-dances in Zermatt and Basle are a very fine thing in their way – but last night we watched a hula dance on the beach under the full moon before retiring to our decidedly cosy palm-thatched hut. The décor and the company might not be what one expects at a finishing school – but I wouldn't swap it for every five-star hotel in Switzerland.

I doubt Mabel would really understand, without having been here – she is certainly climbing high in accepted social circles, and if I baldly described my current state she would probably bottle out her tail in horror and contact the nearest Colonial authorities to try and have me “rescued”. Quite the last thing I am in need of.

We are back “on the case” as they say in Molly's issues of True Crimes Illustrated, working on our pair of expatriate inventors. One hardly supposes the Althing sets people to watch every prominent arrival, but if they are advancing them funds such as for Dr. Maranowski they might quite rightly want to keep an eye on him. Having us watch his rival as well is only fair.

4th August, 1935

Off to Casino Island again in our keen Reporter's guise. I had suggested making ourselves some “Press” hatband badges, but Helen firmly dissuaded me. The prospect of being swooped on by genuine local Press (some of whom know us already) demanding to know what we are doing and by whose authority, would be embarrassing.

We had agreed to meet with Professor Kurt at Lingenthal's, a popular Euro restaurant we had heard of from our friend Erica (now back home in Berlin working as a Party organiser – booking bands and caterers I expect). One consolation of our new job is that we can, at last, explore Casino Island without worrying about being back before our Passes expire.

Being rather early, we stopped outside the Casino gardens to listen to a fine native band, the Syncopated Seventeen according to the billboard outside. There was a cheerful hail from the terrace above us – and a familiar figure was waving down at us.

According to the whispered tales that went round at St. Winifred's, left to her own devices in “bad company” Beryl would have been fleeced out of her allowance (and probably her virtue) inside a week, and be reduced to begging sanctuary at a mission for the unfortunate, inside two. This has failed to happen. She invited us up for a coffee (despite having something elaborate with ice-cubes, fruit and a cocktail parasol for herself) and brought us up to date. It is just as well Molly is not here, she would have turned as green with envy as Helen does on half an hour over choppy seas.

Beryl had somewhat deceived our Tutors (she claims) by saying she was leaving Spontoon for the holidays – but she returned the next day, moving into the small hotel she has mentioned on the North side of the island. She has been at the Casino every night, refining her “system” – and though not a complete success, she has ended up in credit by “a pile of shells”. She looks very different these days, in a new cocktail dress with professionally groomed fur – and mentioned this was her breakfast, as she regularly stays up till the Casino closes.

I am sure no good will come of this, though I have to confess she seems to be doing well enough so far. She says she has found a useful place to put her ill-gotten gains, as her friend's father, Mr. Van Hoogstraaten Senior, is opening up a bank specifically for wealthy exiles and their exiled wealth. She says the local tax laws in Spontoon are rather generous, not being written to consider anyone who might have more than a mattress-full of money to invest.

I tried to dissuade her, pointing out nobody is ever going to trust a bank on the far side of the world to look after their investments – and apart from a few traders, pilots and such who pass through the island, nobody is going to come all this way just to cash a cheque. What people want is a nice trustworthy stone-built establishment on their own High Street, not some mysterious place a thousand miles offshore – I'm sure that will never catch on.

Leaving her, we found Lingenthal's Continental Restaurant some two hundred yards round the corner, and Professor Kurt sitting outside on the terrace surrounded by books and papers. We sat down on the far side of the hedge to observe him, fortunately downwind. Since we spent last week chasing the Guides, we have been more conscious than ever as to how useful a canine's nose may be. In ten minutes he had done nothing suspicious except work on his notebooks, formulae and quite a few sketches as far as we could tell: the only

suspect thing we noticed was him ordering a particularly sumptuous cream and chocolate cake with his coffee, that is surely illegal in nations of extreme puritanical traditions.

At the appointed time we strolled round the corner, to be greeted most cheerfully, and had a “working lunch” as he expounded his plans to us. Helen was somewhat put off her food I fear by his vivid descriptions of the waste problems he is here to solve – certainly, unless something is done fairly soon, Casino Island at least may be a victim of its own success. As good journalists, we had to be exceedingly interested for an hour in the quantities and types of wastes a single Hotel could output in the course of a day in high Tourist season. “High” has been a good description of the scent of some beaches on occasions where wind and tide have concentrated rather than dispersed the problem.

I did ask how he was going to extract power from his contraption – Doctor Maranowski’s project makes cooking gas, but at first sight Professor Kurt’s only makes compost. He smiled, a cheerful but alarming Wolven smile, and tapped a piece of paper that seemed to have a diagram of an electric refrigerator on it. Not that I would recognise one usually, but it had appeared in cut-away diagram form in last month’s “Unpopular Mechanics.”

Now I can understand why the Althing wanted us to look hard at this project! His explanation made sense in a frightening sort of way – as the “Bio-Reaktor” would not run hot enough to boil water, it had to boil something more volatile for the turbine to generate power. I had to admit that ether should work, but its vapour is rather more explosive than petrol fumes, and even his pilot model uses an awful lot of it. Just as Doctor Maranowski’s methane plant redistributed itself over Ulm, one pressure-pipe leak and a spark could do much the same to Professor Kurt’s invention. I saw Helen’s tail fluff out in alarm: she has often described her Father’s oilfield fire fighting career, and hinted that hot vapour leaks were the most feared hazard in the whole risky business. Having ether would be ten times worse, it being of course the original anaesthetic gas – a deep breath of it and one might not even get the chance to run away.

One gets the impression that scientists who settle on remote islands on the far side of the world from home, have to do so for a definite reason. Having either contraption within burst radius of the expensive hotels and tourists might not be a particularly good idea – but it is Casino Island that has the problem, unless the Althing want to invest in miles of expensive undersea pipeline.

On the way back we stopped in Market Square, attracted by a crowd of locals attentively listening to a pair of speakers haranguing each other. One of them we had seen before – the fundamentalist, hellfire Unitarian, who was snout-to-snout with a similarly fundamentalist, hellfire Atheist missionary. An interesting theological debate, to be sure. The Atheist’s approach was that unlike his opponent, no Deity had power to decide his fate – at which the Unitarian was promising that all the Deities his religion incorporates, would have fun for Eternity passing him around between them like a piñata.

August 5th, 1935

Another blisteringly hot day – I am always up at first light, to enjoy the coolest part of the day. Indeed, Maria had been commenting rather sourly that I am the type who gets up at six no matter what the time is. Certainly it is quiet then in the Hoele’toemi household, and I can stroll over to talk quietly with Helen without much fear of being overheard.

Helen was busily writing when I arrived: she has started keeping a diary of her own, though in plain text. She says she will not be recording anything in it that will get her lost in one of those “tragic swimming accidents” that we see half a dozen of a year reported in the local papers. The minor staff of Embassies such as Cultural Attaches seem to be particularly prone to getting caught in undertows on deserted stretches of beach. That sort of information, she firmly says she will be leaving to me, adding that Lexarc shorthand is not a secure code if my old teacher has her attempts to popularise it sitting in remaindered book stalls around the world. It only takes one failure to really get us in trouble - rather like our Precautions, really.

Anyway, we are dutifully following our orders and keeping an eye on the competing scientists – Professor Kurt has been given a compound just on the far side of the stream from his rival, which should make for some keen competition. I expect that danger signs might be one or more of them withdrawing his money from the local bank and quietly purchasing tickets – just the sort of thing we hope to be poised to spot.

We managed to “shadow” Doctor Maranowski fairly well all morning, though there is nothing sinister to report. Indeed – far from heading out on the nearest flight, he recoiled quite violently from the sight of one of the holiday posters outside the Shawnee Pacific Airpaths booking office. Neue Suden Thule looks a perfectly respectable place to me, and the prospect of skiing and sledding is surely as exotic in this climate as a tropical beach must be at home. Spontoon has most sports, but I imagine their bobsleigh team must need to travel an awful long way to practice.

Our quarry had vanished indoors for lunch at “Gefilte Fish a Go-Go” when we noticed we were being followed ourselves. A familiar figure though, and nothing sinister about her – I recognised Buko, one of Ada Cronstein’s friends, a slender brown-furred equine girl originally from the Fillyppines. She waved us over, and asked if we had heard from Ada, who is back home in Sealth City as far as we know.

We had to disappoint her, but promised we would call at Songmark and see if there was any post arrived for her – and if we could forward it. I believe the compound is locked up right now except for the guard dogs and whoever feeds them. I hope someone does remember to feed them.

Buko seemed fairly resigned, and invited us over for lunch – an offer we had to decline today, but hope to take her up on later. She seems very interested in my having been to a classic Public School, which she assures me she has heard a lot about. One supposes that, like the idea of a snow and ice holiday in Neue Suden Thule, from here it seems an excitingly exotic idea.

August 6th, 1935

Quite a sight! Today we gave ourselves a morning off, as it would not do to be noticed all the time following the tails of our inventive pair. Of course, seeing another SIRA competition added further temptation, and by ten o'clock we were back on our former perch at the Northern tip of Eastern Island with binoculars and a picnic basket. Despite being burned over not a month ago, the plants are already shooting up with marvellous speed, with all this sun and rain (more sun than rain today, thankfully.)

Thankfully there were no unpleasant shocks today – there was a parachuting display showing the latest types, some of which are slightly steerable. According to Radio LONO, the two winners were a Vostok “barnstormer” hedgehog called Mikhail Mikhailovich and a young German direwolf, Otto Scorzonera. Helen says she was rooting for the German, but the Vostok competitor won on points.

With our field glasses we can spot more tour boats coming in – no doubt the hotel staff are rubbing their paws with glee. And no doubt the problems will get a little worse – picking our way along Pebble Beach yesterday we had a few unpleasant surprises despite the harassed efforts of the beach patrol.

Still, we returned to Casino Island for lunch, and met up with Buko as arranged. An interesting luncheon! She showed us over to a café tucked away behind one of the big hotels, though we have passed it several times without really noticing – other cafes have far gaudier signs to attract the passing trade.

It was quite a nice place, tastefully furnished – and Buko had about a dozen of her friends in there to meet us, several of whom I recognised from the all-girl swimming and volleyball clubs. Indeed, there was not a gentleman to be seen in the place. We had a very elegant repast, and quite a long talk. I found myself quite the centre of attention, though Helen seemed rather ill at ease as the ladies gathered around within close scent range, complementing us very warmly on our athletic triumphs and very hard-trained figures.

I fear I had to disappoint Buko about life at St. Winifred's – I'm sure I don't know what sort of stories she reads, but they must involve a lot of wishful thinking. From the questions she was eagerly asking, she seemed to think it was something like a mutual harem, plus hockey. She was right about the hockey, at least.

Helen suddenly announced we had an urgent appointment elsewhere, and all but hauled me out by the tail. Honestly – it was hardly as if we were liable to be dragged off, and Buko had spotted my “Tailfast” locket anyway. Still – now we know where to look for Prudence and co. if ever they go absent without leave next term.

A very different evening – Helen and I are now in the small “guest” longhouse, though Moeli comes over most evenings. She announced that she would be meeting her husband and children tonight, and invited us to join her. No question of us refusing!

Even at sunset Haio Beach was quite busy with tourists out for a relatively cool evening stroll, but we pressed on into the jungle heading West, past the remains of the Forsstmann giant triplane and past it to the very far corner, the southern “fish-hook” of South Island where the coast curves round to look back again at Haio Beach. It was quite deserted, being a long way from the last concession stall, and we could have seen anyone approaching several hundred yards off on the beach.

Moeli walked out into the water just as the sun was on the horizon, and when she was waist-deep she began to hit the water, much like we had seen Beryl do in our hide and seek tests last term but in a definite rhythm. Helen murmured that Beryl had almost broken her eardrums at close range, and the sound should certainly carry a distance underwater. She repeated the “song” twice, and we waited while the last of the sun slipped away.

What happened next happened very suddenly – one second we three were standing waist-deep in empty waters, and the next a dozen swimmers surfaced all around us! We recognised her husband [] and then a native girl with three youngsters in tow broke surface – two of them Moeli's, I discovered later. The Natives of No Island speak Spontoonie, with a rather odd accent – possibly the original Polynesian dialect from before the resettlement a century or so ago.

We were invited for a swim, which proved to be quite an experience. It was still light enough to see perfectly well, and the whole shoal of us headed out towards the Western side well away from any possible tourists. Still – at that range and in that light, even with field-glasses one would only really make out thirty swimmers – the occasional flash of their distinctive tail-ends above water would be hard to be sure of unless one knew what to look for.

Although naturally they can carry very little with them, the youngsters had a ball that they played with constantly. I tried to play catch with them – and discovered I had no chance at all. It was like being Missy K in a hundred-yard hurdles race: they were that much faster that I could scarcely believe it. Without nets or equipment, they have the reflexes that could grab fish right out of a fast-moving school in the open water. Very impressive.

Of that particular tribe, some were seal and the rest feline types, with very sleek fur that absolutely gleamed like silver in the last of the light. Like the Priestesses of the local religion, they seemed to have no trouble seeing in the dim light – though Helen and myself had to head for the beach after an hour, while we could still find our way back. Moeli stayed on, and we are not expecting her back very soon.

A fascinating experience – and Helen seems very impressed with several of the gentlemen, as best we can see them. It may be that Marti may have some competition in future.

Back to our longhouse, stopping off at Haio Beach for a snack. There are really two sorts of snack bars around the tourist areas – those that serve Popatohi, roasted fish and other local specialities (quite cheaply, considering) and those that serve hot-dogs and chips etc. with made-up Native names. Sad to say, we were the only customers for the Popatohi stall – the party of tourists at the hot-dog stall next to us were loudly complaining about the heat and the wild jungle, and speculating with a shiver about all sorts of lethal snakes and spiders. Hearing these islands unfavourably compared to Boise, Idaho is more than somewhat irritating to us – happily for the Tourist Board, Helen's rather anatomical comment was in Spontoonie.

August 7th, 1935

Back to work on our “case” – a momentous day for Dr. Maranowski’s project, the filling of the first fermenting tank with vegetable wastes. For a change he was quite conversational, explaining how the raw wastes enter through his gas-tight patented U-bend system. Charming. At least there was nothing obnoxious about the raw material he is testing it with – every year or so all the thatched Native huts repair or renew their thatch, and there should be a good steady supply to supplement the more noxious drainings the plant is meant to handle.

Just across the brook to the East, there was furious activity as Professor Kurt had twenty workmen putting together his rival project. Having exhausted our welcome elsewhere, we crossed the brook to talk to him – a most charming wolf, we are both agreed. He explained that he had worked on the idea back in his home Reich, where the government are very keen on the Land and the Earth (he did indeed speak in capitals.) His Uncle, Count Franz Von Mecklenburg Und Strelitz aber nicht Schwerin, has a similar model on his estates producing twenty kilowatts of power in a far less favourable climate.

Professor Kurt’s ether turbine design depends on having a radiator and a condenser, preferably cooled by deep ocean water. He tells us he will have to wait for a full-scale model to get a working pipeline, until which he is diverting some of the stream. I am a bit dubious about the array of ex-hotel cast iron radiators his workmen are installing in the cooling tank – they look as if they have had a long and exhausting first career, though of course this pilot plant is only a temporary structure. If any of the ether vapour gets out, it may prove more temporary than he expects.

After work tomorrow, Professor Kurt has invited us to another meeting organised by the Friends of German Opera – more accurately an evening of beer and song at Lingenthal’s, lederhosen strictly optional. Of course we would not attend such an affair for fun, but we have a job to do and I feel sure Mr. Sapohatan would want us to use every opportunity to gather information.

Helen says she has known several German-style saloons in Texas, and they tend to be rowdy – hardly the sort of sophisticated entertainment the tourist brochures describe for Casino Island. Still, sophistication is something one can have too much of – I recall over in Barsetshire that old rustic sports such as stand-up shin kicking contests are still as popular as ever – though folk have occasionally tried to cheat by bringing in innovations such as molybdenum steel boots rather than the classic iron-shod ones.

August 8th, 1935

A fine morning on South Island, made more interesting by the arrival of Beryl. I keep expecting her to show up in rags with tearful tales of how she was fleeced out of everything she has – but then, she is a graduate of Saint T’s, and has had a rather different education than most folk our age. Beryl had shed her cocktail dress for the day – she complained that the Casino was closed for a private party last night, so she had to go to bed “scandalously early” at midnight.

Certainly, she was suitably dressed for the climate, despite what one would have called scandalously short shorts at home. She asked if we kept up with our self-defence classes, as she had been missing them. Indeed, every other day or so Helen and myself take an hour or so of vigorous falls and throws before our morning bath.

Two hours of exceptionally energetic struggle commenced, Beryl being keen to practice, and to show off some new moves she has learned. It seems her friend Mr. Hoogstraaten Junior has various well-qualified family “servants” she has been taking instruction from. There is one trick she demonstrated that she claims the French Foreign Legion refined – it involves a back somersault to get out of grabbing range, instantly followed by a forwards flip delivering a two-footed kick. Spectacular indeed if it works, but it looks more of a circus stunt than a practical manoeuvre.

We caught up with all the news – Beryl being more leisured than ourselves, and more centrally placed in the social whirl, she has a word of scandal about most folk. Our tutor Miss Pelton marries next week – and may not be returning full-time to the Songmark she founded. Missy K is in deep trouble with her family, having “borrowed” a seaplane and returned it somewhat damaged, and forbidden to fly for the rest of the holidays.

