



# MALAYAN CLIMAX



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CARLINE REID

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*The Author*



# MALAYAN CLIMAX

Experiences of an Australian Girl  
in Malaya, 1940-1942

CARLINE REID

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1944

Robertson & Mullens,  
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## MALAYAN CLIMAX.

It was midnight, and almost cold on deck. In front, a wild display of fireworks sputtered and glowed, beads of fire crossed and recrossed the sky in wide arcs looking like falling stars, and flames, such as I had never imagined, rose higher and higher into the heavens and were reflected in the inky water.

The scene of this exhibition was Singapore, and the date was 11th and 12th February, 1942. The flames came from fires in the town, Go-downs of rubber near the docks, an island of petrol whose tanks were drained out and set alight in accordance with our scorched earth policy. I counted 13 enormous fires along the coast in front of where we squatted. . . . The spurts of light which flashed about the sky came from tracer bullets, and it was grisly but fascinating to watch them change their target, spit, spit, woosh — then the bang of the gun joined in with the other noises. Sometimes they seemed to be coming right at us and there were horrid moments of suspense. At one time a searchlight wavered about the sky and cast its beam right on to our ship; that was grim, too, as one never knew who was behind any gun or light.

I think there was a full moon about this time, but the night in the Roads was only lighted by the fires of Singapore and the flashes of artillery; the thick pall of smoke blotted out all else — incidentally, it was that smoke which caused us to anchor for the night; the Captain could not risk tackling the minefields through that awful curtain which trailed miles out to sea.



Though our ship still had to run the gauntlet of dive-bombers, submarines, raiders, the whole Jap Navy for all we knew, to me at least, it seemed a haven of peace and safety after the business of getting to it. It had been a long day, so, in spite of raucous snores from a dark shape nearby, and rumblings of hunger from my own inside, I curled up amongst my few belongings and went to sleep.

That was the last we saw of Singapore; we got away about dawn, a perfect target for Japanese bombers who were lying in wait.

If anyone had told me when I arrived in Malaya two years previously that I would end up by being ejected from the country in the inferno already described, I would have said they were mad. To begin with, I only meant to stay a month with friends in Kuala Lumpur and then return to Australia by another route. My return ticket expired in three months; but somehow I stayed on and became involved in the life of the place, and there it was.

## CHAPTER I.

Directly I arrived in the Federated Malay States I was taken up Frasers Hill for a week. This is a popular hill station where people from all over Malaya take bungalows to cool off and imagine they are home again. One plays golf vigorously all day, forgathers at the Maxwell Arms after the game, and then goes home to dinner and a crackling fire.

After Frasers Hill I stayed in Kuala Lumpur and was fascinated with the place, its lovely buildings, its green jungley background, its nice people.

My friends knew many of the wealthy Chinese, and took me to their houses. I remember my first Chinese dinner, bird's nest soup, then juggling with chopsticks through dishes of shark's fin, noodles, a complete roasted sucking pig (brought in with the whole of the crackling cut into squares so that one could snip up a piece at a time with one's chopsticks; only the crackling was eaten, the rest of the body taken away). Most of the food was delicious, the only dish which did not appeal seemed to have as its foundations the beaks, eyes, and claws of some gawky bird; I came across this several times afterwards, but never really enjoyed it. Throughout the meal one nibbled melon seeds; there is quite an art in biting them the correct way to uncover the kernel; and after about ten courses we ended up with oranges cut into slices. After this hot, wet towels, heavily scented, were brought round to the guests for a really good clean up. . . .

The time went very quickly. We played golf and tennis, dined at all sorts of places, and danced at the Club. We went to Port Dickson, a famous seaside beauty spot where one feels completely torpid and swims and sleeps, and watches the native crab catcher paddling about in the shallow water, his trousers rolled above his knees, his large coolie hat balanced on his hoary head.

There are casuarina trees and cocoanut palms silhouetted against the tropical sky or fiery sunset—glassy water reflecting all the colours of the rainbow—sampan—native fishermen throwing out their ancient circular nets. Bathing at night when all is dark till one plunges into the water and the sea, being disturbed, lights up with twinkles of phosphorescence.

There were frequent Asiatic holidays; Chinese New Year (which does not coincide with our New Year at all), when the Chinese had great parties and festivals, decorated their shops and houses and let off crackers all through the day and night to frighten away the devils.

Then there was Hari Ryah, the end of the Mohammedan's fast—this affects the Malays. For a month beforehand no good Mohammedan will have allowed food or drink to pass his lips while the sun is up—though they gorge themselves to their heart's content during the hours of darkness. At the end of the month they celebrate with enormous feasts, buy new clothes, and have one or two days' holiday. This corresponds with the Feast of Ramadan. On their holidays the Malays strut about in their finery, a most picturesque sight, the girls looking perfectly sweet in their white lacy bajus, bright sarongs, rolling their eyes behind lacy scarves.

There are also Tamil festivals. Indians come from all over Malaya to worship at Batu Caves—vast subterranean caves in one of which has been made a Tamil temple. There were enormous processions, fire-walking, the worshippers doing penance by driving nails into their bodies, threading skewers through their noses—one man towed a cart for several miles from a rope which was tied to a meat-hook hooked through the muscles of his back!