She finished up by describing her trip to Main Village yesterday, where she says she watched my favourite stag dance – and that she quite understands what I see in him. Of course, I protested, pointing out it is Molly who has his affections, and that I am very happily Tailfast to Jirry – but it is no use arguing with Beryl once she has made her mind up. Even Helen was looking at me rather oddly, I thought.

Still, she left us in peace by lunchtime, a most pleasant affair at the Hoele’toemi household with Saimmi dropping in to visit. Her sister is still off at sea, but by all accounts that is not uncommon. The Natives of No Island can even sleep in the water, she tells me, but there are many isolated beaches on Main Island they and their less aquatic friends can use.

Helen asked if she would teach her how to call them – but Saimmi just laughed, assuring that the sea folk would teach her if and when they wanted to. Certainly, there is etiquette to be followed for everything, no matter how crude it may appear – Beryl has said there is even a wrong and a right way to break a bottle.

Back to Casino Island later on, contenting ourselves with asking Dr. Maranowski’s workmen how things are going. The big methane digester is digesting away quite happily, they assure us, but it will take a few days to get the air out of the system and then really begin to stoke it.

We noticed the side facing the rival project across the river is heavily sandbagged and is being further protected with high earth banks, now the machinery is in place. Either they expect hostilities to commence fairly shortly, or they have as high a regard for the safety of Professor Kurt’s design as Helen has. Or possibly they know more than they are telling.

Crossing the stream is rather like going through “no-man’s land” into the opposing side – though so far there are no craters or shots being exchanged. Professor Kurt is as always pleased to see us, and as affable as his rival is close beaked. He showed us around his project, with the mining-railway type loading ramps, the air

vents and the liquid recirculators. He claims a ten tonne “charge” will generate enough heat in this climate to evaporate two tonnes of liquid a day – and still have enough spare power to run a hotel or two.

An hour later we were across the island at Lingenthal’s, where various folk were already gathered and a traditional band was playing what one assumes is the latest hot tunes from Germany, thumping out on accordion and tuba. Very lively indeed. We were introduced to various folk we had seen before – the black-furred wolf aviatrix being Ilsa Klensch, a familiar name indeed to anyone reading the Schneider Trophy results. Everyone seemed really quite polite and charming, and the food was excellent – I had thought I had eaten enough cabbage for a lifetime at St. Winifred’s, but their “Sauerkraut” with smoked ham was really quite delicious. We must find a way to discreetly ask why Dr. Maranowski has such a down on this place.

Professor Kurt is anything but curt, and was very willing to chat with us about our project. We had mentioned quite truthfully that we had written up reports on SIRA for Songmark, and if he assumed that Songmark commissioned our reports on his work, we did nothing to contradict him. If our Tutors are as involved with local affairs as we suspect, they will probably get to read them anyway.

The only thing he had to say against anyone, was the various “Hula Junkers” who have stayed on over here – many of them folk of reputable families who would be more than welcome back home facing their responsibilities of rebuilding the country. Considering the state of their nation in 1918, anyone would have thought a life of beachcombing and fishing in these islands was far preferable to living on turnips and mouldy rye back in the snows and fogs of East Prussia. I did ask if he thought the same of his countryfolk who had settled German Samoa and the Caroline Islands – but no, in his opinion those were staunch and loyal colonists heading out to develop their county’s interests overseas.

I suppose last year I would have thought much the same myself, had I heard of Beryl’s current life as a gambler at the Casino here – rather than heading out like dear Gwendolyn from my St. Winifred’s dorm to be a nurse in the Even Newer Hebrides. Spending time over here exposed to the Native way of life does tend to mellow one – and although Professor Kurt has many virtues they are all highly vigorous ones and “mellow” does not really fit on the list.

The scene reminded me of those pictures Irma Bundt showed of her Swiss home: same band, same quaint dances and the same costume, near enough. All very brisk and stirring tunes, obviously healthy outdoor songs such as “Auf die Lunenberge Heide” (On Lunenberge Heath) and “Wach am der Rhine” (Looking over the river Rhine, according to Professor Kurt). It got definitely loud, but the songs are the sort one stamps one’s feet and sings along to without really needing to translate them. Although the rest of the party drank an awful lot of beer, Helen and myself stuck to a white wine apiece and made it last.

A very jolly evening, which we excused ourselves at around ten and left in full swing. Despite having just the one glass, the atmosphere quite went to our heads – fortunately we are both fast learners, and having learned it we sang “Lunenberge Heide” all the way back to the water taxi. I was just saying to Helen that it was super of the Professor to let us join his party, when we came round the corner almost nose to beak with Dr. Maranowski. He gave us SUCH a look, and launched into a stream of language that neither of us could translate – which was probably just as well. At any rate, from his tone it was definitely not the conversation of a Gentleman.

August 9th, 1935

Alas – our investigation looks like it has come to an end, or at least it might have to be rather one-sided from now on. We returned to the site to be warned off by the workmen, who assured us that the Doctor was threatening to use us as digester fuel if we set paw on his area again. There was little new to do apart from watch concrete set on Professor Kurt’s side, so we retired to Tower Hill park where we found a shady bench by a pond to write up our notes. This will take some time – so before we started I sent a postcard addressed to Post Box Nine to let them know the news.

A fairly busy morning writing up our notebooks and getting our ideas collated – every deduction tied to an actual fact or conversation, and all our quotes as accurate as if we had to produce them as evidence in Court. I suppose that to a casual tourist we might have been holidaymakers getting through our correspondence lists. One hardly expects Agents to be sitting around on park benches feeding the ducks, after all.

Lunchtime with Beryl, who showed up wearing a new dress that looks slightly too small, and a grin that was several sizes too big. She let us take a peek in her bag, which was simply stuffed with local currency, mostly in twenties and fifties! I don’t think I’ve ever seen so much cash in one place before – more “shells” than one would find in an arsenal. She explained that her “System” has a sixty-five percent success rate, but that when she can spot the start of a card sequence it becomes three-quarters for the next bet. Very puzzling, and when Helen asked her more technical questions she just laughed and winked at us in that annoying way of hers.

On this scale (according to my old teachers) she must obviously be building up to a fall of world-famous proportions, as I was brought up on tales of folk who started winning at shove-halfpenny and ended up in the Workhouse or the Asylum. Hard work and thrift is how I was always taught one should gain financial security (that and a prudent marriage.) She says she will have to be cautious, certainly – if the Casino changes its dealing technique she will have to start her whole “prediction run” from scratch. On the other hand, if she gets too greedy she can find herself barred from the Casino – and according to her, Casinos round the world trade lists of professional gamblers whose custom is decidedly unprofitable.

While Helen puzzled over the menu deciding between the jumbo shrimp or the mini prawns, Beryl noted she had been having fun and keeping fit with a lot more self-defence lessons. I had noticed the “Trench comb” knuckle-duster in her handbag, but by her accounts that might have been just standard school issue. Anyway, she tells me she is learning “savate” and “Ilap-goch” and various other self-defence traditions. Certainly, anyone wanting to part her from her casino winnings would have to be prepared to work hard for it.

I mentioned that we had been working with the local Guides, helping them with their tracking and training, and Beryl seemed very interested in the idea, especially when she heard of the “surprises” they were apt to set to slow us down. She is full of ideas on those lines herself – it seems that one does not open a door or pick up any item at Saint T’s without first checking it very carefully. We had to decline using some of her ideas though – otherwise the Althing would end up not with more guides, but fewer.

The restaurant garden of the New Victoria certainly serves an excellent lunch, and it made a change to have roast meat that was not chicken. The price was what one might expect imported steak to be – in fact, by the price it might have been airfreighted, one steak per aircraft! It certainly makes one think, how much fresh fruit and cassava that would buy you in the Native market: probably more than one could carry, let alone eat. Anyone who insists on eating just the way they do at home, the locals are very happy to oblige, with a suitably priced menu. We have been living mostly on roast fish, breadfruit and a wide range of fruits, all of it caught or farmed locally – and judging by our fur condition it is doing us a world of good.

Thinking about it, the Spontoonies certainly seem to have a good grip of their economy (and a firm one on the wallets of every tourist within range.) As my old Home Economics teacher Mrs. Maynard-Keynes so expressively put it – “buy cheap and sell dear.”

On our return to South Island in the evening, we found a postcard awaiting us with a local stamp and no signature or return address – just the cryptic “Message understood – will be in touch.” Post Box Nine certainly has a first-class delivery service!

August 10th, 1935

Moeli is back – having been several days off with the side of her family who do not pose for postcards. It is a great relief, as there are a dozen small and fuzzy Hoele’toemi distant relatives who are quite a handful to look after. Being back in native costume myself, the kits do confuse me with her, which is embarrassing when they get hungry – and they are far too small to explain things to.

A vigorous morning, keeping up on self-defence classes with Helen. We padded a palm tree with mattresses and practised what Beryl calls “the Legionnaire’s Trick” for half an hour or so, till sore paws and dizziness with all the somersaulting made me call a break. Then down to mingle with the tourists on Haio Beach – I had to admit, most of even the younger ones seemed a rather ... unimpressive bunch, compared with the Guides we have been chasing round the islands. But then – as Helen pointed out, we have got used to an extremely physical life style out here, and one hardly expects the average Euro tourist to compete in six hours running up and down mountainous jungle trails a day.

To judge from what Mrs. Hoele’toemi has let slip, Haio beach is something of a resort for the locals – where they compete to see how much spoof folklore tourists will actually swallow until their “suspension of disbelief” snaps with a loud twang. If one listens carefully, you can hear tourist guides telling the most outrageous tales with a straight face – and always managing to tie their yarns down to some real event or place. The favourite ploy is to tell tales nobody would ever believe without proof, then randomly point to some part of the islands and finish with “and it happened right there, in my Grandfather’s time.” At this point you can see tourist cameras starting to train in that direction, and postcards come out for note taking. Generally, once the Euro tourists have been put in a receptive mode, they are invited round past the Native souvenir stalls to be sold beads and trinkets, which is probably some subtle form of revenge.

Although we have seen most of the building and maintenance takes place in the off season, there are a few small works going on. One of them is on a small bluff just above the beach, a round “swimming pool” looking out over the biggest gap in the reef. Helen and I strolled over, but refrained from commenting, sketching or taking notes – Helen murmurs it looks just like she has seen in “Jane’s All The World’s Fighting Trenches” with the article on “Building coastal batteries for fun and profit.” We just strolled past, averting our eyes – we have seen quite as much as is healthy for us already, and the fact that the “swimming pool” has a sturdy metal pivot in the centre could be innocently explained away as the base for a central fountain.

We were hailed by a familiar voice, and recognised Violobe with her Guide’s group, who invited us for lunch. Very nice – Popatohi, an extra pungent version that I doubt the tourist stalls would sell. We noticed they had a game going involving a handful of shells and pebbles – it is something she says is an old Native game, which certainly needs very little equipment. One player casts some of the available pieces onto a grid sketched in the sand – the other has ten seconds to memorise them before turning round, waiting another minute and drawing out an exact map of where everything is. It sounded simple, but when we tried it proved exceedingly difficult. Violobe laughed, and pointed out she and her friends had been doing it since they were quite small. *

One of the guides mentioned they had found the remains of one of the Japanese balloons today, tangled in a tree on the far side of Mount Tomboabo – and that some more had been washed up in the lagoon. Although quite a few reached the islands, they do not seem too accurate at this range, and are hardly a commercial success if more than half miss by a mile. I will not trust my postcards home to balloon post.

Helen commented that the prototype “Flying Fortress” being constructed in her homeland, is reputed to be able to “Drop a bomb in a pickle barrel from forty thousand feet.” An impressive feat, though rather petty if you ask me – though I suppose the psychological value might be worthwhile in a protracted struggle. One would hope they could find some more suitable military targets.

On our return, we found a Florida postcard from Molly, who is looking around some companies her Family has acquired as a good home for its hard-earned capital. She writes that she is not used to being in a soft drinks factory, but that “Pensa-Cola” is selling well, her Family’s salesmen using their traditional techniques of clinching a deal with shopkeepers. It is certainly good to see their talents put to a peaceful purpose. She writes they are getting involved with the transport and construction trade – wines and spirits

proving less profitable in the past year or so, with their Government repealing some recent laws. It certainly seems odd to me, that both her family and the teetotal movement had supported Prohibition.

* Editor's Note: this seems very, very similar to the memory exercises used to train the Imperial Indian Intelligence services, as described in Rudyard Kipling's classic "Kim". One assumes Amelia hasn't read the book or she would recognise it – and one assumes someone else on Spontoon HAS.

11th August, 1935

I was wondering when Mr. Sapohatan would get around to remembering us – and indeed, it has not taken him long. One last peaceful morning with Moeli, looking after the cubs – Helen is never keen on the idea, and keeps saying I am getting far too domesticated by the Hoele'toemis. The sight of me sweeping up the longhouse in my Native costume or happily plaiting rattan matting, is quite at odds with her notion of how a spirited Adventuress should be behaving. At lunchtime I was helping Mrs. Hoele'toemi with the cooking (at least I now know how to safely prepare cassava root, which is poisonous raw) and commented that our hostess really does not look like the mother of six large and sturdy offspring.

Mrs. Hoele'toemi laughed, and pulled out a drawer full of engraved dance medallions and plaques from the past twenty years – commenting that a dedication to hula dance does wonders for the figure, as well as fitting one to other healthy pursuits. She looked rather wistful, commenting that dance had won her some very fine prizes – including, one suspects, Mr. Hoele'toemi. Our hostess is really very friendly and helpful, and has been demonstrating some exercises that she says will greatly help me keep my figure – not that I need much more exercise these days.

I was just serving out the meal when a familiar guest in the household showed up – Mr. Sapohatan, who greeted me quite courteously as ever, and noted that he had been reading our reports with great interest. At which he was shushed by the lady of the house, for talking "shop" at mealtimes – which gives me cause to wonder about the family profession. I know that Jirry's grandfather is certainly highly ranked in the Government – not that a casual tourist would be able to tell by looking at him. His Father is often away from home as well – folk vaguely describe him as being in the transportation business, though they never elaborate as to what or whom is transported, or where.

Anyway, an hour later Mr. Sapohatan was sitting affably with Helen and myself on the porch of our small longhouse, as he looked through our reports and chuckled over some sections while my ears blushed deeply. I had feared that our final evening on the case would be a grave disappointment to him – but he seemed very pleased with what we had found, and by all the detail we had included.

I had suspected we were not the only people gathering evidence, and he confirmed it in a roundabout way – casually commenting that I had been right to ask the question about Doctor Maranowski's Ulm site as having possibly been sabotaged – but he had testimony from one of the original engineers that it had been quite volatile enough without needing any encouragement. Having the chief scientist of a project walking around an untested methane plant smoking large and foul-scented cigars all the time is no way to set a safety standard to one's staff. One assumes that the Althing will enforce some more stringent quality standards.

He did caution us that the Friends of German Opera might not be quite what it seems, regardless of how much genuine opera gets discussed there – and certainly, we are in no great hurry to return there. The "Oompah" bands are very lively and most of the discussion seems to be on healthy outdoor topics such as climbing, long-distance hiking and even parachuting as a sport – but we received the impression that it would not be as healthy as it would appear, to take too close an interest in the place.

With that, he relaxed somewhat and brought out a second folder, a much slimmer volume, and noted that he had another job that I would be particularly suited for. It seems there is a certain Phoebe Carsholton, a wealthy girl about our age of the Berkshire Carsholton family, who has gone "absent without leave" for the past two months and is being urgently sought by her Guardians. There are private investigators on the case, but the Pacific is a very large place, and one could play chase-tail for years without finding someone.

However – by the facts he had assembled, Mr. Sapohatan placed her as having travelled through Spontoon last month, heading in the general direction of Orpington and then Mildendo Island. Which, he pointed out, would normally be no concern of his – but her Guardians are kicking up something of a storm in the more sensationalist press about her probable hideous fate amongst the hordes of heathen savages (who always seem to be somewhere else whenever WE arrive anywhere.)

Obviously, this is not great publicity, and having a stream of amateur and professional detectives streaming through after the reward money poking into whatever mystery appeals, might be something Mr. Sapohatan disapproves of on principle. Only last week the American cultural attaché was fished out of the lagoon, having apparently gone swimming with a metal detector and become tragically entangled in the seaweed. Too many such "accidents", however provoked, would likewise be poor publicity – just the month before, a Security Adviser at the Vostok embassy had been forgetful of the state of the tide when he went solo cliff-diving. In any event, he was found at the bottom of the cliffs with a newspaper report on cliff-diving stuffed in his pockets – that would be absolute proof for a village constable back in Bassetshire, and is naturally quite good enough here.

I volunteered to help straight away – though Helen looked rather unwell at the prospect of more ocean crossings. I suggested we follow in the missing girl's paw-prints as far as we can, and see if we can find her and persuade her to return.

Mr. Sapohatan looked somewhat pensive, and commented that he would be happy enough with her being found demonstrably unharmed, hopefully persuading the detectives to give up turning over rocks that he would be far safer leaving strictly alone. He left us with the report, tipped his hat and left us to make our plans.

(Later) Helen is looking decidedly unenthusiastic about this trip, having read through the information a few times. True enough, Miss Carsholton seems to have had a decidedly thin time at the hands of her guardians, having lived on an absolute pittance until she inherits the bulk of the estates on her twenty-first birthday. I have to admit, it looks as if she went “over the wall” the first chance she took, and is now enjoying some fine scenery and quite possibly fine company as well. Of course, it would be socially unthinkable to turn Native in one’s own Colonies, we have to keep up appearances – in an independent state such as Spontoon things are quite different.