Chinese funerals could be seen at any time; there was an enormous Chinese population. The more wealthy the deceased the more noise he could afford at his funeral to drive away the devils, and the more magnificent the pageant to follow the coffin. Enormous effigies, pictures, scrolls, flowers, paid mourners wearing special suits of hessian and hessian hats in the shape of candle extinguishers. Weeping and wailing, lanterns bobbing, paper figures jogging with the motion of the carriers, roasted sucking pigs carried on a kind of stretcher between two coolies: an amazing sight. A wealthy man would have several different bands marching to his funeral, all making as much noise as possible, crackers cracking, cymbals crashing, Bedlam let loose.

Then the war news in Europe got worse and worse—Holland was invaded, France fell. Malaya began to realise something must be done. For some time no men had been allowed to leave the country to go home and enlist, the production of more and more tin and rubber was considered the most important thing, but nearly all the men belonged to the Volunteers and did parades in the evening.

In June a two months' mobilisation was ordered, and this meant a real upheaval, many businesses being hopelessly depleted over night. Women with a little office

experience offered their services and were catapulted into amazing jobs. My friends said why not stay on for a while and take a job? They were terribly good, and helped me polish up my shorthand, and before I knew where I was I was taken on by a large firm which controlled rubber estates and had different departments of Engineering, Shipping, etc. If my week's trial proved satisfactory I was to take the place of two Engineers and the Manager of the Import Department while the men were in camp! During the week before they left I was to learn the job of importing and also do a short course of engineering and learn about Diesel engines!

For the first week I was in a complete haze, but gradually warmed up to the task and was terribly impressed by the enormous desks flanked with filing cabinets and a great array of telephones and bell buttons. The Engineering office was air-conditioned and most luxurious; one pushed a different bell for whichever clerk was wanted. The other office was huge, and the three clerks were within ear-shot; I just had to hail them with "Chong" or "Cheng", or whatever name it happened to be. They were marvels of efficiency, but had to be watched.

The Chief Clerk was rather a slippery gentleman who had a tendency to run underhand rackets of his own. One day he was caught out and lectured by the Director. The loss of face was terrible; he was very glum all the morning till at tiffin time he said he was sick and wanted the afternoon off. When I asked what was the matter he said he had diphtheria, but he would be back without fail next morning; he only wanted to have a perfectly free afternoon to take a purgative.

These clerks spoke and wrote very good English, but now and then made some amusing mistakes. One rang up a shipping office to see when a certain ship was to come in. He said: "Is it true that 'Bahar' is giving birth at Port Swettenham on Monday?"

There was no need for the shorthand at which I had worked so furiously, because I, with a business record of six months' typing, was expected to dictate my letters to Asiatic clerks! I spent hours poring over old files getting the phrases. Needless to say, the Director dealt with all controversial matters.

I was a little chary about signing things at first, then I got quite abandoned and would scrawl my name on everything. I had to sign all the bills (in quadruplicate), sign my own letters and those of the clerks. One day I overdid it and signed an important document which should have had the signature of the Director—and did not discover my mistake till it was well on its way to London. I went cold all over with shame for days after whenever I thought of it.

One day I was told to call in all acid demijohns from planters, but some of them took no notice of the threatening letter I wrote (copied from an old one in the file), so I had to ring up and jog them on. One man was very argumentative, and told me how the business should be run, and asked a lot of difficult questions which were hard to counter. Then a few minutes after this conversation he rang up in triumph to say that the acid was bad anyway.

So I rang the head of the acid firm, who happened to be a friend of mine, and told him about the bad acid, adding that the client was awfully fierce, and had put me on the spot.

The next time this planter rang up he was full of sweet reasonableness and began his conversation with "I am not going to be difficult this time" — a non-committal grunt from me — "Well, that is what you told T., wasn't it?"

After that we got on well, and over a year later, when we had all evacuated to Singapore (he was in the L.D.C.), we were laughing about the day he had bullied me, and he went as far as to say that he had always admired the way I had coped; "but," he said, "there is something I have always wanted to ask you, Where did you learn to write those stinkers?"

After the first mobilisation period the men came back, but I was asked to stay on another month, as others were going on short leave; and I was whisked away to the Shipping Department, and filled the gap there for a while. Then some more men went into camp, and I moved on to Estates Department, and learnt about rubber seeds and budwood, and arranged about the sale of the year's fall of seed from the "isolation garden" of special stock.

I used to have appointments with a lovely Sikh person who had dazzlingly white teeth and wore a white turban, who dealt in scrap rubber. He was frightfully hush hush and confidential, as he always expected others to outbid him if they knew his price. We would go into conference for hours during which time he would tell me all about himself and his factory — he was very entertaining.

One day I watched one of the engineers trying to get sense out of a Chinese contractor who had failed to finish a job. The contractor spoke no English and had been smoking opium all the morning, so he was difficult to deal with. A Chinese clerk acted as go-between, and the old contractor (who looked rather like Cecil Kellaway, with absolutely no expression on his face, his trousers dangerously low on his hips) carefully misunderstood every word. The clerk got exasperated, and, tired of singing to him in Chinese, barked at him in Malay.

Several more people joined in, they drew pictures of engines and factories, they acted dumb show, and it was all hopeless. At last a few golden words fell from the old man's lips and we waited for the translation by the clerk. It came. "Yum Hing says it is quite alright." . . . . The engineer shrugged his shoulders: "You win."

Filling up gaps in the staff and learning quite a lot about Malaya I stayed with that firm for six months. Then I had a few days off and spent Christmas up the Hill with a very cheerful house-party.

We danced at the Club or stayed at home and roasted chestnuts in the fire, played golf all day—usually with a regular foursome, but one day we got involved in a match with some friends in another bungalow, four players a side, each with one club. The man with the driver began, then the No. 2 followed, then the 6, and the putter in strict rotation. Of course, we all got mixed up in no time, and the one with the putter would have to drive and the No. 6 to putt, and so on. There was a dramatic finish when the captain of one side was left with a five foot putt and a driver to do it with. He had not had much success with this club on the greens, so we thought it was all over, but he lay down on the grass and used the club as billiard cue—and sank the putt!

On 2nd January I started the New Year with the Selangor Defence Corps, still meaning to go home in a month or two.

At first this office was in the State Treasury in the Government Buildings, but after a month or so we moved to part of the old Police Depot. The cinema was converted into offices, Q.M. Store and Armoury, etc., and one looked down on the Parade Ground, edged with green grass and trees. Every evening parades were held there, and when all-day exercises were in progress there was a grand view of it all. (I remember in one of these trial "wars" when a Platoon was ordered off to some imaginary incident, they embused with great speed into the Corps transports, the fattest member (an enormous man) was left to last. He heaved himself aboard, and the vehicle started off rather precipitately, and he fell off again and was left bouncing on the gravel.)

Of course the L.D.C. was a voluntary Corps and all the officers and men had to keep their own businesses going, though they spent a tremendous amount of time organising and training. The permanent staff at H.Q., besides myself, consisted of three Asiatic clerks—two Chinese, one Tamil, two Malay Armourers, and a Sikh jaga (watchman), and later three Indian guards, for the Armoury. They were an amusing collection, and often got jealous of one another and wrote priceless letters to

the Adjutant, saying, in high falutin language, how they were being slandered. The letters were usually written by the public letter-writer and flowed with wonderful phrases, "honourable sirs" and "humble servants."

About this time some friends going on leave lent their house to another girl and me for three months. It was a lovely place, one of the nicest houses in Kuala Lumpur, on Maxwell Hill, behind the town. There was a grass tennis court, an air-conditioned room, a cook and two boys — one a dear old Indian, one of the most perfect servants it would be possible to find; the other, Ah Tam, was also a gem. The Syce was another old pet, and they looked after us like queens and thought we were a great joke. . . . I wonder what has become of them now. . . .

It was while we were at Maxwell Hill, that petrol rationing came in — I celebrated it by going home in a rickshaw from the office; it seemed no distance in a car and one did not notice the hills. My rickshaw man was not one of the most athletic, and when we came to a downhill stretch, the wheels ran away from him, and the puller was being pushed instead. We got faster and faster, no brakes of course, the coolie was panting and blowing and making other queer noises, but had no hope of pulling up. He tried tipping the shafts away up, then pointing them to the ground; it was a toss up whether he could keep moving at this speed; I knew he would have no compunction about letting go altogether if he could get out of the way himself.

At the bottom of the hill Malay women and children and chickens were scattered all over the road; they saw and heard us coming, however, and parted like the Red Sea for the Israelites — and to my intense relief we reached the foot of the hill the right way up, not even a dead chicken to show for it. The coolie pulled up with a groan and looked at the rise in front. . . . I paid him off quickly and walked the rest of the way!

Then there was Easter up Cameron Highlands with another house party. A lovely place over 5,000 ft. above sea-level, cool and bracing. We went on an expedition away beyond the hills to Blue Valley where the remains of the Sakais still live — these are some of the last of the primitive wild men who lived in trees and killed game and birds with darts fired from a blow-pipe about 8 feet long. They are ugly little people but extraordinarily clever with their pipes which they still use to get food to augment their diet of tapioca roots and bananas, and fish.

One day we walked to the fish hatcheries where the ova (brought from England by air in blocks of ice) was hatched out to stock the streams; fish do not spawn in

Malaya, but by this method it was possible to keep the rivulets in the Highlands replenished with trout. One of the party had his fishing tackle, and caught quite a number of small fish.

The country there, like all Malaya, is very beautiful, and to get to the hatcheries one walks through jungle, wet and steamy; I remember great patches of wild gloxinias which were out at that time, and trails of flowering creepers.

. . . . Golf on the excellent golf course, chatty bridge in the evenings — then back to Kuala Lumpur and the heat, with plenty of work waiting.

I took a flat about this time and discovered that all amahs were not treasures. At first I got a huge raking woman who could not even speak Malay, the universal language, but only her native Chinese. We had two words in common, one, "wantee" (my language), and "chow chow" (eat) — hers. As I left for the office at 8.30 each morning and did not come home till dusk there was not much time to do ourselves justice at dumb-crambo, also I discovered she was only trained as a child's amah and could not cook; so I had to sack her — I was afraid I would have to keep her till I learnt Chinese but managed to get my meaning across by nearly pushing her down stairs and showing her a week in 7 fingers of my hand.