But – this is the job we are offered, and there is no use speculating without some more facts. At any rate, we are only promising to try and find her, not necessarily to hand her over to her pursuers. Tomorrow we pack up and head out – a distinctly open-ended chase, which we hope will not take us out to Japan or the Aleutian Islands. I am taking my dictionary along, just in case. It is an awful shame that we are missing out on Miss Pelton’s wedding – but Helen points out, if our Tutor had wanted her students around on the big day, she would not have scheduled it for mid August.

One last evening under the familiar palm thatched longhouse – both Saimmi and Moeli came over, and we talked till late. It is really very sparsely furnished, when one thinks about it – but as in those traditional Japanese houses one sees in books, everything is exceedingly practical for its job – no useless ornaments or heirlooms cluttering the place. It amazed me how comfortable the wooden headrest was, rather than a pillow, and the Pandanus palm coverings are far more suitable to sleep in with oiled fur. Looking at the other headrest, I felt a definite pang at the thought that Jerry would be back in three days to find us gone. At least we are on official business, and can claim “the exigencies of the Service” as Father used to describe any particular hardship of Army life.

One last note, dear Diary, as I leave you in Moeli’s care. Helen mutters that Moeli may personally like us a lot, but will probably mimeograph the diary and send it to Post Box Nine, while other folk telegraph back Home to bookshops enquiring after Lexarc shorthand guides. It is just as well that I sent the previous terms’ entries home by Registered mail, all things considered.

12th August, 1935

(Pencilled as “Transcribed from waterproof field notebooks, September”.)

A sad parting from the Hoele’toemis and the cubs, as we head out to Casino Island for the boat trip. I managed to persuade Helen to wear the safari suit while I stay in comfortable (but respectable) Native costume – we look quite the classical Huntress complete with loyal Native guide, I hope. Mrs. Hoele’toemi has praised my local accent, though Helen is recognisably Texan whatever language she speaks. Still, we both have alternate costumes in our packs, including the original parachute silk uniforms we threw together in the Autumn term. Although we could use some company, we are agreed that Molly and Maria would not be quite right for this sort of mission – they have many fine qualities, but discretion is one they need to practice a little.

Indeed, I toyed with the idea of inviting Beryl – but there is always the problem of how much to tell her, and one suspects she is extremely good at ferreting out inconvenient facts. Plus, she seems to be having a good time at the Casino, something she will definitely be missing when term starts again – much to the Casino’s relief, I should think. Beryl has told us she can handle affairs with the proverbial kid gloves, but I have examined those gloves she wears. Conventional evening gloves do not have fine chain-mail linings or half a pound of fine lead shot sewn into the knuckles – at least, not in my social circle.

Somebody we did see was Nuala, paying in a large sum at the bank where I was collecting my allowance – that banded tail will stand out in any crowd, and in a cramped bank I was quite conscious of her natural musk perfume even before I looked her direction. She invited us over for a meal tonight – sadly, we had to decline, and explained where we are heading. As Miss Carsholton’s case has been splashed around the more lurid newspapers for a week, there is no secret that she is being searched for. Nuala’s tail twitched somewhat, until we assured her we were not heading out after the reward – quite the opposite; we are paying our own tickets.

It is a good thing Father wired my allowance over - looking at the price of two flying-boat tickets to Mildendo Island, I rapidly changed our route to scheduled sea travel instead. I suspect it would be pointless trying to send travel expense claims to Post Box Nine. We did drop them another postcard though – the Western Union Telegraph office is right next to the ferry company, and sells the cheapest postcards we have yet seen; everywhere else has extravagantly coloured local landscapes, but these are extra plain and advertised as “Now 15% More Generic!”

We did manage a quick lunch with Nuala though; there is an exotic Asian restaurant called “Bow Thai” not two hundred yards from the Casino. She tells me she is the treasurer for her “Union” and takes the other member’s earnings to the bank every morning. Quite puzzling – to judge from the size of the currency notes she was handing over, it must have been a very well-attended dance or native exhibition – I recall her telling us she was working in Entertainments. She can certainly afford to eat of the best on the house – she helpfully warned us off the “Nimitz Sea caviar” on the menu, which she claims is only eaten by the less discerning tourists who have not enquired as to the ingredients. Who would have thought one could make any sort of caviar out of sea-slug eggs?

The docks were quite a sight, cargo and passenger ships queuing up to load and offload as we waited for the one timetabled boat of the day that passes Mildendo Island. Half an hour before sunset we were boarding from the jetty just south of the Old China Dock, where there are extensive redevelopment works in progress aimed for next Tourist season to take the bigger tour boats that are starting to arrive in these waters. The main tourist season will be over in another month or so, but the hotels certainly look as if they are making the best of the time remaining.

As fitted her hunting costume, Helen had her target pistol in her baggage, all legally licensed and declared to Customs, and we both had those handy experimental parachutist's knives in our belts disguised as electric torches. It might seem excessive, but had Molly been coming along she would doubtless insist on taking my Mauser "Big-game" rifle. At thirty-five pounds without bipod, tools, case or ammunition, she would be quite welcome to carry it around the hills and jungle trails, and any comments about me keeping in character as a "Native Bearer" would fall on exceedingly deaf ears. Anyway, at half a pound weight per cartridge, it would have to be exceedingly big and valuable game to make the expense of hunting with a 13 millimetre rifle worthwhile. I believe the original "game" cost thousands of pounds apiece, had a five hundred horsepower roar and a boilerplate hide half an inch thick.

(Later) Thinking about value, for the price of a cramped wicker seat in the flying boat one gets a quite comfy sea cabin for two, with room service included. Helen does not look as if she is appreciating it, as she is out on deck in the fresh air, trying to compare stylish "mal de mer" with plain explosive seasickness. A great shame, since the evening meal was a very nice deep-fried fish and garlic dish that one could smell cooking from one end of the ship to the other. Helen should try to keep her strength up: we have an overnight crossing ahead of us, stopping at Orpington around midnight then heading out North into the open ocean – already the coast of Main Island is vanishing into the dusk, low on the horizon.

We passed the last fishing boat just as darkness fell, and I recall from our Easter trip with the Noenokes that out to the north-east of the islands there are almost empty waters, with only the occasional Rock Goby to be found – a definitely barren area that they referred to as the Goby Desert.

According to a guidebook I have managed to acquire from the ferry office, outside the Spontoon group several of the islands are legally in quite disputed territory – having a few hundred people scattered over coral quays is too small a unit to make a Government of its own, and the financial incentives are too low to attract any of the colonial powers (the tale of Spontoon being a commercial loss-maker is often bandied about, often I suspect exaggerated.) This rarely stops keen young Empire-builders such as King Zog of Albania, whose newly claimed South Indies are proving a delight to stamp collectors if nobody else, with local issues of stamps for every single inhabited islet. But this part of the Pacific is on the rather hazy border between Polynesia, Micronesia and the much larger Meganesia, and a lot of what Governments normally do is handled (or not) by private enterprise. One supposes anything a Government forgets to do, is blamed on Amnesia.

Indeed, many of the less famous dots on the map are still not quite fully explored, at least by Euro culture – if islands anywhere are in fact ruled by the sort of pulp horror comic "Thing" that our school chum Ethyl fondly thought ran Spontoon, this is the sort of place. We have heard tales of Cranium Island that makes one's fur stand on end – "Truth is stranger than fiction" they say, and I recall some very odd fiction in Ethyl's copies of "Weird Tails." Ethyl seemed quite disappointed when she heard the true facts.

Still – I expect we are in for a tiresome time, hunting down one of my countryfolk who probably just wants to be left in peace when we do find her. In any event, farewell to Spontoon for a few days!

15th August, 1935

It has been quite an adventure already, just exploring Mildendo Central Island – and indeed, since we left the boat we have been really in the thick of things.

We arrived on Mildendo just two hours before sunset two nights ago - one of the crew had warned us that it was far less "tourist-friendly" than Spontoon, and we should keep our wits about us. Indeed, there were no grand hotels or illuminations there to welcome us; just a rather battered jetty shared with tramp streamers busily loading and unloading unnamed cargoes. The place sweltered in a tropical mist, but we could see the jungle surrounding the main port of Toonabo Town, rising up in ranges of low hills. We have our aerial and nautical charts of the area with us, but they show very little inland detail, except that the island is roughly pear-shaped and about fifteen miles on its longest side.

Certainly, the locals are not geared up for flower-garland receptions and public dancing. I suppose a lack of tourists = lack of tourist income = lack of developed tourist attractions = lack of tourists. In fact, our only reception was a rather snappish Customs official, who fortunately did not ask to look at my passport. I had my Spontoonie fur patterns in freshly oiled and cured fur, and did my best to imitate the local accent. If pressed, I can truthfully say I am speaking Spontoonie trying to perfect my accent, but was born on one of the other island chains (Britain being an island chain, so to speak. No need to say which ocean.)

Quite a thrill, really – standing in the street of a strange town an hour before sunset, knowing nobody there and with no very clear idea of where to go next. But Songmark gives training in that sort of thing: we spotted a rickshaw driver and asked to be taken to the second best hotel in town; an expensive request on Casino Island but very obviously there is nowhere like the Old Vic or the Marleybone on Mildendo!

Half an hour later – an Adventuress and her loyal Native guide were booked into our base on this island, a fairly clean no-star place upwind of the docks called the Stone Bure, an odd sort of building apparently designed by someone who had once seen a hotel from a distance and worked out the details from guesswork. The roof does not leak, and the water in the taps is at least transparent. Helen announced that after a day and a night being seasick, she was urgently going out to see what the local cuisine had to offer *.

I suppose Toonabo Town is a "standard" Pacific island trading port, with functional but unspectacular buildings and rather more spent on freight handling facilities than sanitation. Helen has told me a lot about life in the oilfield towns, where things are distinctly rowdy at times and gunfire is a frequent sound after dark – happily it was nothing quite that dramatic for our first night.

We had checked beforehand that Spontoonie "Shells" were acceptable currency here – just in case, Helen's money belt held a small roll of gold Sovereigns to get us home if all else fails. That is the sort of thing they teach us at Songmark, certainly – never fly anywhere past half your fuel range, and never travel anywhere (if possible) without a sure way of getting back. Still, the eating-house we found to be very good value next to

Casino Island – and two large portions of roast “Short pig” were very welcome. I wonder why they have to specify the length of pigs around here?

It is going to be quite difficult to find this Phoebe Carsholton, given that we only have a stock photograph of her taken a year ago, and if she has travelled light enough to leave her name behind, we are reduced to searching for a recently arrived Euro girl of particular age and species. If she deliberately vanished, she may have changed more than her name by now, as I well know. Anyone hunting for me on Spontoon would have walked straight past me in Native guise, expecting no doubt to find me still clad in my tropical twill suit and solar topee (a rather useless item, far inferior to a local straw hat and a hundred times the price.)

At least we are here, in the right area and settled in to search. Helen grumbles that a stream of qualified Detectives have probably already swept through here with years of experience and expense account bribes in their favour, but we will try our best!

* (Editor’s note – in plain text in the margin, this is labelled “Gonna git me a mighty pile of chow before ma belly fur wraps round ma backbone” – evidently Helen’s untranslated words. Amelia seems to do a lot of translating for some of her friends.)

17th August, 1935

Two tiring days, with little to show for it – except a fair knowledge of Mildendo Central island and the various minor villages and industrial enterprises. At least, we are refining our techniques – the first time Helen asked a local if he knew where to find a young Euro girl, he winked and assured her that his sister was very pretty, and had a Euro costume that fitted her like a glove. Not quite what we had in mind! I think Helen’s ears are still blushing.

Of course, there is the other problem of what to tell folk when they ask why we want to find Phoebe – the Detectives can offer a share of the reward for finding her, but we are not here for the money – nor do we have enough spare to bribe our way across the island (probably to be passed to a string of fore-warned friends and relations claiming to know where our quarry went next, and bleeding us cash at every step.)

Still, we have promised to look, and we are looking. Today we struck out across to the far side of the island, where there is an extensive copra processing plant with its own docks. Judging from her file, Phoebe has a good education already and probably little spare cash – it was my idea that she might look for a job as secretary or similar in one of the industrial concerns. I can well imagine any well-presented Euro girl turning up and offering to work for a discount wage might have very few searching questions asked. She is not at Wanoro Peal Coconut Enterprises, wherever else she may be.

Quite a sight, after nearly a year in the South Seas, to finally walk under avenues lined with ripe coconuts. A definite postcard view, although when a sudden squall hit the plantation it became rather hazardous. One can well imagine that of the various local obituaries one reads of folk found dead with a thirty-pound bunch of coconuts next to them, quite a few might be actual accidents. Just this once I found myself wishing I had brought my very sturdy solar topee with me – though of course it hardly fits with my Native ensemble.

19th August, 1935

Dear Diary – no wonder this Phoebe is proving hard for even professionals to track down. We have spent another two days getting around the outlying Mildendo islands, but getting nowhere as far as the chase is concerned – and of course the scent is growing colder all the time. Whatever any of the private investigators have found out, they are naturally keeping to themselves – and probably (Helen says) paying their sources not to tell any of their competitors. Which leaves us with little option but to explore in ever-increasing circles from her last known port of call, and just hope to spot a face or accent in the crowd. Not knowing her personally, our chances are a little disheartening (Helen says she might be in oiled fur like myself by now and disguising her accent as well. Ever the optimist, dear Helen is – I don’t think.)

We certainly get to meet a lot of other people, though – this lunchtime we were talking with a Spontoonie who was passing through here on business – he works for a firm doing Imports and Exports across the whole area, and promised to keep a look out on his travels. When we told him our names he seemed quite surprised – he evidently recognised them. Helen seemed a bit suspicious, until he explained he is a great supporter of the Spontoonie dance competitions, and had read of our unexpected successes in the newspapers and club magazines. At last, someone else is on our side.

21st August, 1935

News at last! Just when we were getting ready to give Mildendo up as a bad job and move on, we received a postcard at our hotel – from a Mrs Virginia Crichley, a missionary. She writes that she met the commercial traveller we had spoken with, and she has seen a young lady answering that description – and that she will call on us tomorrow. A great day – all it took was one postcard to decidedly cheered us up.

In the circumstances, we felt quite ready to take the afternoon and evening off – after five days of hard work, with whatever our mission brings us tomorrow. Happily the sun had broken through the steaming hot mists, leaving Mildendo looking as cheerful as we have seen it. Toonabo Town is rather basic, but has most of the supplies for a pleasant picnic, with fruits and grilled fish in the market and an imported bottle of Nootnops Blue apiece for the beach afterwards.

Interestingly, from what we can hear playing in the shops there are Euro radio stations within range of here, possibly Missionary built transmitters. At any rate, I doubt Radio LONO would be playing that latest and most irritating George Formless track – the one from his comic film of rioting Chinatown Anarchists, “Mr. Wu’s a window-breaker now.” I wonder if one can become allergic to ukuleles?

A fine afternoon, though looking out at the sea Southwards, I felt quite longingly of my own distant jungle hut for two. Helen is as staunch a friend as I could wish for on this trip – but there are things I discover I have become accustomed to, that a year ago I would have never expected to miss. My Taifast locket is on full display as ever, which deflects any unwanted attentions by the locals as well as Helen’s gun belt does for her – but reminds me of what I might be doing back on Spontoon. At least, we have a lead now, and might not have to waste the next month searching fruitlessly across the whole Pacific!

22nd August, 1935

One gets the impression that things get stranger and stranger, the further we travel from Spontoon. We stayed in our hotel after breakfast, awaiting this Mrs. Critchley – who sent up her card at ten, and I received her in our rooms (which are drab, but better at least than the street outside.) A very striking lady of canine stock, white curled head-fur and a tail that was quite hidden by her very demure dress. It was hard to spot her accent – I detected French in it, and something of broad Cockney English – she explained that she had travelled the world for many years on behalf of her Mission, which no doubt explains it.

She began by explaining that her Mission work took her into the less travelled parts of the world – and the less welcome she was there, the more her services were needed (Helen seemed to have some trouble working this one out.) Her most recent trip had been to a place I would never have thought of searching – to Krupmark Island, which is as notorious as old Tortuga was in the swashbuckling days when my family hunted Pirates through the Caribbean. * I doubt any Detectives have made much of a search of there, theirs being a definitely unpopular trade on Krupmark – and there is only so much risk that the reward money will pay for.

However – Mrs. Critchley has been there, and says she met an English girl answering Phoebe’s description, in what she describes as an Unfortunate area. Although she could not speak with her long, she got the impression Phoebe was in real need of rescue.

Helen did ask why she has not approached the Authorities with this, or announced it to the newspapers – I can imagine folk putting together a substantial rescue mission even without the reward, as they do for lost explorers and such. Mrs. Critchley hesitated a little, and then confided that the newspapers would be all too eager to broadcast her unfortunate position, and her reputation would be ruined for life through no fault of her own – any rescue would have to be discreet, and preferably soon. Besides which, Krupmark is at the very centre of the most disputed piece of the Nimitz Sea, and there is no single Authority with any clear right to act there.

Well! This is definitely the sort of thing Songmark girls such as ourselves should be doing with our Summer Holidays – it seems quite tailor-made for the pair of us. Some reinforcements might be useful, but on reflection it is as well Molly and Maria are not here. I fear that Molly’s idea of a rescue mission would start with setting the town on fire and seeing who comes out of it – and Maria is possibly more subtle than a bull in a china shop, but one has to look hard to be sure.

The trouble is, that getting to Krupmark is rather difficult. There are no scheduled commercial routes, and few honest traders go near the place. Which means we either find a dishonest one, or arrange transport ourselves – over a hundred and fifty miles each way, with an unknown reception at the far end. Quite a tall order – although in a Tiger Moth it is barely two hours flight, there is no Krupmark airfield marked on the map. A regular poser, this – we will have to get our thinking caps on.

Mrs. Critchley did mention she would be returning there in a week, after she had discussed things with her superiors – but a lot can happen in a week. Fortunately she is staying here on Mildendo till tomorrow, so we shall have her advice until then.

A definite brainteaser, for the pair of us. Helen seemed somewhat doubtful of our guest, claiming all the Missionaries she has ever met always smell of harsh carbolic soap, not perfumed brands. Quite possibly so, given a free choice – but this is Mildendo, and one takes whatever supplies are on the shelf. Honestly – if one cannot trust the clergy, whom can one trust? Her dress was very austere and of a very fine pattern, watered silk unless I miss my guess. As I told Helen, respectable dressmakers cater for respectable people.

* Editor’s note: Elsewhere in the diary Amelia drew up her family tree, several centuries’ worth. If she knew that her prominent ancestor Henry Phipps founded the family estates after a career sailing as Blackbeard’s right-paw henchman, she pointedly ignores the fact. No doubt he ordered his skull and crossbones flags from an impeccable tailor, which excuses most things.

25th August, 1935

Krupmark Island at last! It has been hectic, with no time to write – indeed, we have been decidedly swept along by our luck this trip. Right now Helen and I are sitting in a woven palm “basha” concealed on a ridge half a mile from Fort Bob, the main settlement on the island. We were quite wrong about the lack of airfield – in the valley below there is a rough but serviceable dirt strip that can take twin-engined cargo aircraft, although judging by several wrecks at the end of the runway – only excellent pilots need apply.

We had been quite at a loss as to how to get here – Helen was considering returning to Spontoon and contacting Mr. Sapohatan to ask if he could help us. Not a bad idea – but it would take days even if they agreed, and we have no real proof it really is Phoebe anyway. I doubt our standing with Post Box Nine would be much improved after a fighting expeditionary force discovered we had sent them on a wild goose chase. The whole

point of us having this mission is that we have no official standing with the Authorities – any trouble we stir up, will not float in a Spontoonie direction.

Of course, that is nice for Mr. Sapohatan, but we are severely on our own here with nobody to call for help or even knowing where we are. Some backup would be useful, but our ticket to get here was strictly for two. We have Mrs. Critchley to thank for that – when we met her the second time she told us she had met a rogue trader who has dealings all throughout these islands – and who might be persuaded to take us over, for a suitable fee.

I don't know if there are actual Pirates on this island, but what "Captain" Panapa charged us for a sweltering voyage in the hold of his sloop was daylight robbery. It took fully half the gold in Helen's belt to persuade him – and we were an hour out on the high seas when he cheerfully announced that he had been heading this direction anyway! Had Helen not been exceedingly unwell by that time, the Captain might have more claw-marks through his ears than he already has.

Decidedly not a pleasure trip, crammed in the hold for a day and night, both of us wishing Helen was a better sailor. Just before docking we heard the sound of powerful engines, and a voice hailed our vessel abruptly – evidently the local version of "Customs" is only concerned that nobody is sending a gunboat, for nobody seemed at all concerned with the cargo. One must be grateful for small mercies.

Despite paying such an exorbitant price, our "ticket" did not even cover us all the way to shore. Captain Panapa stuck his head into the hold and bellowed that we had best get ready to swim – as the ship would be searched as soon as it docked, and we were not on the cargo manifest. I suppose it is good tactics for concealment, but the boat did not even slow down as we were "invited" to jump carrying our packs tied to old cork life-belts, three hundred yards from shore. At least, we have done this sort of thing in class – and our training fell into place as we made shore, groomed out our fur and vanished off the paths to check nobody was following us. We were generally not feeling too grateful, except that we had those days playing hide and seek with that Guides' School – though I hardly expected to put it to such a test so soon.

It was slow, hard going through the scrub and ten-yard jungle, trying to keep the main trail in sight until we found Fort Bob. Our camp here is quite as secure as we can make it, hidden from the air by the canopy and from below by a dense bamboo thicket. There is a spring nearby and we have food for six days plus whatever we can find in the jungle – so far so good. Even time to rest and write up our adventures! Tomorrow we take a look at Fort Bob.

26th August, 1935

Dear Diary – I don't think I'll be able to watch a Robin Hood film again. It seems such a romantic notion, a town of outlaws in the forest, banded together in rough camaraderie against the outside world. Well, it might have been then, but the world has moved on and not always for the better.

We were up at dawn, slipping through the forest rather faster than we might if we expected anyone was awake to hear us. Our first job was to get an idea of the town's layout (we were not expecting tourist maps here) and then to find somewhere we could observe for a few hours. In half an hour we managed that – it is a big place, hardly a shantytown, with easily four hundred houses and a fair collection of prefabricated storage down by the airstrip. The streets were almost deserted, the only sign of organisation being what looked like a "clean-up squad" of rather worn-looking rodents with shovels and hooks. It was an awful shock to see what they were loading onto a cart - I sincerely hope the figures being flung onto it were just dead drunk.

Very chastened, we found a fine lying-up position on a small knoll just outside town, with more bamboo concealing us, and a view down onto the main street. We observed all morning with our field glasses, making careful notes and whispering quietly, our voices quite drowned by the rustling bamboo around us. Dry bamboo leaves and stalks scattered on the paths around were set to give us warning of unexpected visitors: the stuff crackles and snaps like pistol shots when trodden upon - another useful lesson the Spontoon Guide's School taught us.

Whoever said crime does not pay, was evidently taking a long view of the subject, for Fort Bob looks exceedingly prosperous! An awful lot of business was being done there – a regular "thieves' Bazaar" of weapons and all sorts of equipment was at one end of the street, and we caught the flash of gold and jewels being traded at the other. From a distance it looked quite shockingly like a happy, thriving market town, the streets filled with eager buyers and the scent of cooking drifting up quite tantalisingly to us three hundred yards downwind. Well before lunchtime there were taverns doing a roaring trade – and several fights spilling out into the street. Nobody seemed to be at all concerned, and simply moved out of the way as they continued to bargain. There were even several shots, though it was hard to say exactly where from – but still the locals seemed completely indifferent to everything.

Still – it looks as if our silk aircrew uniforms are the best costume for blending in down there. At least there will be no worry about where to conceal weapons, as most folk seem to be armed to the teeth like a stage Mexican bandit. Helen whispered that we should have made our wills beforehand – not an encouraging thought.

We waited till dark, then slipped back to our packs to eat and change costume, before returning to the quite well lit town. From Molly's back issues of "True Crime Illustrated" we have some ideas of how to blend in – if this was a factory we would wear overalls and carry a broom, and for a research lab we would try to acquire a white coat, a clipboard and a worried expression. Something bolder should suit us here – so we joined the track near the airport and marched up into town along the main road, loudly discussing which of the saloons we had spotted to visit first.

Hopefully nobody expects spies and agents to stop off at corner food stalls and snack their way down the open street – at any rate, we were quite undisturbed as we wandered through town noting the various buildings and committing them to memory. Most of the commercial premises were heavily shuttered, but there was one corner of the Thieves' Bazaar still open to catch the passing trade. I was expecting to be gouged

unmercifully for any equipment there – but one of Helen’s golden guineas got me a used but sound Webley-Fosbury .57 automatic loading revolver, including a holster and a box of two dozen “hunting” rounds. Quite a bargain, and as Father has one, I am perfectly familiar with the model. Helen looked at the size of the cartridges and whispered that I would do myself severe injury firing it – but the Webley-Fosbury has a patented anti-recoil action so smooth that it is banned as unfair by most target pistol clubs.

Anyway – we seemed to attract little attention on the streets, and our position is rather stronger than before, as now we are not only familiar with the streets but also well fed and better equipped. Even so, we headed back to base before exhausting our luck for the evening!

27th August, 1935

Quite a frustrating day, overall – we spent the whole afternoon in Fort Bob, and though we have learned an awful lot there is no sign of Phoebe. Fortunately this is a place where nobody is curious about where a stranger comes from and why – we are dressed more or less as pilots, and seem to be accepted as such. Indeed, we have had to turn down two offers of private employment already – Helen told an elderly jackal and a surprisingly well dressed rat that “the Boss wouldn’t like it”. As she pointed out to me later – no matter where in the world you are, in this sort of place there is always a Boss.

Although we have avoided the rougher-looking taverns and saloons, we must have wandered through most of the public areas by now, as well as the airfield. Having slipped round through the jungle to one of the wrecks bulldozed off the runway, our pocket toolkit sufficed to prize loose and scavenge some “cover” – nobody looks twice at two aeronautical types walking around an airfield carrying oil cans and unidentifiable electrical parts. As Molly’s handy guide pointed out, if it is obvious what you are doing, nobody will start asking themselves dangerous questions.

28th August, 1935

A surprising meeting – we were listening out for any familiar accents in the street, when I heard a familiar voice – the brave missionary herself, Mrs. Critchley! She was wearing a different black dress, and was not preaching in the streets as one might expect – though on reflection, around here that would make for an exceedingly brief career.

We managed to discreetly attract her attention, and she confirmed that she had indeed been looking for us. Her usual “preaching” style here, she tells us, is to let anyone with an interest seek her out – she says she is a familiar sight in these streets, and everyone knows what she has to offer. Certainly, I noticed that even the roughest-looking types seemed to treat her quite respectfully.

As to our mission, she recommends one other place we might try – on the far end of the island, a resort that is known only as The Beach. It seems that Fort Bob is the main trading post, and The Beach the entertainment complex – like London and Eastbourne at home. Indeed, Mrs. Critchley recommends us to search that side of the island, whispering that there are many folk in great need of saving there.

A grateful farewell, and we vanished off to “strike camp” and explore the rest of the island. Five miles through pathless jungle took most of the rest of the day, there being no Native trails or tourist routes to follow if one wishes to avoid the main track.

(Evening) We have found what is a very temporary “hide” at best, a rather small clump of palms perhaps a quarter of a mile from shore and what is evidently our destination. There is a settlement behind the dunes, perhaps two dozen houses of the portable wooden frame type – some look rather like one sees in Cowboy films, with verandas and steeply pitched wooden roofs. As far as we can see, there is no trading and no industry – everyone arrives from Fort Bob on dilapidated lorries and heads straight in without stopping to sunbathe. Most curious. They have some amenities though: even from this distance we can see lights, and hear the hum of a generator coming down the wind to us. Tomorrow, we hit the Beach!

29th August, 1935

Dear Diary – one can have too much Adventure after awhile. I had started out at first light, when Helen stepped in front of me and asked if I had realised just what The Beach exactly was. I had thought it was a quiet retreat from the haggling and street brawls of Fort Bob – which it may be, but Helen expounded the ... Details, in some detail. She pointed out that what has to be discreet even in the back streets of a Texan oil boom town, can be right out in the open on Krupmark Island.

Oh my.

One has to agree with Helen’s logic here – it rather fits with what Mrs. Critchley explained about the reasons for not arriving with an official team to rescue Phoebe (if she IS here, which I greatly doubt, Phoebe being a well brought-up young lady of respectable family.) This gives us rather a problem though – at Fort Bob there were all sorts of folk wandering around for all sorts of reasons, which is not the case here. And from what we have seen, visitors to Krupmark Island are not the sort to innocently sunbathe and build sand castles while enjoying the scenery.

Still, we are here to look around, and it seems even quieter first thing in the morning than Fort Bob. Back into our Pilot’s uniforms, and inland till we hit the main road – we should attract less attention that way than if we were spotted sneaking in through the dunes where nobody goes. Arriving behind the sea-facing houses, it looks definitely as if some of these have been dismantled and rebuilt here – the paint schemes do not match, and no two houses really seem to fit each other. They are two storeys tall, generally with attics. I had expected barbed wire fences, but as Helen points out – anyone trapped here unwillingly needs no fences, the only way off the island being the easily guarded airstrip at Fort Bob and the loading jetties nearby.

There is a main "street" of ten large houses facing the sea, and perhaps a dozen single-storey structures tucked away behind, rather like the bunk houses one sees on the old plantations on Spontoon. Nobody was around at seven in the morning, so we could stroll confidently around getting an idea of the possible exits. It all looks rather unpromising – there is the gravel road to Fort Bob, the ocean (with breakers roaring over what looks like an unbroken reef) and on each side the open beach, with dunes of soft sand quite impossible to run through. It would be depressingly easy to seal off this piece of shore – there are radio aerials on two of the larger buildings, and reinforcements from town could be here in ten minutes.

We had a lucky escape, and a piece of luck – for awhile I had noticed an appetising scent of cooking bacon, something I had really missed in these islands. Heading back to our base camp, we were passing the last bunk house when the doors flew open just in front of us, and a plump cougar lady bustled out with a tray laden with plates. She evidently mistook us (or at least Helen) for customers, as she grinned and pointed out breakfast was included, but most folk rarely get up so early. When Helen hesitated, the cook added that the truck would be arriving at ten.

My Father always told me to take advantage of an unexpected meal, when one never knows where the next one will be coming from – and we were hardly going to excite suspicion by running away. Of all the places I have eaten breakfast, this must be the strangest – tinned bacon and powdered eggs, eaten in the courtyard behind not merely a house but a village of Ill Repute, miles from any friendly face but Helen's. We did full justice to the meal – and our cook nodded towards one of the large houses, the one with the lavender-coloured door and "reminded" Helen that closing time was at ten. Helen gave her best roguish grin, but I could see she was sweating at the thought.

We vanished up the track as soon as the cook was out of sight, and had a quick counsel of war behind the nearest dune. An awful problem, this one – and we felt we had pushed our luck quite far enough for the day, walking around in plain sight.

An hour later, I had thought of a plan: we had passed a large tree trunk washed up on the beach near our hideout that looked just manageable between us. By ten o'clock we had rolled it into the water, brushed out our tracks from the sand and paddled it along the calm waters of the lagoon, to act as a floating observation post while we trod water behind it. The water was quite warm, mercifully – as we were there for two hours, paddling just enough to keep still in front of the houses fifty yards offshore.

There is one thing that can be said in favour of The Beach, it is quite unprejudiced – when the lorries rolled up there were folk of all species getting on them, and from the house with the lavender door I saw why Helen had been pointed that direction. The dust cloud settled, and for a while things were quiet – until we got a most awful shock.

I should have thought about it. There is a fine sand beach and warm, cleansing water here – and whatever plumbing is in those buildings must be basic at best. Furthermore, I doubt there is much one can do in way of recreation out here. Of course, the entire resident population goes for a swim every morning! The sight of the first half dozen bathers had us very cautiously paddling our log back along the shore – had we waited another five minutes we would have been surrounded by folk very curious to know what we were doing. It was a close call indeed, as the sight of a log suddenly making rapid progress across a calm lagoon would have been rather conspicuous. There were about half a dozen feline girls who might have been Phoebe, but we were far too busy putting as much distance as possible between us and them to be able to use our field-glasses.

We made our escape, beached our log and retired to our lying-up position, rather baffled about our next move. The only way we are going to spot if any of them are Phoebe is to get close enough to ask – and we can neither do that covertly or socially, one might say. Unless we happen to strike lucky first time, we might quite give the game away, with probably rather awful consequences.

To make matters worse, our lying-up position is none too secure, unlike the previous nights' camp above Fort Bob. There is only one clump of trees within a mile and we are in it – the first place anyone would look. So we can hardly risk either going back to The Beach or staying here – which means we will have to beat a retreat towards Fort Bob, temporarily I hope. If Phoebe is here in need of rescue, I hardly like to be the one who got within a hundred yards and then abandoned her. Not the sort of thing a Songmark girl does, and especially not a Bourne-Phipps.

2nd September, 1935

Mission successful (sort of.)

3rd September, 1935

Dear Diary: I have recorded some shocking things in the past year, but I thought long and hard before deciding to expand on yesterday's terse yet truthful line. Right now we are back on Mildendo, ready to return to Spontoon. Helen and I have agreed what to tell Mr. Sapohatan, who should be pleased with the overall news – and the rest of it is nobody's business.

We waited till dusk on the 29th and followed the road to near Fort Bob – all the traffic gave itself away with headlights long before anyone could see us diving for cover. By full dark we were in our old camp, dropping our heavier equipment and heading into the town under the light of a full tropical moon. A lovely evening at first, rather spoiled by our mood after having to (temporarily) admit defeat – things are not always like in the Talkies, where the heroine swoops in and saves the hero single-handed every time.

At least, we could put the "tactical withdrawal" to some good use; the food here is really rather good. I cannot say whether the whole community here is as depraved as rumour has it, but they have some wickedly good roadside cooks. That was one worry less – but we still had to confirm where Phoebe is, rescue her and then get her and ourselves off the island at least as far as Mildendo, quite possibly with a hue and cry pursuing

us all. This, without any transport or contacts available to get us away – and not even a safe house to retreat to until the locals give up the chase. Just to further dampen our spirits, the moon was soon hidden by clouds promising heavy rain before midnight.

I did suggest taking a closer look around the airstrip and looking out for any likely “getaway flivvers” as Molly would say, on the grounds that aircraft here are liable to be stolen property anyway, or at least engaged in shady business – hence there would be nothing really morally wrong with “acquiring” one. Helen squashed that notion straight away, pointing out that over here (a) aircraft come and go unannounced, leaving us no guarantee what might be available when we need it (b) on this island nobody is at all likely to leave unattended cabin doors unlocked and aircraft ready to fly, and (c) the locals are very prone to shoot first and ask questions later, if at all.