The next amah did surprising things, though a pleasant little creature. She was supposed to be able to sew, so I asked her to unpick a few inches of seam in a dress I wanted to alter. She took it away and presently came back with all the seams unpicked and the garment in several pieces. Another day she washed the clothes in my Elizabeth Arden soap, then scrubbed the porcelain bath, the jewel of the flat, with a metal pot scraper — smiling pleasantly the while. The back quarters were always untidy, her little braziers and cooking pots of evil smelling Chinese makan were strewn about the back verandah, so one Sunday morning I had a grand clean up and gave her places to keep everything. She had been complaining that her bed was breaking so I threw open the door of her little room to see to it, and there was a half-naked man asleep on the bed! No wonder it was breaking! Drawing myself up to my full height I said, "Apa orang" — What is this man — and was met by such a flow of Malay and Chinese that I was none the wiser, and had to wait for counsel from the "mems" at the Anzac Club, that afternoon — they always knew the answers.

There were four flats in the building and the one under mine had lately been taken over by an Asiatic Club, the members of which played queer and noisy card games



till 1 or 2 or even 6 o'clock in the morning, and the noise came clattering up through the open windows. The flat upstairs across the courtyard was occupied by a rather wild member of the L.D.C.; he used to get furious with the din made by the Club, and one night when he came home late, badly in need of sleep, particularly hilarious game was in progress down below. He could see them through the open window, clustered round a table, yelling and jumping up to grab the cards. He remembered his air pistol which fired darts and the temptation was overwhelming, so, taking careful aim as one of the worst offenders leaned over the table with his back towards the window — he let fly — and scored a bull's eye.

The victim let out a scream, and, thinking he had been stung by a night wasp, tore off his trousers in the midst of a jabbering and excited crowd. At last the dart was discovered and caused great wonder and amazement — from whence had it come and by what hand?

In the end the police were put on the track of the man who had done the deed and he got into all sorts of trouble, was heavily fined and had his pistol confiscated. But he said it was worth it.

The other flat downstairs was occupied by a Chinese family, usually very quiet, one could just hear the rattle of tiles as they played mah jong in the evenings. Some times one of the occupants bathed at odd times and one would hear him whistling blithely at 2 a.m. as he swished water over himself with a tin dipper which banged and scraped — but only occasionally.

At the back of the flat was a hill covered with rubber and jungle and peopled by monkeys. If I stood on the back balcony and threw bananas or papaya skins they would come cantering down the slope or swinging from trees — old mother monkeys with babies hanging round them upside down, big ones, small ones, hairy ones, and indecently naked ones, all playing about like circus clowns. I liked the monkeys.

The flat was very central but it had its disadvantages, and it was rather a relief to move out near the golf course where I shared a bungalow with Margaret while her brother was on leave. There was an excellent boy and reasonable amah and a smoothly running house. We were very comfortable.

The whole of 1941 was very hectic — there was a great deal of work to do getting the Selangor Defence Corps going, with an enthusiastic Adjutant who worked 13 hours per day regularly every day of the week between the L.D.C. and the State Treasury; then when I could get away in time there was golf and tennis in the evenings, or watching polo. Kuala Lumpur was still quite

gay. People worked harder, but they still went out to dinner and danced; when they had leave the men wanted to do something. The town was full of soldiers from every British country; Kuala Lumpur was a big centre and the number of Generals and Colonels was prodigious. One man at the Polo Club asked one of the local military men (a very huntin', shootin', and fishin' type of person) to dine with him; the other answered, "Awfully sorry, old boy, I am looking after a 'giggle' of Generals that night."

The Anzac Club was started at the beginning of the year, and I did a regular shift on Sunday afternoons there. Originally this club was for the Australian troops in Kuala Lumpur when they arrived in great numbers, but later it embraced British other ranks from any part of the Empire. It was a great success, and had most energetic helpers; women who had lived in the East for years and years, waited on in every way, would work for hours on end in a sweltering kitchen, and quite enjoy it. It was not just one burst of enthusiasm, they did it regularly for a year, some were there every day.

Sunday was one of the best days in that the Club was always crowded. In the rainy season you could hardly hear yourself speak, what with the rain on the roof, the piano or gramophone (one of them was always going), the babble of the men. We would go home hoarse from shrieking "two sausages and eggs and bacon" and so on to the kitchen and carrying on a belled conversation with the troops over the counter. Everything was worked out and hundreds of men could be handled very quickly. On the big days one would give the order to the kitchen, run to the enormous Ali Baba jar of fruit salad, ladle out a measure full, put a dollop of cream on top and sprint back in time to grasp the sausages as they shot through the hatch.

On Tuesday evenings we would dance with the troops at the Masonic Hall; strapping great men, fighting fit, and a most inadequate supply of girls. They taught us barn dances, polkas, old time waltzes, and the band scarcely paused for a minute. Though most of the men were good dancers in their vigorous way there were always some who stepped heavily on the feet, and when it was over we would crawl home absolutely exhausted, with toes which felt they had been broken, to bathe our wounds. The heat was terrific and the men just poured with sweat.

## CHAPTER II.

Being in the office of the Selangor Defence Corps in Kuala Lumpur for the whole of 1941 I had a pretty good idea of what was going on and what was expected of the potential enemy, but it is safe to say that what they really did was considered absolutely out of all probability by most Malaysians. People realised that "something" might happen, indeed, a few had been sure of it for months and had had great trouble in making the slightest impression on people who should have been preparing to combat it. I know I typed many letters very much to the point for W. F. N. Churchill, one of the people who saw what could happen and did his best to make others realise it.

I think it must have been the Musical Comedy setting of Malaya which was her downfall; to the average individual it always seemed hard to take things seriously. Imagine a background of lush green jungle full of monkeys, an odd tiger, and thousands of cicadas, which make a continuous blur of rather rasping sound. Towns and villages peopled with Asiatics of every variation of race and colour, talking all kinds of improbable languages, wearing fantastic clothes of all colours and shapes from loincloth to sari or sarong and baju. There is no drabness in a Malayan town, the first thing that strikes one is the glorious jumble of colour, the bright blue of the rickshaw pullers, the lolly-pink favoured by the Tamils, the reds, greens, purples of the Malay's sarongs. Coupled with the unreality around one is the Malay's lazy, attractive frame of mind, "Tid apa" — it doesn't matter. Why do today what you can put off till tomorrow? "Tid apathy," as someone put it.

Things seemed to be getting really serious, however, by the end of November, 1941, and by Saturday, 29th, it was realised that war was more or less inevitable. That morning the Colonel had had word from the British Resident that the Selangor Defence Corps was to stand by. Guards were mounted at the Power Station and the Telephone Exchange, Despatch Riders and Messengers and a skeleton staff were always on duty at Headquarters.



Malay Children,

Photo by courtesy of Mrs. J. N. D. Harrison.



Mata Matas (Malay Police), before the invasion. (When the Japs came they showed a tendency to hide their uniforms and rifles and slip away to the jungle.)

Photo by courtesy of Mrs. J. N. D. Harrison.



Chinese Temple, Kuala Lumpur.

Photo by courtesy of Mrs. J. N. D. Harrell



The Mosque, Kuala Lumpur. Destroyed by bombs in one of the early raids. Hundreds of Malays were worshipping there at the time and the casualties were very heavy.

Photo by courtesy of Mrs. J. N. D. Harrell

I remember the tense feeling at Headquarters waiting for word that the balloon had gone up. The Colonel, the Adjutant, and other Officers were in deep discussion. Maps had to be unearthed, and plans of Vulnerable Points; they were calling for confidential files, and in between all this we were ringing up more men to tell them to be on call . . . word might come through any minute to say we were at war with Japan.

Presently there was a loud "ping" on the line reserved for in-coming calls. I answered it and all heads turned, ears cocked, in its direction. There was a moment's pause while someone was connected through an exchange—I was thinking, so this is how a war starts—then suddenly a very confidential voice said "Have you got anything good on for this afternoon?" Anti-climax. The speaker was rather startled to find he had been put on to the wrong number, he was only concerned with the races which were to go on that afternoon in blissful ignorance!

However, the war did not begin that day, and some time during the afternoon I went home to lunch.

That night some of Kuala Lumpur's amateurs were producing "No Time for Comedy" for the War Fund at the Town Hall, and I was in a party dining first with the Federal Secretary at his lovely house, Carcosa. This was the former British Residency and stood on one of the hills overlooking Kuala Lumpur (at this time still brilliantly lighted). When we arrived our host was at the telephone talking to authorities in Singapore, and all through dinner he or some of the guests were being interrupted with messages and cables—things were warming up. Still we all went to the show (and incidentally sat immediately behind the Sultan of Selangor, a rather insignificant little man but for his beautiful clothes which, on this occasion, had gold thread woven with the silk. The Selangor National Anthem was played as he entered; it goes, rather disconcertingly, to the tune of "Pop Goes the Weasel").

Normally we would have all gone on to the club to dance, but this night, after the play, we returned to Carcosa. The party had grown enormously and we stayed till all hours—not really because we were enjoying ourselves, but one had a queer feeling that something was about to happen, and was reminded of the old story of the Eve of Waterloo.

In spite of getting to bed about 3 a.m., I was up again at 6.30 next day as I was being called for to go to a picnic out in the Ulu to see an elephant—some had lately been rounded up into a stockade. It was a wonderful day. We drove through rubber plantations, jungle, some padi, and finally bananas, and after crossing the Jelabu Pass

with its magnificent scenery, came to the spot where two Indian mahouts were beginning to educate the elephant. They had painted its face blue and red and were teaching it to be a law-abiding and useful beast.

We went on still further after seeing the poor animal put through its paces, past the little village of Pali mentioned by Bruce Lockhart in his "Memoirs of a British Agent" (it was here that he lived on a rubber estate and kidnapped a royal Malay girl, and subsequently withstood a siege by the Sultan of Negri Sembilan of that time), till the road petered out in one of the nicest little Malay villages I have ever seen. No European lived there, probably the natives never saw a white face except on their rare visits to the town over the Pass.

Here we had our tiffin, in the local Courthouse which was little more than an attap roof with a raised dais at one end and a bench and chairs. The local schoolmaster showed us round with pride, he was evidently the Tuan Besar of the village and looked sweet in his sarong and baju. The school was of the same pattern as the Courthouse, but had walls, round which were displayed patriotic posters and pictures of the King and Queen, Churchill and the Sultan — the writing underneath was in Malay script, which looks like Arabic.