We had reached rather an impasse, and our tails were definitely drooping – there being no point in taking awful risks getting Phoebe away from The Beach if we all get recaptured an hour later. Just then, at the end of the street I spotted a silhouette that had my heart pounding and Helen growling as I pointed it out. There are plenty of tall stags, but very few with such distinctive two-pronged antlers. I could hardly believe it – but Lars Nordstrom was there, no doubt taking advantage of unfussy local Regulations for his Import and Export business.

Just to be safe, we waited till he had vanished around one corner before heading the other way around the building to check nobody was following us. All was clear – and a minute later I was greeting a very surprised stag, who very creditably guided us away from listening ears on the street to a private office, before sitting us down and asking in amazement what we were doing here.

Honesty is the best policy – although I could hear Helen gritting her teeth, we had nothing to lose by telling him the plain truth about our mission (except, of course, our connection with the Spontoon Authorities.) When I mentioned that Mrs. Critchley had pointed us the right way, he gave rather a start – evidently she is well-known for being famous, as they say. But then, as the only missionary on the island, that is hardly unexpected.

Lars really looked very dashing in a flight suit – he explained that he was organising some high-value shipments of certain things that needed his personal attention. However, he hoped to have that arranged by the next day, after which he promised to make inquiries and see what he could find out. It was a great relief, to have not only a friendly face on the island, but one who is already well-known here, and has his own transport! Even better, he offered us the use of the back room in his office, where there are Native sleeping mats rolled up. He was very apologetic as he pointed out they are used by the hired help on night duties – but it was hammering with rain outside, and the thought of half an hour’s trek through the dripping jungle in the dark was something we had been trying to put off. There is a spirit stove and a coffee pot – so although he had to leave us to finish his business, I thought we had fallen on our feet in the truest feline style!

Helen was less than keen about the whole thing, pointing out that even in our leaking palm-roofed shelter in the bamboo grove, we are hidden and have free action in all directions. Quite true – but she had been the first one to realise that our “free action” is of very little use right now – we had come to a dead end on our own, and definitely need some help to get any further. The offer of free accommodation and coffee was jolly nice, and I felt honour bound to point it out.

A rather tense night, with Helen insisting we stay up in shifts with pistols ready – I suppose that on the whole we managed more sleep than we would have half way up a tree in the jungle. When dawn arrived and no packs of henchmen had arrived to capture us, I could wake her with a pot of Lars’ fresh coffee and cheerfully tell her so.

Really, Helen can be quite bad-tempered first thing in the morning.

About nine, we heard the key in the lock – two seconds later we were at each side of the door with pistols drawn, but it was only Lars who strolled in, looking quite relaxed and rather pleased with himself. He seemed to take very little notice of the fact we were both armed and ready – indeed, he complimented Helen on her caution in this neighbourhood. Presumably, in his business a lot of folk go armed most of the time – and even so, Molly has assured me there are no bullet-holes anywhere in his hide (given his rather scanty Native dance costume, I had gained that impression already.)

Lars announced that he would be paying a call on Mrs. Critchley – and his urgent business should be over by lunchtime, so he would see what he could do after that. In the meantime, he suggested we either lie low and rest, or head out of town entirely for the morning – it being definitely risky to wander around the streets, as folk might compare notes and notice we are not in fact working for any Boss after all. Definitely, Helen agreed that we head for the hills: she has a definitely suspicious nature, and is happiest with a clear view of several miles with no corners for unpleasant surprises to hide behind.

An hour later, we were on top of the main hill of Krupmark Island, which is nameless on our large-scale maps. I suppose Father would have called it Point 980, after the altitude on our aerial navigation chart – at any rate, there is a good view down to Fort Bob and the airstrip. We could see the docks about a mile away on the South coast – and the only road that even a Model T Ford could negotiate crosses the island’s “Capital” and finishes up at The Beach, out of sight from us at the Western end. A very solid reef fringes the island, with no marker buoys that we can see with field glasses – evidently the locals want only visitors who already know where they are going. This also makes Krupmark a rather secure island, whether against invaders or escapers – apart from one artificial hole in the reef, the only way in or out is through the carefully guarded airstrip.

Although Helen’s expression was rather as if she was coughing up a furball, she admitted that we could either go along with Lars or return to Spontoon and pass on a very inconclusive report that I doubt Mr. Sapohatan or anyone would be very impressed with. Furthermore, even getting away might be rather tricky – If we meet Captain Panapa again, I have definite visions of him demanding all our money and then cheerfully turning us over to whatever local Authority deals with uninvited visitors. So Helen rather ruefully agreed to accept Lars’ help while we can – though adding she would keep her eyes wide open and her holster unbuttoned.

After a few hours exploring and mapping the island, we headed back towards Fort Bob – again, stepping out of the jungle near the airstrip and sauntering up the road as if we owned it. The military manuals

would dictate advancing in rushes between breaks of cover – but in the circumstances I would re-title that idea “how to attract unwelcome attention in 1 easy lesson.” Still – nothing ever goes entirely to plan, as we soon found out.

We had just got into town when three rather ragged individuals with rifles on their backs stopped us and demanded we hand over “Arrival tax” immediately – pointing out that we could claim it back from the Boss if we felt like it. Definitely split-second decision time – had they been in any sort of uniform I would have paid up on principle, not wanting to avoid attention. But one of them rather leered at Helen, and pointed out we could pay part of her tax in services rendered.

Oh dear. Wrong thing to say to Helen (and to me, for that matter). Had any of the three been carrying their rifles ready in their paws we would not have risked it – but Helen “Saw Red” and I followed about a heartbeat later. Our self-defence instructors, the Fairburn-Sykes, did repeatedly say that the two sorts of fights we should avoid at all costs were fair ones and long ones. Helen’s interviewer went right down with a dent in her solar plexus that would have made a medicine ball plead mercy, and the one in front of me was wide open to a “Glasgow Two-step”. That left the third one, a mongrel canine “gentleman” going for his rifle – and greatly to my surprise, I discovered that the rather cinematic “Legionnaire’s Trick” actually works surprisingly well. The whole thing was over in ten seconds – I was amazed, and very slightly horrified at just how our training kicks in.

Still – that left us with three floored natives, who we quickly pounced on and relieved of their rifles and a rather nasty-looking stiletto that one had in her boot. In the films, the thing to do would be to tie them up in an alleyway – but there was no time, and we beat a hasty retreat by roundabout routes to Lars’ office, where he was awaiting us.

There was good news and bad news. The good news was that he had contacted Mrs. Critchley and got all her information, and her promise to help – and the bad news, that there really IS an “Arrival Tax” that one or another of the crime bosses that run Krupmark collect at random from new faces. Whatever their manners, we have effectively assaulted the local Police! But still – he seemed highly amused at our account, and told us that the trio in question were not likely to run to their Boss complaining that two girls had flattened the three of them in fair fight and stolen their weapons. It does make our walking around Fort Bob in these costumes rather more hazardous, however.

This rather cuts down our options – we all agreed that we would have to make our move immediately, or the risk of discovery would get far too great.

(Later) Lars vanished for an hour and reappeared around teatime with two of his trusted lieutenants, Mr. Pikida and Mr. Sstabeek – very impressive-looking gentlemen, being of Falcon and Komodo Dragon stock respectively. He introduced us, and mentioned they would “mind the store” while he headed out for some in-depth reconnaissance to The Beach that night. Exactly what plan we could come up with, depends of course on what he could find out there.

An interesting evening followed – we sat up playing cards with Lars’ colleagues, who are great poker players. They made quite a contrast, what with Boto (Mr. Pikida) with his finely groomed feathers and Sarda (Mr. Sstabeek) in gleaming polished scales – both wearing the loose shirts and shorts that folk commonly wear here. I have hardly seen a grass skirt or head-dress since leaving Mildendo, and they were few and far between even there.

Helen and I had a more restful night, as although we rigged various alarms after Lars’ colleagues had left, she did not insist on staying up on watch.

Lars did not appear till mid-morning – he looked definitely fatigued, and announced that things looked rather discouraging. The good news is – he has found Phoebe Carsholton! The bad news is, that he had little opportunity to do more than pass her a note – as she is in the large house on the front with the lavender door, and he explained briefly what that meant.

As if that was not enough, he says The Beach is the exclusive property of one of the other Bosses here, who would take great exception to what he would see as theft of his assets. There are a dozen “Bouncers” at all times there, who keep order and can radio for heavier assistance, as we suspected. Assuming we could get Phoebe out, there is only the one road, and we would certainly meet the reinforcements coming the other way.

Still – he says he has a loose plan, which will need us both to work – and although he is very keen on rescuing Phoebe, he is less keen on being identified to The Beach’s owner as the one responsible – which is fair enough. After all, Lars has business interests here, whereas we will be happy if we never hear of Krupmark again. He suggested we discuss the matter with Mrs. Critchley, who he says is experienced in this sort of business. A capital idea!

As soon as dusk fell we headed across town to one of the finer houses, rather well funded for a Mission here I would have thought. In fact, it was quite luxuriously laid out. Mrs. Critchley greeted us soberly, and thanked us for our efforts – though she warned that the hardest bit was still to come. Although there was a plan that Lars had sketched out, a lot of it would still rely on making the most of whatever luck we had – happily, being able to think fast on your paws is just the sort of thing Songmark trains us for.

With our sketch maps we went over the “raid” planned for that very night – Lars has already dispatched his flying boat to land in the lagoon half a mile or so from The Beach, where it should have been secured before dark. Boto and Sarda are flying it – the trouble is, that the aircraft only takes two average sized passengers in comfort, with three possible with a squeeze and no full fuel tanks. His employees would guard the aircraft till we arrive with Phoebe, at which point Lars can fly her and one other out and they can make their way cross-country at their leisure back to Fort Bob.

Quite a thrill! Mrs. Critchley mentioned that we would need disguises, of one sort or another. Although the “bouncers” she mentioned rarely go about armed with more than a Billy club against rowdy customers, they have more weapons available, and are liable to use them against obvious interlopers. By her account none are chosen for their razor wits, and there is quite a turnover of staff there; if properly dressed we have a chance of not being challenged unless one meets us snout to snout and starts asking questions. So unless Helen and

myself are going to dress and act as customers, there is really only one disguise we can use if we are going to go in there. When in Rome, et cetera.

Helen's tail and ears were bristling like wire brushes at the idea – but Mrs. Critchley saved argument by announcing she had nothing that would fit Helen anyway. It seems she had managed to sneak another Unfortunate girl off the island last month, who was about my size – the clothing not being considered suitable to donate to the usual Mission charities. She invited me upstairs to a really quite elaborate boudoir for a Mission, and pulled a rather fetching black costume out of a sandalwood drawer, which we tried for size.

I must say, the effect was really quite stunning – although I would hesitate to wear it back Home, I have seen showgirls in far less on Spontoon, let alone the Native costume – indeed, it rather resembles Molly's new dress. Mrs. Critchley fussed and adjusted like a trainer around a racehorse – but overall, the dress fit me as if someone had measured me for it! I cannot say the shoes were comfortable, though – definitely they are not designed for much walking in, though I gained an elegant five inches in rather precarious height. Half an hour's practice was not nearly enough to gain confidence walking in them – though it was a rather fascinating experience. Very different indeed from our usual Adventuring boots with their clinker-nailed soles and steel toecaps (useful in the workshops if an engine drops on your toes. I have the impression the ones Mrs. Critchley buckled me into, are not intended for much outdoor use.)

One thing I had to reluctantly agree on – Mrs. Critchley spotted my Tailfast locket, which she says would never do – it stands out like an Iron Cross on a British uniform. So that had to go into my flight bag in her care, until we are out of danger again. I must say, taking off one shell necklace made me feel far less dressed than anything else; apart from bathing I have not removed it since the day Jerry and I exchanged lockets. I felt very different indeed – not recognising myself at all in the full-length mirror as Mrs. Critchley groomed me and announced that I should pass muster. One assumes she has had much experience with Unfortunates, in her profession.

Half an hour later we were piled into an old Ford lorry jolting along the rough track, Lars driving without telltale lights and Helen and myself keeping a sharp lookout in the back. I notice that vehicles here tend not to have registration plates – possibly so their previous owners have problems identifying them (my Webley-Fosbury revolver that Helen looked after for the evening, seems likewise to have lost its serial number somewhere in its career.) Helen nodded towards our driver with her teeth gritted somewhat, and whispered that if he really manages this rescue she will have to change her opinions of him – but she'd be ready to lose a large bet on it.

Leaving the lorry pulled off the road about two hundred yards from The Beach, we quietly closed the distance (bare pawed and shoes in hand, in my case) and had one final briefing. Helen took up her position at the back of the lavender house, ready to escort Phoebe up the beach to the waiting aircraft as soon as we could arrange it. Despite the rather scanty costume I was hardly chilled at all, indeed being quite shivering with nervous excitement – very like my cousins described being ready to go “over the top” into the unknown.

With a quick wave to Helen, we strolled casually around the front, to the building next to the one Phoebe seems to be in – the wooden houses are spaced about a yard apart, with unlit alleyways between them. Lars pointed up and whispered that he had told Phoebe to be at a particular window ready to leave, as soon as she could – but we would have to get up onto the second floor opposite to see it.

A bold approach is always best, according to Molly's “True Crimes Illustrated” – and Lars strolled in as if he owned the place, gesturing for me to wait outside. About a minute later he waved me in, whispering that he had checked the coast was clear. Inside was a hallway with something like a hotel reception area, with a rough-looking gorilla reading a sporting journal behind the counter, who gave us hardly a glance as we went upstairs together, a difficult task indeed in those shoes. At least I am leaving no fingerprints; the gloves are very stylish and shoulder-length, even preventing me shedding any telltale fur from there.

Then – a most surprising encounter – a tippy lynx girl reeled out of one of the rooms, and collided with me. She took a deep sniff and laughed rather shockingly – before either of us could react she had pulled a perfume sprayer from her bag and doused me, before dancing off downstairs. I could not help but get a snout full of the perfume, a rather nice tingling spice like a more herbal ginger.

I must say, Lars was marvellous – he cautioned me urgently not to breath in, and got us through the next open door into a narrow room where he grabbed a clean pillowcase and doused it in water, before handing it to me as a gas mask and opening the window wide. He reassured me that it would do me no actual harm at all – but that highly refined catnip oil had certain unfortunate effects on felines that has got it banned for public sale over most of the world.

Happily, the room we had stumbled into was just about where we would have chosen – and one supposes that “Do not disturb” signs on closed doors are wholly superfluous here. Standing with my snout out of the open window, breathing deeply through the soaked cloth, I could see the building opposite, and Lars pointed to the window that we hope to spot our target signalling from. The plan had taken us so far – and all we could do was to stay quiet and await events side by side.

I must say, from what Lars had said I expected the catnip oil to work somewhat like Nootnops Blue or a big glass of that highly inflammable Arak that I regretted trying at Xmas. Actually, I noticed nothing of the sort – everything was extremely clear and focussed, and indeed every whisker and piece of fur seemed to have come more alive than ever. Some places more than others – I had to sit down, to save embarrassment as I watched Lars carefully checking the exits and listening for signs of trouble. After half an hour or so he courteously sniffed me and announced that the worst of it had worn off, but that I should still try to breath out of the window.

It was a long wait indeed – more than an hour, with various folk going past outside. I was far less nervous than I had feared – and indeed Lars was the very essence of calm. He mentioned that once any hue and cry started, after the first minute or two there would be little chance of anyone else getting away – whoever was going to reach the aircraft would have to move fast and not look back. Still, he seemed quite unruffled at the idea – I could scent not a hint of worry on him even up close as we both looked out of the window.

Just then we saw the window opposite open, and a feline head silhouetted against the light – about twenty feet away, in the next building. The plan was for one of us to go over with the wire rope ladder Lars had in his knapsack – and to secure it to get Phoebe down to where Helen was waiting. I would have volunteered, but I was definitely not dressed for climbing over rooftops. So without a word, Lars slipped out over the tiles, jumped the gap between the buildings most gracefully, and moved up to whisper with our rescuee.

I waited about ten minutes – growing rather alarmed at the delay. Eventually Lars returned, and for the first time ever I saw him with his tail drooping. A most awful change of plan – Phoebe has a friend she has made here, and refuses to leave without her! That “blows everything higher than up” as they say – especially our finely tuned getaway plans!

Still, the ladder was fixed in position ready to unroll and Helen ready to receive them – I scribbled a note and tossed it out of the window to her, letting her know of the change in circumstances. Definitely we were having to think on our paws, though the waiting (till Phoebe’s mysterious and inconvenient friend was free, I presumed) was exceedingly hard on the nerves – I found myself exceedingly wound-up, jumping at the sound of every creak from the corridor outside. The doors were very flimsy looking, and an assailant such as the gorilla we had seen downstairs could surely charge through them without even breaking stride. Still, there was plenty of noise to cover our moves, with several gramophones playing and the sound of raucous partying from the buildings around.

It must have been another hour (my costume not having a watch) before I spotted movement again opposite us – Lars was out of the window very smoothly and over to assist. The plan was to get Phoebe and her friend down the ladder, then to follow ourselves. All went well, as Phoebe and a canine girl appeared (of coyote stock, dressed in something like the Red Indian costumes we have seen on North coast Spontoon). They were soon down the ladder despite (rather unwisely) carrying large bags, and I saw them meeting Helen and vanish into the shadows.

All had gone very well – I was about to shed my shoes and head out to join Lars on the roof, when disaster struck! I heard voices shouting and a whistle blowing from around the front, and suddenly three large shapes with powerful torches were in the alleyway just below us. Lars did the only thing he could do – let go the wire ladder, there being no time to pull it up, and it would have pointed like an arrow towards two suspiciously open windows. He jumped back in and closed our window and curtains, just in time as a torch beam played across the glass. This left us in rather a pickle, to put it mildly.

I could hear folk banging on doors on the storey below us, evidently working on some well-practised search plan. Being spotted with escape gear and shoes off ready to make a hasty exit would look awfully suspicious – and Lars had whispered that there might be peepholes in some of the walls. It really looked as if we were in for it.

Dear Diary – I could happily write that I grabbed Lars and embraced him quite passionately for the benefit of a suspicious eye at the door. And I did – there is nothing wrong with play-acting, especially in a good cause. It was five minutes later that I began to register that I had stopped play-acting, and had changed gear entirely – Lars had protested mildly, but very soon folk could have been watching me from all the doors and windows in the place and I would not have been discouraged in the slightest.

Oh dear.

Around dawn, the hue and cry had quite died down – Lars told me he had heard the aircraft take off, but I had been far too ... preoccupied to notice. I quite see what Molly means about him, now. She is a very fortunate girl. Indeed, he had to almost drag me out of the room, where I was feeling exceedingly comfortable, out into the cool dawn. We managed to find the truck unmolested, and were soon heading towards the second rendezvous point we had agreed on if the plan went wrong. I had no time to do anything but dive into the truck, bare-pawed and squeezed contentedly against him, feeling wonderfully relaxed though rather chilly as we drove along to where the road neared the lagoon and a sheltered cove invisible from directly above.

Happily, the aircraft was there awaiting us – in fact, everyone was there. Helen had managed marvellously, realising that she had to get everyone away – while Mr. Pikida flew, Phoebe and her friend squeezed into the cockpit and Helen and Mr. Sstabek hung onto the floats. The aircraft had been too heavy to exactly take off, but it had served very well as a high-speed motor boat getting them all well out of reach of their pursuers from The Beach. Our original plan would have been far too risky in terms of getting Lars’ lieutenants away in the face of organised pursuit – had they been seen, even if they had escaped folk might have recognised who their employer is. As it is, they vanished around the corner of the lagoon into the darkness – not even letting the pursuers get a glimpse of the aircraft, which is just as well. Quadriplane floatplanes are rather distinctive, and there cannot be many of this model left flying.

A brief council of war had us scattering to the four winds – the first priority was to get Phoebe and her friend Hontaho off the island – so they took off for Mildendo piloted by Mr. Pikida in the plane, a very nice floatplane conversion of one of the Pemberton-Billings Nighthawk series zeppelin interceptors. It was getting quite light, so Helen and I took cover under a tarpaulin in the back of the lorry for the trip back to town while Lars and Mr. Sstabek drove in the cab. They are familiar faces in Fort Bob, but since our run-in with the local “police” we have to stay as invisible as possible.

I think Helen must have noticed something – she had been sniffing me quite suspiciously, and being in close quarters under a tarpaulin is no way to hide the scent of catnip or anything else. She had looked Lars over quite thoroughly too, but seemed satisfied there – only then did I realise that I would have scratched him half to pieces in enthusiasm had I not been wearing gloves with paw-tips that seem to be specially reinforced for the job. The ensemble is quite the opposite to Helen’s in every way – with shoes that only work indoors and gloves that prevent me from clawing. I hope it is just the after-effects of the catnip, but I found the idea far less disturbing than I think I probably should do.

That night we piled into the back seat of the Nighthawk behind Lars and quietly left Krupmark, hopefully never to return. I am writing this back in our room at the Stone Bure on Mildendo Island where we arrived before

midnight, happily finding everything had been set up for our arrival. Mrs. Critchley had arranged it all with Lars; she turned up this morning, with the helpful news that she has contacted Phoebe's relatives, and let them know she is safe. Rather stretching a point, she informed them that Phoebe has been helping at the mission here (even folding a tablecloth could be defined as "helping" and no mention of how long for) – and that she had only just heard of the alarm and search for her. Which is perfectly true, as far as it goes, and might save a lot of embarrassing questions from being asked.

We have met Phoebe and Hontaho only briefly – the shocking thing is, they do not seem particularly grateful to be rescued! The impression one gets, is that we had "blown her cover" as they say in the detective books, and made it impossible for them to stay once we found out where they were. Of course, Phoebe did not say that out loud – but did comment that her Guardians had tracked her down again, and would be packing her away somewhere respectable for the year.

It is very puzzling – Helen says she would like a long talk with Phoebe, as there are quite a few things in the story that refuse to fit. To hear Phoebe describe it, The Beach was a far more ... equable establishment than we had thought. But in that case, why was there such a hot pursuit? Alas, we are heading out tomorrow and Phoebe is waiting here in Toonabo Town till she is collected - so I doubt we will get the chance. I asked if they were in need of funds, but for some reason they seemed to find that highly amusing.

I must say, Phoebe looked very different, dressed to match Hontaho in very Red Indian style, buckskin-fringed skirt and such. She seems to be very happily "gone Native" for the few days she expects to be left in peace, and I commented that they looked like two very contented Indian squaws.

Helen whispered that "Squaw" does not exactly mean what it is usually used for in the Cowboy films, and is rather more specifically biological. One lives and learns – but I think I was right, either way.

4th September, 1935

Farewell to Mildendo! Lars had to return to his Business interests on Krupmark yesterday, and left us promising to see us on Spontoon. Helen looked after his retreating back with a very puzzled expression, I thought. I found myself quite down in the dumps to see him go, after all his selfless help on this trip. After all, he has gone to such trouble to arrange everything for us!

Indeed, it is something of a letdown – although we completed our mission totally successfully, it did not turn out at all as either of us expected. Returning to Spontoon, we have to think about what to tell, and to whom.

Thinking of which – although Mrs. Critchley returned my Tailfast locket to me yesterday, I have been hesitating to wear it. I fear I have rather spoiled being Tailfast – not "with malice aforethought" as they say, but at the time it was definitely my own idea (Lars did indeed protest somewhat, though I was in no mood to argue.) Discovering I can have such behaviour is most alarming – it is as if our Tiger Moth aircraft had a supercharger that switched straight into about twenty pounds of boost, and stayed locked full on till the fuel ran out – quite out of control, but an incredible ride while it lasts.

Helen says I should blame the catnip – she recognised the scent on my fur immediately, and confesses that she tried it once herself. But never again – she says she manages perfectly well without letting any herb extracts make her decisions for her. Still, I can see how Phoebe might have found it useful to keep up her interest in the circumstances.

If deciding what to tell Jirry was not hard enough, in less than two weeks Molly will be back asking how we enjoyed our holidays. I did promise to keep a close eye on Lars, but I doubt she meant THAT close. That was definitely not in the plans – and worse, being Tailfast and far away from Jirry for the trip, I had no plans for any Precautions either. Fortunately my calendar saved me – the only thing that did. I know Jirry's family would be very happy to see a kitten, but presenting them one with horns might be rather stretching their hospitality!

One thing I am trying hard to regret, is that with catnip one knows exactly what one is doing – and can remember it in great detail. As Madelene X often remarks, "Vive la Difference" – and Lars, Jirry and Tihan certainly are very different gentlemen in many respects. For one embarrassing instant I had an image of myself with one of those medical pamphlets I was shown by that lady doctor from Casino Island, marking off ticks for the various species types like my brother does in catalogues for his stamp collection. Definitely not a notion for a well brought-up girl to pursue! I will try hard to forget it, but am having no luck so far.

(Later) We are back afloat, an hour out on the evening departure for Spontoon. Helen is being no more seasick than usual – that is to say, if she swallowed enough water the fire station could use her as a pump. I felt somewhat more cheerful in the fresh air on deck with Mildendo vanishing below the horizon. One wonders how many success stories in the History books are simplified that way to hide embarrassments? After all, we have completed our mission, returned alive and well, and put some local crime chief's nose severely out of joint. I think we did, anyway. I have acquired a jolly good sidearm and a dress that would cost many pounds over the counter at Rachorska's – the shoes I was definitely glad to leave behind.

5th September, 1935

Back in familiar waters, with less than a fortnight of holiday left to enjoy. The ship's bell awoke us at dawn (we had quite slept through the midnight stop at Orpington) and we emerged rubbing our eyes to see the familiar skyline of Spontoon Main Island on the horizon. I fear Helen is poor company on any boat trip, especially at meal times. No complaints myself, the cook does such marvels with such a tiny galley, that I had to ask her for the recipes for her specialities (chicken-fried steak and steak-fried chicken.) At least Helen's sense of humour is intact; she was speculating if she can get a discount on the boat ticket for her meals – strictly speaking, anything she eats in a rolling ocean swell like this is not exactly consumed, but borrowed. It all comes back.

We had an hour or so to pack and get ready before swinging round past the sand spits and whirlpools of the Eastern passage and heading across the lagoon towards Casino Island. I noticed workmen at the tip of

Eastern Island taking down big checkerboard-marked pylons – and we realised we had totally missed the Schneider Trophy races! An awful blow, spending all August in these waters and missing out on THE Spontoon event of the year – the other girls will never let us live it down.

Certainly, things will have changed since we left; Miss Pelton is no longer Miss Pelton, but Mrs. someone – I could not recall her fiancé's family name, if indeed we were ever told it. I do recall being told that Miss Wildford would be taking on a more senior role to replace her, having after all been on the scene since Songmark was founded. Maybe we will hear something more about her – it would be interesting to see her relatives, and discover where she gets that fur pattern from. Helen has always maintained our dear Tutor is a good customer for the cosmetic dye industry.

Helen looked out at the liners departing, and murmured that all around the world, prospective First-year Songmark girls are packing their steamer trunks. Indeed, any relying on scheduled sea travel all the way from Europe, might already be on their way! A frightening prospect. We are going to be uncomfortably sandwiched this year, between having the awful responsibility of looking after the “new bugs” as they call them at my Brother's school, and still being sat on by the third-years just as much as ever.

Still – whatever happens next month, it was good to see the islands again. It's great to be back!

6th September, 1935

(Written under a palm tree, Haio Beach, South Island)

Dear Diary – it's amazing what one can get done in a day. Yesterday we shed our Adventuring costume for respectable Native guise, and headed for South Island by the first water-taxi available. We had telegraphed from Mildendo (they have a wireless telegraph, which works – sometimes) of our arrival, and Mrs. Hoele'toemi was on the Hotel Bay beach along with Saimmi and Jirry to meet us. A postcard was on its way to Post Box Nine, not that I suppose they need to be told of our return – but to keep in their good books we had best keep in touch.

Thinking of which – happily, I can report that my Tailfast locket is around my neck again. As is Jirry's – he had kept his own for me. I confessed everything – although there were some parts of the story he seemed very disturbed by, he seemed more sympathetic than shocked about what I had done with a snout full of catnip. He seemed far more concerned with the exact details of how I had been dosed with it, and had me drawing in the sand exact positions and timings of everyone involved.

Still, we are happily Tailfast again – as I write, Jirry is taking a much-deserved siesta. As a Guide, he has been showing dozens of folk around the remoter parts of the island, and admits that some of the lady Euro tourists are persistent and determined to do more than they will write about on the postcards. I can quite understand it – the jokes about “school ma'ms” behaviour on holiday two thousand miles from home are definitely based on truth. Both of us are what one could call on Active Service – and what we have to do as part of that can cover an awful lot.

There is news from Casino Island – it seems our pal Beryl “bankrolled” half a dozen of her former school friends to come out here, much to the dismay of the Casino authorities and everyone else. Knowing Beryl, I would not be surprised to find out there was some profit-sharing scheme agreed before anyone broke out of Saint T's. Four of them have been accounted for, having been caught and deported in time – but two are still evading capture. I feel rather like pointing them towards Krupmark Island, and sitting back to watch the fireworks from well over the horizon.

The Schneider Trophy races went very well, with no serious crashes this year and some record-breaking performances. The Italians came second, with one of those odd hydrofoil based racers that sit as low in the water as a canoe at rest. The trouble is, even the best pilots have an awful time at take-off switching between the water and airscrews at fifty knots – half of the takeoffs turned out to be “splashdowns” instead. Still, I wish I could have seen them making the attempt. For the first time in years the French team won, with an aircraft powered by the top-secret “Radium” engine that put out more than two and a half thousand horsepower, according to the team! Helen has commented that my predictions tend not to turn out too accurately, but agrees with one of them - Madelene X will be insufferable this term. Britain came third, but (for the first time) using nothing but a slightly customised Service fighter plane, which should cause a few foreign military tails to fluff in alarm.

Although I missed a lot, I am very happy to be received back with Jirry and his family, despite everything – I am very contented, right now, and hope it will last. As that poem we had to learn at St. Winifred's has it, “A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou.” Substitute breadfruit and Nootnops Blue for the bread and wine, and there you have it!

7th September, 1935

I should have known it was too good to last – troops returning from the Front get a week's home leave, but we had scarcely two days. I returned from my morning swim with Helen, Jirry and Marti to find a postcard waiting at Mrs. Hoele'toemi's house – there is no signature or return address, but an invitation to meet this evening and discuss our mission. I think we know who THAT is from.

After a few minutes of walking around with our tails and whiskers drooping, both Helen and myself decided to make a day of it – there is no point in worrying about whether we are going to be sent off again tomorrow, we will find out quite soon enough. Happily, both Jirry and Marti were free, with the tourist season tailing off and no film crews currently on the island – so we packed a lunch hamper under their mother's approving gaze, and headed off for a picnic on Mount Tomboabo.

It was quite a welcome return, to go past the Spontari Guest House and up the valley we explored in mid-winter – there has been what the locals call a lot of wind through the palm trees since then. The view was splendid from the rocky northern peak, looking out over the central waters and Casino Island – and there are

some grassy hollows just under the peak quite invisible except by air, where a very pleasant afternoon was passed. Helen is quite right, there is absolutely no need for catnip.

A rapid return downhill was followed by a bathe in the stream, then a hurried change of costume and we crossed the island to Hotel Bay, the big sandy bay where most of the tourists on South Island stay. There were still quite a few of them around, as two of the largest tour boats were still berthed across on Casino Island – Jerry tells us one is leaving tomorrow, the other early next week. But we had a rather less public meeting – the back room of a Native teahouse, where there was not an Euro costume to be seen.

As we expected, Mr. Sapohatan was there – we had passed on a brief report, but he quizzed us very keenly about our experiences on Krupmark Island. He was exceedingly interested in what I could tell him about Lars and his activities there – his business ones at least. He made both Helen and myself go through what we had seen of the rescue and getaway, and had us describe Mrs. Critchley in detail (Helen is very fair at sketching, and furnished a passable pencil portrait.)

There is a first time for everything – Mr. Sapohatan shook us by the hand, and thanked us for having completed the mission exactly as planned, though he commented that we had had some very close shaves and had been lucky to get away. We hardly expect him to tell us these things, but he mentioned he would be having a very long talk with Lars in the near future, and expects to get some direct answers from him.

Still – we could all relax, as he says there should be little to do for a few days. I did ask how our German Scientists were faring, and if they had blown up themselves or each other yet. Surprisingly, it seems that both pilot plants are up and running at maximum ferment, without much fuss. Professor Kurt is winning the race so far as regards power generated, but both sides are being awfully fastidious about the rubbish they select, and are very far from simply being able to plug a hotel drainpipe into the inlets of their “Bio-Reaktor”.

Back to the longhouse, where various cousins had annexed it for the day and left their kittens to play. It feels very natural now – and when I was hiding in the scrub of Krupmark Island wishing I was home, I have to confess that I was thinking of here and not Barsetshire. Of course, we do very well there – folk come to England from all over the civilised world and non-colonial nations for a fine education. But the Spontoonie ideas seem to suit the locals very well – everyone’s friends and relations piling into shared longhouses rather than packing the kittens off to governesses and boarding schools. Jerry is very good with the cubs and kittens, who are a very good-natured bunch and rarely howl the place down without good reason.

10th September, 1935

Dear Diary – after 2 idyllic days of swimming and fishing, we donned our more respectable shirts and shorts and headed out to Casino Island, leaving the Hoele’toemi brothers to a much-needed rest. (I can see there is more than one good reason to ban catnip – I have heard one can have too much of a good thing, but I have yet to prove that.) It was a very fine day, slightly cooler than it has been – I recall thinking on our arrival last year that late September was swelteringly hot, but then I had come from a Barsetshire “summer” and not a Spontoonie one. Mercifully, second-years are not obliged to wear the very Euro Songmark blazers.

After nearly three weeks in the field and on the waves, we could enjoy a full morning’s shopping, with all the tourist stalls and shops still open to grasp the last departing tourist dollars. It will be very different next month, we know – many of the stall holders will be back tilling the family fields on Main Island, and the show-girls will be at the bank wiring their wages home before following them back to the respectable shores of Europe and America. It must be an awful shock to return – though looking at a poster for a rather scantily clad Amerind chorus line, I remember hearing there have been Apaches in Paris for years.

Thinking of returning Home – I had some postcards from Father on Kerguelen, where he has been helping the French Army make it virtually unassailable by any armoured formation likely to invade. He writes that he will be sending me a certain aircraft kit via surface shipping as an Xmas gift, if I promise to only fly it in the Pacific theatre of operations. What joy! And I thought he disapproved of my dear Flying Fleas!