At odd times during the day our thoughts would return to the Japs and the war, but in this torpid distant village cut off from the world by hills and hemmed round by jungle in which monkeys, elephants and wild native things carried on as they had done for thousands of years, it seemed very far away. However, we could not linger long, and by 4 p.m. I was back in Kuala Lumpur dealing out sausages and eggs to troops at the Anzac Club. The news was just the same.

That week is just a blur of hard work and uncertainty, of endless talk about attacks, Jap transports sighted off the Thailand coast and so on, till by the Friday we were once more being lulled into the idea that *perhaps* nothing would happen after all. "Who could imagine the Japs being quite so foolish as to attack a country like Malaya, so full of troops and having only one or two possible routes of any use to an attacking army. . . ."

I remember having my hair done by the Jap barber at the Selangor Club on Saturday as usual and wondering if he would cut my throat instead of my hair. I also remember a party given by some popular Americans on Sunday evening to say farewell before going on leave to the U.S.A. It was a huge affair, and it was reassuring to see most of the leading military and Government officers amongst the people who drifted in and out — the general idea seemed to be that things were looking better.

I had a late dinner at the Club Chambers afterwards with P., and finished up by driving out to the Hong Fatt (Sungei Besi) mine. This is an enormous cavity, its sides banked up by terraces faced with turf, the biggest open cut tin mine in the richest tin country in the world, and it looked its best at night with every terrace outlined in lights. One could see the coolies, like ants in an inverted anthill, shuffling about the illuminated terraces, towing their little trucks of precious tin.

A lovely moonlight tropical night—little did we know that just about that time Jap planes were bombing a horrified Singapore, Jap hordes were landing at Kota Bharu in the north and making their devastating attack on Pearl Harbour. A lovely moonlight night, indeed—just what they were waiting for.



### CHAPTER III.

Everyone was staggered at the Japs' effrontery and the speed at which they moved; we all worked hard and waited for a stand to be made up North.

Presently evacuees began to arrive from Kedah, first women and children, and then the men; most of them pushed on to Singapore, but a few men got jobs and stayed. Soon they were followed by evacuees from Perak and then the war came really close — but a stand was to be made at the Slim River. It was reported that General Heath could hold that position for months.

I shall never forget the day the first Perak evacuees arrived. Exhausted women driving cars loaded with people, children, cots, a few belongings; some had driven all night and their eyes were popping out with fatigue. They had mostly been ordered out of their homes at very short notice and told not to take more than two small suitcases. Their husbands had disappeared at even shorter notice to join the volunteers — they had no idea when, if ever, they would see them again.

Later all the L.D.C. men from up North arrived and many of them joined the Selangor Defence Corps. Most of them were quite cheerful but some had had a pretty bad time; for the first time I saw a white man who was really frightened and done in — it was not pleasant. He was as white as a sheet with a terrified look in his eyes, and so shaky one felt his legs could not carry him much longer. He was not young, and it was obvious that he had just been through a little more than he could stand. Of all people he was put in the charge of an Irish Captain — quite the toughest man in the Corps, D.S.O., with bar, and M.C. in the last war, a hilarious humorist, a man who was spoiling for a fight and whose language was a by-word at Headquarters. In my ignorance I was nearly sick with apprehension for the fate of the poor man who was to be handed over to him in this condition. I hung about thinking if I was within earshot he might not be quite so brutal. But I need not have worried, in his broad Irish brogue he said, "Laddie" (the man was twice his age), "what you need is a good meal inside your belly, and a decent sleep," and arranged for him to be looked after. I realised then, and often noticed

afterwards, that the bravest men are not the most ruthless as far as others are concerned; it is the blowhards who are not certain of themselves who are hard on other people.

That same Captain was a tower of strength in the office — if anything went wrong or people were stupid he let them know all about it. His blarney was terrific and he was quite shameless, so with one weapon or another he certainly got things done.

The women who came to look for missing husbands were the most pathetic and it seemed nobody's business to get them in touch with each other. At one time I found myself turned into a sort of inquiry bureau for lost Local Defence Corps husbands, and did my best to get letters and messages through to Tanjong Malim where many of the Perak L.D.C. men were stationed doing liaison work and acting as interpreters with the regular army. It was very difficult to get complete lists of these men, they were travelling all over the country, but when any of them got through to Kuala Lumpur I asked for names of the people they had seen and eventually had a fairly good idea of where people were. Piles of letters came to our Headquarters, obviously from anxious families, and everyone seemed too busy to be interested in getting them to their destinations — and the people were so thrilled and grateful to get any messages or letters. I remember one poor old soul who came to ask for word of her husband; she did not know what to do, friends had advised her to go straight to Singapore and Home, but she was worried to death, her husband had gone away at a moment's notice and they had not discussed where she was to go. He might be looking for her in England, when she had gone to Australia. After a great deal of sleuthing I found he was at Tanjong Malim, and although none of them was on the phone there we managed to wangle messages and arrange for them to get in touch at a certain time. The wife came in to Headquarters again next day, looking a different person, and had written a most grateful letter in case there was not time to call in.

I cannot remember which day was which at that time, they were all the same, the only variation being in the bombing. December 26th is easy to remember, however, Kuala Lumpur's biggest raid, when the Government Buildings were demolished, the Post Office and the Selangor Club (the famous "Spotted Dog"), and many other important buildings were hit and a tremendous amount of damage done. That day practically finished off Kuala Lumpur, as all the Asiatics were so shattered that they ran into the jungle, which meant that all the subordinate

staff of Government Offices, business offices and hotel and shops suddenly disappeared.

Actually some of the Chinese clerks were excellent, but a very big percentage of all staffs were unnerved even if they did not go.

Our Tamby (office boy) was the first to melt away, he was a dear little Malay with a large grin, I always thought aged about 14. But evidently he was considerably older as one day he asked if he could have the afternoon off for a funeral. Naturally I took it to be the proverbial grandmother, but he went on to tell me all his troubles and quite convinced me that the corpse was his eldest son!

It was very impeding when our Chief Clerk who had sole charge of the involved system of Government vouchers suddenly disappeared, leaving a labyrinth of papers and forms locked in a drawer of which he alone had the key—this at the end of the month when the whole Corps was clamouring for outstanding payments of travelling claims, etc. Then another clerk was too frightened to carry on and we were left with only one.

At this stage the Corps moved from the old Headquarters building to a fine new block of offices where it was possible to work on all the time during raids and feel reasonably safe from the roof falling in if anything fell beyond hundreds of yards. The old H.Q., the converted police Cinema, was made of bricks stuck together with sand and water, the roof consisting of ill-fitting tiles gently placed on each other so that in places daylight was visible through the cracks. It was not reassuring to see a little Chinese carpenter put in an extra door which was to be an exit to the air raid shelter.

He marked out the place, produced a hammer with a wooden handle and tapped the wall lightly till a big enough hole appeared—then he slipped in the door. We thought of the effect a really good bomb would have. . . .

Even the Ack Ack guns over the hill made everything wobble rather, so it was grand to move into a modern concrete building even though the firm owning it had moved out to go to a safer place.

The new Headquarters being solidly built, there was no need to go into the shelter during raids, the Asiatic staff (what was left of it) used to go out, but I much preferred to stay in the more normal atmosphere of the office, where the British sangfroid was well up to the Cinema standard! Before we moved I used to be bundled out into one of the Hume Pipe tunnels, and sometimes my only companions would be terrified Asiatics, armed to the teeth, their rifles loaded in case of paratroops.

This was a much more frightening business than being in the open, as I always thought those quaking fingers would pull the trigger if one said as much as "boo," and bullets ricocheting in the concrete pipe would be hard to dodge! There was also the fascinating temptation to give them a fright to see what would happen. Actually they were quite amusing at times, would tell the stories of their lives, give each other tips on what to do to make them brave (half a tumbler of brandy was said to be good), all in pidgin English. Their point of view and absolute lack of shame was rather interesting, and some of the stories were very, very funny.

All the same, I must say I preferred the office where everything was taken as it came. We did a certain amount of work during raids, but the windows (the glass had been removed and replaced by wooden slats) were always shut to keep out flying bits, and with the blacked-out lights it was very hard to see.

Usually we sat and talked, ready to prostrate ourselves if the spotters outside warned us the bombs were coming our way. The assistant Adjutant, a veteran of Penang, sat near me, and would regale us with stories of that awful debacle; he was naturally full of instructions about what to do, and told us that Jap bombs were mostly small compared to the German ones, but that they made up for size in numbers. Their favourite kind was an anti-personnel bomb which only made a small crater but spread out in every direction low to the ground. A person lying down or below the surface of the earth was fairly safe, but to stand up was simply suicide.

With the disappearance of the cleaners the sweeping of the building was left to the tender care of the troops, and, being concrete, the floor was always dusty--disastrous to light linen frocks, so one of the officers used to spread a blanket out so that I would not get dirty if it came to diving under the desk or lying under shelter of the wall. A most Raleigh-like gesture considering that the blanket was his only bed covering when he was on night duty.

Some of the men dropping in from out-stations would bring blood-curdling stories of the campaign. Tales told of a regiment of Gurkhas, those tough little men from India, are typical.

While camped by one of the rivers menaced by the Japs the Gurkhas, several hundred at a time, would strip themselves and, carrying nothing but their famous Kukris (sharp curved knives), jump into the water and disappear in the direction of the enemy. Some hours later they would return, bringing with them many grisly trophies of the night's work. The Gurkhas are inveterate collectors.

This Regiment was very successful in the Malayan campaign—they are wonderful fighters, and, unlike most Indians, are mostly short and stocky, wear longish shorts and the well-known Gurkha hat (which is the same as the Australian wide-awake). Their method of warfare is very distasteful to the Jap in consequence of the belief that if a son of Nippon dies in battle complete with his head he will go straight to heaven, but apparently the whole thing is ruined if his head is chopped off—and chopping off heads is the Gurkha's mode of killing. . . .

There was a popular belief in the early days of the campaign that the raiding Jap planes were being led by German pilots. I cannot vouch for this theory, as no real reports came through of any German pilots being captured—the idea may have arisen owing to the surprise caused by the skill of these pilots when Japs were well known to be "no good at all in the air." At any rate, one story went the rounds that the plane of the leader of one of the formations had been brought down in the north and that a white man had stepped out. He had been met by a furious band of Gurkhas who cut him to bits. The trouble was that the bits were so small that there was still no proof.