Alas, this is tempered by him warning that he might be away next holiday as well – the French must have been particularly impressed, as he will probably be still in the Southern Hemisphere, demonstrating how to secure the French Antarctic coast from gas attack. At least it will be Summer there.

We passed the Casino around lunchtime, but there was no sign of Beryl – Helen commented rather sourly that we were either eight hours too late or too early, with Beryl’s bohemian timetable.

One thing we spotted as we rounded the back of the Casino kitchens – two small tractors pulling covered trailers, parked at the service entrance. There seemed to be some argument between their crews – as we came closer, I noticed that although they were certainly locals by their costume, one team wore caps with a blue circle, and the other had armbands with a green arrow symbol on them. It was all I could do not to burst out laughing – evidently, here are the rubbish collectors for Spontoon’s newest power plants, fighting it out as to who picks up the choicest organic fuel for their respective projects! Still, the vegetable peelings from the prestigious Casino are not just any old rubbish.

Ten minutes later, we had strolled across to the Northern side of the island to see where the poi peelings and fishbones are destined to end up. I must say, both rivals have worked hard since we last saw their efforts. They look remarkably similar structures, in fact – as both have topped their tanks and pipework with rather elegant square black pyramids (plain for Professor Kurt, stepped for Dr. Maranowski) that I recognised as solar heat collectors. Helen noted that before the oil boom brought cheap fuel, Texas and the Western states were covered with similar collectors.

We were not unhappy to miss encountering Dr. Maranowski – but Professor Kurt was hard at work on his site, dressed in a very elegant black boiler suit with the green arrow of his company brand prominent on his sleeve. He recognised us, and most courteously invited us to tour his site – which we are amazed has not blown up (yet) in the slightest. The sight of several empty drums of ether gave us cause to wonder, I must say.

A most comprehensive tour followed, the Professor fairly radiating enthusiasm as he pointed out technical details – and like a true devotee, showed us the first finished samples of his process. I must say, his “Bio-Reaktor” is most marvellously efficient, running at sixty degrees centigrade it can break down the most noxious things into very fine garden compost (which he is donating free to the Casino Island parks.) By his accounts, even the finished product of his rival is a rather noxious sludge that one would not want to spread on the rose bushes under one’s bedroom window.

On enquiry, we discovered the meaning of the various insignia the rival workmen are wearing. Doctor M’s methane project has a stylised gas bubble, and Professor Kurt’s green arrow represents direct progress towards vitally healthy growth. He is really quite a dynamic individual, both Helen and myself being very impressed with his achievements – our impression is that Mr. Sapohatan has misgivings about his politics, but really Professor K has hardly mentioned which way he votes, let alone pushed his views on anyone. After all, their present Government is has changed its nature entirely since the aggression of 1914-18, and seems entirely occupied with improving the domestic standards of its people. At any rate, I remember Erica saying that their leader’s main plan was to expand everyone’s living rooms – or words to that effect. On the newsreels last month we saw great national road networks under construction, the “Autobahns” that are threading the country. Being able to move huge numbers of vehicles rapidly to any of their borders should do wonders for their commercial and tourist trade – I expect in a few years the resorts of Europe will see German visitors everywhere.

We accepted Professor K’s kind offer of luncheon – he did ask when he might see our report of his project written up. At least we could truthfully say that we had put it in the paws of our editors, and it was up to them – and honestly, there was nothing in our articles that could not have been printed in the Daily Elele. So we left his workers busily loading the small mining trucks with superannuated palm thatch and the vegetable trimmings from the last few tourist banquets, and retreated upwind to our favourite apre-dance class venue, The Missing Coconut.

There is something to look forward to next month at least – back to our Dance lessons, hopefully with more relaxed Passes this year. Term commences for us and the third-years on Monday the 18th, though the new arrivals should start appearing any day now.

11th September, 1935

Just when we thought things had settled down for a few days – we were on Haio Beach when Beryl turned up this morning on the arm of her young gentleman friend, Mr. Piet Van Hoogstraaten (Junior). She is looking very well, positively bubbling with mischief – and was very eager to hear of our adventures.

We gave her a rather condensed version of our trip – her friend Piet was somewhat surprised that we had managed to get away from Krupmark Island, (we did not elaborate as to how or in what company) and said he had heard that Security there was getting lax. From Beryl’s accounts, she and Piet have what I would have called a rather unusual friendship consisting of robbing each other in increasingly complex “scams”. Beryl announced that currently the score was about even – and looking up somewhat hungrily at her rat friend, hinted she had some ideas for changing that. Piet smiled good-naturedly, ruffled Beryl’s head-fur and predicted she would finish the week without a pot to spit in. (I paraphrase.)

Still, they seem quite well suited to each other, and the total sum of money between them is increasing by all accounts, regardless of whose pocket it is in at the minute. Beryl asked if we had kept up our self-defence classes – we mentioned some practical uses of them we had been forced to, which she was keen to hear of in blow-by-blow detail. She was very impressed that I had learned the “Glasgow two-step”, and added that most of her old comrades would have been amazed to hear someone from a school such as mine proving so effective. Though I am proud of my chums at St. Winifred’s, I am rather glad none of them heard that remark.

Apparently, Piet gets the finest private tuition, including self-defence tutors of international notoriety. Personally, I would not list being expelled from all the sporting bodies as a qualification, even after having won most of their prizes first. Mr. Toshiro Finkelstein of South Zion seems to have mightily irritated the established Masters in self-defence arts, with his hybrid and brutally efficient hybrid fighting art of “Jude-Jitsu.”

It seems Beryl has been quite living the high life, scheming and partying with the Hoogstraaten family and their crowd – despite last week having been blacklisted from the Casino for reasons she refuses to explain. She made rather light of it, claiming the really interesting gambling is elsewhere, for folk who have the right invitations. Beryl means well in her own way - she extended us an invitation which we had to refuse, as gambling for money is something both Helen and myself avoid. As Father always used to say – when one sees a bookmaker wearing ragged trousers with the seat worn out and gamblers driving past in new cars – only then is the time to take up betting.

We asked about Beryl’s comrades – two sisters as it turns out, Jezebel and Salome Pennington-Fforbes (unusual names, but their father is a defrocked archbishop.) Beryl smiled, slyly tapping her muzzle in that irritating way of hers as she hinted they were still at large on the island and doing very well for themselves. She added that they were recent graduates of Saint T’s, and had passed with top marks in all the most popular subjects. One shudders to think.

When Beryl and her friend had gone, Helen and I talked the matter over. Although it would normally be very bad form to hand over my own countryfolk to a foreign power, for the sake of international harmony I could happily make an exception in this case. If we happen to identify this pair Post Box Nine should know immediately, their response hopefully involving nothing more drastic than two one-way tickets and firm escort out of Spontoon.

Thinking about it – I know we promised Jerry’s grandfather to behave as honorary Spontoones while we are here, but things seem to be progressing far faster that way than I ever thought when we promised back in

April. Within reason, if Mr. Sapohatan calls us tomorrow and hands us a Mission, we will metaphorically salute, grab our packs and rifles and head in the direction he points. I had quite a long talk with Helen about this.

Helen was rather pensive for awhile, then pointed out that we have come to actually like this sort of thing. There has never been a dull moment, true enough – even between trips, the thought of being ordered (or strictly speaking, Requested) into action at short notice, makes us make the most of what leisure time we have. There are other compensations too – she was looking towards a squad of trainee lifeguards exercising on the beach, and bluntly asked me how the ... company back home would compare, after our becoming accustomed to the friendlier pace of life here. She pointed out that even if I am Tailfast, I can unashamedly enjoy the view.

I fear she is quite right on that score – the nearest equivalent back home would be to frequent athletic halls and wrestling rings, which is absolutely not what a well brought-up lady does if she has any regard for her reputation. It is very different here – there is a dance festival down here at the beach tonight, where we will be shaking our grass skirts along with the Hoele'toemi family and their neighbours, followed no doubt by a fine supper and suchlike under the stars. Definitely, all this is worth agreeing to do a few little jobs for Post Box Nine, especially as they have all been perfectly respectable missions.

It has been a whole year now that we have been here – in all the confusion, I forgot to check last year's diary until today; we should have been celebrating our anniversary on the 7th. Still – we will try and make up for it tonight.

12th September, 1935

A wet finish to the tourist season – last night was an excellent dance under the stars, with some of the last loud-shirted tourists finishing off their films ready to take home. Both Helen and myself are now back in our fullest Native guise, our fur oiled and patterned with the appropriate markings. I had my head-fur styled for the night in the same fashion as Moeli, and when side by side we did look quite believable as sisters. She is perfectly recovered, and was bouncing into the dance routines like any gymnast, no doubt having used the exercises her Mother mentioned. I must definitely learn those myself.

Still, by the time the fire died and we headed back, Mrs. Hoele'toemi mentioned that the weather looked like changing – and indeed she was right, though whether she used traditional Polynesian portents or Radio LONO I could not say. At least, the tourists heading out will have the consolation that they would not be missing much had they stayed – it is quite as torrential as when I arrived last year!

Some things have certainly changed though – I hardly expected then to be waking in a snug longhouse built for two, listening quite contentedly to the rain landing soft on the thatch and dripping from the eaves. And definitely I was not expecting to have such company – in just over a week I will be back in a Songmark dorm with Helen, Molly and Maria for company, but right now I far prefer things just as they are.

We had been planning to work on the garden patch, but everything was far too wet, so a very pleasantly domestic morning ensued. The longhouse is of full width, but only one end is fully finished with marvellously carved doorposts and the like. The Hoele'toemi family prefer traditional designs – none of their houses have corrugated iron roofs or window shutters, which are awfully noisy under hammering rain. When I asked Jerry, he explained that the main house structure is meant to be permanent – longhouses are made to be lengthened, expanding to suit growing families.

This seemed a good time for us to talk: I know I have been an honoured guest of the family for months, sleeping under their roof, sharing their feasts and everything else going. My first year of Songmark is over – in another two years I can imagine various possibilities, some of which leave me feeling rather uncomfortable. I imagined waving farewell and departing for Europe – having taken up Jerry's time and his family's resources for three years, and left them with nothing but a few photographs (which do not last long in this climate.) In that time, if not for me he could have found a respectable Polynesian girl and started extending the longhouse.

Of course, there is the other extreme – I could tell our Tutors to advertise my place as vacant, and walk down the trail this very morning to ask his parents if they would accept me as a daughter-in-law. That would make a lot of people very happy, including me. But then – I have put a lot of work into gaining Songmark qualifications already, and imagined myself wistfully looking up from hoeing the garden every time an aircraft flew overhead. There are lots of feline girls in the islands who are better dancers and better cooks than myself – but if I pass the Songmark course, I will be a far better asset, to myself and for everyone else. A qualified commercial pilot earns a lot more for the family than a breadfruit-picker.

Jerry was very understanding, and jokingly pointed out that even our tutor Miss Pelton ended up marrying into a Spontoonie family, one very distantly allied to his own. So that's what she did! But after a career that long, her fiancé would have waited an awfully long time had they met at our age. Actually, I had the impression that Miss Pelton had spent many years shocking everyone except the rather hard-bitten matrons of Songmark – and that she would have taken great delight in crowning everything by managing to shock them too.

Still – we are very happily Tailfast, and he assures me that his family will never be lying in wait for me with a net and a priestess around some corner. They would not need the wedding head-dress, as I already own one. In fact – he pointed out that unlike myself, most Native girls have some years of deciding who they will even consider being Tailfast to – and should I not wish to formally renew our lockets in December, he would think none the worse of me. Certainly, no Native girl is expected to don her wedding head-dress without knowing exactly her other options would be.

I was very grateful to hear it – and demonstrated it to him, and then again. I am sure I could not find a better feline to be Tailfast to – and I certainly have no idea of wearing the locket of anyone else's fur. (The whole morning, I must confess I was wearing nothing else, outwardly at least.) Jerry kissed me most admiringly, and reassured me that no holidaymaking "School ma'am" can possibly compete with me, even if they do spend all year saving up everything for the holiday. He does not just mean their money.

The afternoon was just as interesting, though more public – after a bath in the waterfall pool we rejoined the family and Helen, who seems to be getting used to having cubs using her as a climbing-frame. A postcard had been forwarded to us – not from Post Box Nine but from Songmark. Almost a case of “Talk of the Devil, here he comes” after all our talk about Songmark this morning.

The card must have known just where to find us, for we were requested to present ourselves that very evening – happily there was no mention of dress requirements. Anyway, strictly speaking we are on our own time until the 18th, and can refuse to go if we feel like it. We will accept the invite, though.

(Later) An interesting trip! Although the main Songmark compound is locked up with evidence of a lot of decorating work going on inside, we met Miss Devinski there who invited us to Song Sodas. Even without the custom of sixty or so thirsty students, it keeps going all year round. Her eyebrow raised at the sight of our (respectable) Native costume, but she made no comment.

It seems that we are the only (new) second-years to be found, as Missy K has not been in touch since July and Beryl has vanished again, probably doing something criminal. So we have been given the task of watching for new students arriving, as they are already on their way. I protested that surely the staff have arrival timetables and such – certainly I recall they had met me off the boat last year. But that assumes rather a lot – schedules slip, and impatient folk can upgrade their tickets to faster routes. I know that one of the new German cruise ships, the Norland that we saw visiting in June, has a flying-boat that it can catapult off the deck to speed mail and urgent passengers the last thousand miles.

We gave in, with (I must confess) rather ill grace, as we both had thought of other plans that did not involve hanging around the airport and docks waiting for straying first-years. I did mention that we had more Official demands on our time in the holidays – at which Miss Devinski nodded and conceded that the two duties need not clash. Well! That definitely clinches things, regarding how close in our Tutors are with the Authorities!

13th September, 1935

Pouring with rain still – which is disheartening enough, but there is worse. We had hoped to stay in Native dress until the night before Term starts, but we are going to be the official welcoming committee and have to be dressed accordingly. So farewell to oiled fur and comfortable Ulául fabric sarongs and an unwelcome (if brief) return to our Songmark official blazers, which have not been worn since church trips before Easter. If there is one thing worse than wearing heavy blazers in semi-tropical heat, it is mixing the heat with one hundred percent humidity! Our fur underneath will be a sorry sight by the end of the day.

Still, there is some satisfaction – we get to sew a second bar on the official Songmark “Musical note” insignia; a higher denomination note now, one might say. I remember the day Father sewed his General’s rank badges on his uniform, explaining that there are tasks one gives to the tailor and tasks one reserves for oneself.

To pass the time waiting for aircraft to arrive, we have some world maps and timetables with which we are tracking the various new arrivals’ routes; it is hardly as if there was a dedicated Europe to Spontoon direct service! Even from England one could travel here heading East, West or North if one flies the big Caproni Ca60 triple triplanes over the Pole. Still – we have home addresses and starting times, and are working out who might be the first to arrive.

At least, we are in good company at the airport. We are not the only ones with holiday jobs, our friend Violobe and her class from the Guide’s School are working here as trainee stewards and stewardesses, keeping track of everyone who pass through. I suppose this time of year, the bottom drops out of the market for tourist Guides. Violobe was showing us how they memorise faces and fur patterns, a more developed version of the native game involving shells and pebbles that we had practised last month with them.

Looking at the list of home addresses, one definitely gets the idea that Songmark’s fame has spread to some unusual places! Although they will all be classed as “Euros”, that will hardly describe some of our new school chums: Helen had to check the map twice to confirm there really IS a French colony called Ubangi-Chari, and I had only heard of it myself from my brother’s stamp collection. None of our maps mention the Russian town of Ryshynsk, so Miss Tatiana Bryzov could be from anywhere between the East Prussian border and the seaside overlooking Japan. The rest are from a fairly random scatter around Europe and the Americas, apart from one from Japan.

However, our Tutors were perfectly right about needing someone to watch out – we had set ourselves to watch for likely-looking Euro girls of our age travelling alone, whether or not they had travelled in the specified uniform. How on earth folk get a Songmark pattern blazer tailored in the backwoods of Middle Europe or darkest America, I can hardly imagine. And on the first flight of the day, a rather fine Saunders-Roedeer “Sea Spirit” bearing the Royal Hawaiian Airways livery, we spotted our first one. A canine girl with a mass of curly red head-fur and a new ‘08 Pattern knapsack on her back was heading into the Customs shed with a determined stride – certainly a likely candidate. Our first new arrival is Brigit Mulvaney, an Irish lass who was so keen to get here that she actually did fly one of the “Stiff-neck specials” as they call the courier seats in a mail plane to Hawaii.

Helen took her over to Songmark and left me covering the arrivals lounge. Still, between flights I had time to talk with Violobe, and mentioned something of our Summer adventures. She seemed interested in the most surprising details. Still, she has reason to take an interest, considering that I rescued her from a not dissimilar fate than Phoebe. Getting Violobe or anybody out of a more organised country would be a lot harder – definitely the sort of trip to leave to one’s third year.

By the end of the day Helen and myself had spotted and escorted another two new arrivals, and were definitely annoyed with having drawn this duty. Helen was grumbling about quitting, heading out with a few days with the fishing fleet and leaving our Tutors to it – as it is they who are paid to look after Songmark, and we are the ones who are (indirectly) paying their wages. Quite true, but we agreed to do the job and I will stick to it, alone if necessary.

Violobe turned up just as we were ready to leave, and announced that they had a surprise for us – it seems there is a celebration tomorrow night that we are invited to, a “moveable feast” that takes place at about this time every year. She winked, and mentioned that it could be some consolation for our hard work. I could certainly use one after today, and with only days of unexpectedly hard work leading up towards the start of an even harder second year at Songmark!

September 14th, 1935

We are getting to know the Eastern Island passenger terminals very well – being less than a mile apart, we wander between the seaplane and the airstrip terminals as reports came in of passenger flights on final approach. Strictly speaking we could sit on the edge of the runway and watch out the direct way – it takes easily half an hour after landing for anyone to claim unloaded baggage and get through Customs.

Violobe is a great pal, and helped us get through the long day – she is in much the same job right now. She introduced us to two of her Uncles who work at the airport – she spends her Summers with “Custom” for the tourists, while they are in Customs of a very different sort. I was rather puzzled at what folk would try to smuggle into Spontoon – all the drinks and such are cheaper here than in most tourist’s home nations, and items like Nootnops Blue are wholly accepted here anyway.

It seems that it is not just the traditional hats packed with choice cigars and folk with twenty watches on their arms that they are concerned with – it mostly concerns people. One of them confided that they had bundled two “Undesirable Aliens” off the island yesterday, who had been run to ground by our classmate Missy Kahaloa and her fiancé. So that is what Missy K has been doing! I expect that Missy K’s dorm will be a lively place this term when Beryl finds out – on enquiry he confirmed that it was indeed her two surviving school chums from Saint T’s that had been deported.

Anyway, by the end of the day we had intercepted another three first-years and escorted them to Songmark, to join two whom Miss Devinski had met off the boat on Casino Island. That’s a quarter already! A few familiar snouts have appeared, Prudence being spotted with her friend Tahni in Native dress on the beach. Looking at our map, anyone who wants to be back for the start of term must already be on their way.

We met up with Mrs. Hoele’toemi at the longhouse and with great relief changed back into fullest (in other words, scantiest) Native dress, including my head-dress. Mrs. H-T told us the rest of the family were already heading out; mystified, we followed her to Hotel Bay where a small fleet of water-taxis was waiting for us. Quite a long trip across the central waters to a small flat island marked on the detailed maps as Aha Island, which we have been all round but never set paw on (there is manifestly nothing there.)

There was certainly something there tonight! There must have been five hundred Native Spontoonies, by far the biggest crowd entirely in Costume I have ever seen in any one place. There was something else, towering in the trees against the sunset – a gigantic figure that for a second or two had me wondering if there was more to Ethyl’s “Weird Tails” than I had believed.

Actually, Mrs. H-T explained it to us – tonight is the local festival of “Hoopi Jaloopi”, to celebrate the official end of the tourist season. Since it takes place on the first fine night after the last tour boat leaves, the exact date varies – presumably why we have never seen it mentioned on any calendar. The giant palm-leaf figure was of a rotund character in a deafeningly loud shirt of painted sacking, with a “camera” slung round his ample waist made of a tea-chest with the bottoms of gallon glass flagons as lenses. Quite a painfully accurate character study, made by folk who have had their fill of the originals by this time of year.

An excellent evening, with dances and bonfires and many barrels of palm wine drunk around the fire. Almost all the conversation was in Spontoonie – which was just as well, as the main topic was anecdotes of outrageous Tourist behaviour this season. Our Spontoonie language is now getting practised enough to understand jokes and slang, though the “Satirical Hula” had a few bits we could not quite interpret. Mrs. H-T was laughing till the tears rolled down her cheeks, and gave us a running translation of the Missionary’s Daughter and the Canoe Crew, which had our ears blushing (though I could quite believe the story, except the bit about the Tiki statue.)

One supposes the locals sometimes think of catering to huge numbers of tourists rather like doing a full shift down a mine – it brings in the cash you need, but at the end of the shift it is SO good to stop for awhile. Within reason, anyone with a grass skirt in a “Custom” area has to get used to being an unpaid photographic subject, and the occasional wandering paws are treated with a laugh and a light word. I doubt the Tourist Board would really thank us for losing our tempers with valuable sightseers and practising that “Cheltenham Death Grip” that Beryl taught us. No, not even the Roedean Nerve Pinch!

Jirry and the rest of his clan were all there, and we joined in the dances till the moon came out. It was really a very familiar sight; apart from the costumes and the dance steps it was just like the traditional country festivals in the remoter villages of Barseshire. There was even the giant wicker man set up on the village green (or close equivalent) for us all to grab a torch at the signal from the presiding priest and set light to. Molly would have loved this. The Spontoonie wicker man did not have quite the refinements of fine old villages such as Goatswood back home, but the traditions here are young still.

A splendid evening, with some spectacular dances – and dancers. There was one who was missing – I had found myself looking around to see if Lars was there, but there was no sign of him. It was a relief in a way – I hardly know what I would do if I met both him and Jirry, but it would be awfully embarrassing. I hope he has not got into trouble with the Authorities after all he did for us – and even on Krupmark he behaved as honestly as the situation allowed. I even recall him dropping a roll of money in the bedside drawer as we left that room at The Beach; after all, we did use their room all evening, and he is not the sort to cheat on any sort of Hotel bill.

Back after midnight, a fine walk under the moonlight down the trail from Hotel Village to our longhouse. I noticed Missy K on the other side of the fire – in fact I noticed her fiancé first, as Missy K was hard to recognise in Native dress (which I have NEVER seen her in) and minus about twenty pounds. I doubt she will ever be

exactly slim, as she is solid in that Polynesian way, but she has certainly fined down considerably even since July. One can imagine her running down the renegades from Saint T's, whereas a year ago her best tactic would have been to lie in wait and drop on them like Billy Mitchell sinking a battleship.

We have another four days, but plan to use them as best we can. It was very fine to return to our longhouse, hang up the lantern and close up the blinds against the night moths. A very well built structure, with roof timbers planned to last and carved as heirlooms – except that sturdy but plain back wall, which I sometimes find myself looking at with a most peculiar sensation. After all, there are only two basic choices – somebody in the Hoele'toemi family is going to need to expand the back wall one day – either I become a part of that, or I never do. Not the sort of thing we discussed on the debating team back at St. Winifred's!

September 15th, 1935

Up early, and out to the waterfall pool in the quiet. Mrs. H-T was already there, perhaps taking a brief respite from her very crowded longhouse (eighteen counting Helen right now.) She had mentioned awhile ago certain traditional exercises the Island women do, and I asked her to teach me. At one time I would have thought them rather indelicate, but now I can quite see the point – certainly Mrs H-T has a very fine figure, despite her large family.

Alas, duty called Helen and myself away from such pleasant company. Back into blazers and off to the airport, timetables and maps in paw as we settled down to more Songmark-Spotting. The long-distance flights leave Hawaii and the Dutch East Indies at about midnight local time to arrive here for breakfast – and indeed on the first arrival on the Humapore route we had three more first-years (plus Adele Beasley.) One of them took an awfully long time getting through Customs – it appeared they had to dust off some very rarely used official guides to remind themselves what a passport from Ubangi-Chari is meant to look like.

Saffina Montmorency is a very strange looking girl – she quite towers over us, and would be a typical lioness if not for her fur pattern. Where in the world do they have tabby lions? She speaks very good English, though with a French accent: certainly Madelene X should be glad of someone to talk to. There are few lionesses living on Spontoan; I could not really name any apart from the one we occasionally see working on that garish old Junkers that keeps appearing off Eastern Island at odd times.

On escorting them back to Spontoan, we picked up some postcards that had arrived for us. One from Erica in Germany, hurrah! It seems she has been seconded from her role as a Party organiser, and is part of the team planning sporting events. I hear that next year's Olympic Games in Berlin is expected to be a well-attended event. Another card is from Maria in Italy, though the mail only travels a few days faster than passengers and she should be arriving any day now. It will be super to see her again.

No first-years on the afternoon flights, though Jasbir Sind and Irma Bundt showed up; it really feels like watching a house being built brick by brick. At least we are appreciated – Miss Blande turned up and noted that no first-years had slipped past us (on arrival last year Adele Beasley turned left instead of right from the runway and was lost for hours) and that only four were still missing. She took us to one side, and confided that she had some unfortunate news about Molly.

Oh dear. It seems that of the various Family traditions Molly had described to us, paying taxes was not one they specialised in. Simply “going legit” as she described it, merely made their earnings visible to the Government, who were not interested in being paid in tins of PAMS. Her Father had to stuff all the ready cash available into the hold of his seaplane on Lake Inherently-Superior, and dodge the pursuit all the way to exile in Cuba. That looks like an end to the family fortune, as the Authorities seized the PAMS factory and there is very little profit to be made these days in importing beers and wines.

Poor Molly! I remember being quite shocked to see the actual size of the Songmark yearly fees, and sincerely hope hers are already paid for the next two years. If not – it came as an awful shock to realise we might never see her again. Both our tails were drooping at the prospect – although Molly can be most charitably described as a trigger-happy Pyromaniac, that does not make her a bad person.

We were given an afternoon off, much to Missy K's annoyance as she was press-ganged to take our place. We have had no word from Molly since she arrived home in early August – it will be very hard to help her until we know where she is, and if she is managing to get here at all. Just paying her rent on Spontoan is not a problem (we could raise those funds ourselves), the real stumbling block is the accountant-terrifying Songmark bill. We have seen the new flying-boat being overhauled for us at Superior Engineering, and all that will have to be paid from our fees. My allowance is generous, but not that generous – and Helen's education is taking almost all the money her late Father left her.

Song Sodas proved less of a lift to our spirits than we had hoped, recalling the fine times our dorm had had there – without Molly there would be an awful hole in our ranks. All of Prudence's dorm are here already, and were catching up on lost time with their native friends. We were quite surprised to see Beryl though – who stormed in with her tail swishing and her ears right down, demanding to know where Missy K was hiding herself. News travels fast around here.

Beryl calmed down after awhile, and explained that her schoolfriends Salome and Jezebel had been doing some important work for her friend's father, Mr. Van Hoogstraaten (Senior). I hardly dared to ask what that was – but by her account they were very physical types, having been in the First Fifteen Rugby team and both having at various times won the Harriet Ffinchley-Smythe cup for the dirtiest rugby tackle of the season.

After finishing our sodas we left Beryl quietly sharpening those croquet stakes of hers, and were glad to leave Songmark behind for the evening. Being able to stroll out for a free evening is a treat that we are appreciating all the more for only having 2 more nights away from our dorm. Indeed, Prudence and Tahni were at the water taxi docks heading over to Main Island just as we were off to South Island. Naturally, Songmark is a respectable place – it takes great planning in term time to get away for the evening, though I suppose that makes it seem all the more worthwhile. Although we have often envied students of the Spontoan Island

Technical High School for being able to go where and when they please, getting round our restrictions is probably a better education (the staff have broadly hinted that we can probably get Anything in life if we work and plan for it properly.). Though I do love ice-cream, having it served at every meal would make it far less of a treat.

A very pleasant evening working in the garden plot helping the Hoele'toemi family with their Taro harvest, before returning to our longhouse. It is a reassuring idea – though we may be travelling all over the islands next term, at least this will be waiting here for us when we can get away.

September 16th, 1935

Hurrah! It seems that Beryl has been “volunteered” for our job of student-spotting, so we are free for the day. Hopefully our Tutors will have her covering one air terminal and Missy K the other, or there will be fireworks. Today being Saturday, the four of us headed out to see the sights of Casino Island. Today the illuminations are turned off – although the last of the big tour boats has gone, there is always a trickle of independent travellers to cater for.

Jirry and Marti tell us they are quite glad to get away from carrying film canisters and escorting waddling tourists from beach to bar and back again – still, it pays better than picking bananas. Actually, there are quite a few industries opening up around Spontoon, mostly on Eastern Island – there is a tannery that has managed to produce fish-skin leather, which though not very strong looks very striking for head-dresses and other decorations.

Thinking of fish, Marti has a friend who I hope is well-paid – I remember the fish cannery on the North coast of Main Island from our Easter trip, and he is hauling about a tonne of fish bones and innards a day from there to Professor Kurt's power plant. I doubt the Althing really anticipated the good Professor importing waste to Casino Island – quite the reverse! Still, even the pilot plant is pouring two hundred kilowatts into the local power system, and the Casino Island parks are blooming as never before.

I keep expecting to hear a loud bang from the Northern shore of Casino Island, but so far so good. Both the new power plants are quite impressive pieces of engineering, considering what they are running on. In all the stark Futurist films they show cities of the future as being lit by Radium furnaces and the like – sadly there is no Radium to be had in these islands. Rather a disappointment to our former third-years, who left about two tonnes of Uranium yellow cake in the Tanoaho's cellar. Nobody will ever want that much for pottery glaze, will they?

We had a fine luncheon at a quite empty tourist café run by one of Jirry's cousins. It advertised “Hams and cigars – smoked and unsmoked”. The ham was a rare treat, but we definitely left the cigars. None of us smoke, though we considered getting some for Maria. She has been known to make herself ill with the occasional cheroot when our Tutors are not watching; at least the fumes keep mosquitoes away.

In fact, we spotted Maria arriving, as a large Cant seaplane in Italian Air Force markings flew overhead before vanishing round the shoulder of the hill heading for the Eastern Island seaway. That had to be her, we agreed – her Uncle is always so considerate, and often arranges a military escort to take her out of his jurisdiction. It was rather a dilemma whether to drop our plans and rush over to meet her – but we will have very few days like this, and we will have a whole term to catch up with Maria's adventures. I just hope Molly is with her.

Jirry had mentioned having a surprise for us – he had four tickets for the last dance show of the season at the Coconut Grove! Although we have seen dress rehearsals and the like there we have never been to a full performance. A most impressive show – though our jaws dropped when we spotted two rather familiar dancers on the back row. Jasbir Sind and Li Han managed to get onto the stage after all, despite what our Tutors said – which is probably why they arrived early. As Beryl has said, “it is easier to ask forgiveness than permission.”

I must say, they did very well, and would have made at least our dance tutors proud. Seeing a Maharajah's daughter in a showgirl costume is something that would make headlines in the more lurid papers – we will not be telling our journalist friend Missy Aha about it. At this end of the season, I can imagine some of the Euro dancers will have already left, providing vacancies that Jasbir was quick to fill. We are all learning to grab whatever chances we get, a subject which is not exactly written in the Songmark timetables.

Back to South Island early, very keen to make the most of our final evening. Tomorrow night we will be tucked away in respectable dorms, with laundered sheets and pillows instead of palm matting and wooden head-rests. When I first saw those I wondered how anyone could sleep on them – but I have got quite accustomed to the idea. There is an awful lot I will have to manage without this term.

September 17th, 1935

A day of hello and goodbye – Helen and I had a last luncheon with the Hoele'toemi family, before shouldering our kit bags and resolutely striding down the trail to Hotel Bay. Of course, today being Sunday, Maria was there, just leaving Church! The Chapel of the Sacred Heart is absolutely the only Euro church on South Island – it was built in 1890 to serve the plantations, before the Spontoonies quite settled what could be built where.

A fine meeting indeed – Maria is looking in very robust good health, having been wandering the Italian Alps all summer. Her Uncle had the fine idea of promoting tourism in the somewhat impoverished mountain regions, so sent Maria and a camera team to film the remotest peaks and valleys they could find. He certainly makes the most of Maria's time – on the final day he had an autogiro pick her up from a mountain meadow and fly her straight to the coast and a seaplane waiting with the engines running!

We had quite a lot to tell her about our Summer – and indeed, we could tell her quite a lot about our Krupmark trip, excluding some of the more unfortunate details. She regretted having missed the trip, but by all

accounts had a lively time herself. Part of the trip was to visit a training unit of young “Alpinieri” mountain troops, which involved spending a lot of time watching the frontier from remote mountain huts. At least Maria was never short of anything to do.

Alas, there is no sign of Molly – Maria has heard nothing of her, and neither had anyone else when we returned to Songmark. It was interesting to move to our new dorm block though, with everything freshly painted and decorated for the coming year. The new rooms are not over the Staff resident quarters but over the classrooms, and a little nearer the fence. We see possibilities here.

One thing we did straight away was to check the walls and furniture for possible hiding places – Maria says she has missed Nootnops Blue, which is not available in Italy. With a little adaptation we can put our radios and other things in there securely; our Tutors still tend to confiscate anything that is sloppily concealed.

I had handed over my Webley-Fosbury revolver to Miss Devinski to store in the locked cupboards in the staff room, but some other souvenirs of the trip I am keeping close by. The dress Mrs. Critchley found for me is now washed and pressed – when Maria and Helen went to shower I put it on, looking at a very different person in the mirror. Certainly there could not be any catnip traces left on it – but I did feel very peculiar as I wore it, remembering the last occasion. I must say, my regular Songmark sandals really do not go with the outfit, and caught myself standing on tiptoes to judge the effect.

I just changed back and packed the souvenir away in time before Maria returned, wondering if I will ever use it again. All our gear is now neatly stowed away, ready for inspection tomorrow – we are sure our Tutors will be starting off by brushing any cobwebs away, one way and another. Looking at the empty bed I must confess that for awhile I had almost forgotten about Molly, what with everything else – and have to confess to an uncharitable thought. If the worst happens and she never gets back here, at least I will be spared telling her about Lars and the last time I wore it...

(Written before lights-out)

Well, here we are, all showered and groomed, with our second-year uniforms all neatly cleaned and pressed for tomorrow. Helen and I have brushed out the fur patterns marking us as trainee Spontoones attached to the Hoele'toemi family, though I will be wearing my Tailfast locket in class whatever anyone says. Our timetables are loading down the desks with a promise of an awful pile of work in front of us – tonight is the last night we will be really relaxing for a very long time.

It has been a splendid holiday – but it is over. Tomorrow, our Second year begins!

(And Amelia's adventures will continue...)