The enemy usually attacked in formations of threes with a squadron of 27 planes. It was common knowledge that all directing of the bombers was done from the leading plane in each formation, and only this one plane was equipped with the necessary instruments and carried particulars of the target. If the leader could be brought down and the formation split up everything would be upset. But whatever happened, they always kept the formation perfectly; our trouble up country was that we had nothing there with which to split them up—save a few scattered ack ack guns.

There was great excitement in Kuala Lumpur the first time these guns were fired at Jap planes. The little black puffs of smoke in the sky where the shells exploded near the attacking aircraft looked very like parachutists baling out of the planes, so in no time the line was humming with people ringing up to say that we were being attacked by an army of parachute troops. The Local Defence Corps was supposed to deal with these, and there was intense excitement as men were called out in all directions!

For two or three days we had several planes stationed at Kuala Lumpur, the remains of a squadron which had been knocked to pieces at Ipoh. I think they had six planes when they arrived one evening, but lost three the first day and more the next. Then the attempt at air protection vanished altogether—it was hopeless all along.

I met one of the pilots of this squadron who was billeted with some friends of mine, he was very shaken and depressed. They were flying Brewster Buffalos, which were cumbersome compared with the manoeuvrability of the enemy planes, and were hopelessly outnumbered. While we were talking, another man turned up, a friend who had been up from Singapore a month or two before for a polo tournament. Now he was in very grubby battle dress, but full of cheer in contrast to the pilot. He was in charge of a mobile Ack Ack Battery which had fought its way down the whole length of the peninsula, beginning at Kota Bharu and visiting Butterworth (Penang) and Ipoh and all the hot places. How they had survived I do not know, but they still had their guns and were in excellent spirits. They paused in Kuala Lumpur for a while and did some hitting back for us, but their guns were only small ones.

I felt so sorry for animals during raids, they did not know what was happening and got very frightened. Some people I know had two huge dogs, and when bombs were falling and our Ack Ack guns in the garden replying the poor things were nearly frantic; one disappeared, and did not come home for 24 hours.

In the office one day I was surprised to feel something warm and yielding under the desk, which turned out to be a pale yellow dog. It looked vaguely familiar, and I remembered a little Sergeant who was very fond of dogs, and when he was in Kuala Lumpur he used to bring his pets to the Anzac Club — this was one of them. I suppose the poor thing had been left behind when the troops went into action and had come into the office for company. It was a very nice creature, and so pathetic when the bombers were about, it used to sit and whimper quietly.

After the situation became so critical I always had lunch at Headquarters, plates of stew and a slab of bread and butter were sent into the office from the Mess, and the Adjutant, the Intelligence man on duty, and I — there were usually several more — would eat where we happened to be working. The dog enjoyed lunch time immensely, and sometimes the Orderly would collect extra bones for him from the cook. I do not know what happened to that poor little animal in the end, he spent three or four days in the office, then one day he disappeared; we never heard of him again.

Several of my friends had horses, racehorses and polo ponies to which they were devoted. There is no grazing ground in Malaya, and stock cannot fend for themselves, they are quite dependent on imported chaff, etc., and each horse was looked after by its own syce. When the Japs came all these horses just had to be shot. . . .

Life in Kuala Lumpur had become a routine by the end of December; people you had to deal with you saw every day, and others just ceased to exist — some had gone away and some were doing their own jobs, and when they were free went home to bed exhausted. People were mostly quite cheery, but working so hard with so little sleep that tempers were apt to be pretty fiery when things like telephone failed to function. (This happened very often with brand-new telephonists, a brand-new switchboard, and nearly all the people one wanted to contact having had their phones cut off. Also most Government Departments and business offices in the town had moved out into the suburbs for safety, and had a new number which no one knew.)

Of course, there were no days off from 8th December till the final evacuation — Christmas Day, Saturdays, Sundays, all the same, and for those on duty the nights as well.

It is amusing to hear people talking about the Malaysians who did nothing but take their ease and drink stengahs at their clubs. Certainly there were some slow movers, as one finds in every part of the world, but I have never seen people work so hard as most of the Tuans Besar in Kuala Lumpur — in spite of the fact that their leave was, in most cases, long overdue, and they had been living in that climate for very many years.

In some words of advice at the back of a book on Malaya, published by a traveller about 10 years ago, I found the following:—

“It is impossible for the average person to keep well and strong unless he rests in a recumbent position for at least two hours during the mid heat of the day. No woman could forgo her siesta for two days running without risk of a serious illness.”!

Things must have changed very considerably in the last decade, because when one is working with the regular one hour lunch time, during which one drives two or three miles home, there is not much time for resting in a recumbent position! I managed to weather it for two years without disaster, and some girls I know had been working without leave for three years. The men seemed to go on indefinitely.

Then, for the first time, we had domestic troubles, many of the “boys” and amahs disappeared too. Margaret and I were lucky to have a boy who stuck to us till the last, and the amah stayed till a few days before, but quite a number of servants pushed off very early, and people who had lived in the East for years, waited on hand and foot, were left completely helpless. One evening a friend of ours arrived out of the gloom with a lukewarm, semi-

cooked chicken, and some green peas. His boy had prepared the dinner, but an air raid was too much for his equilibrium, and he had not had the nerve to wait and finish it. This man had come off 24 hour duty to find the half-prepared meal, with which he felt helpless to wrestle, so brought it along to eat with us—with the proviso that anything left over could be taken home for his breakfast!

Actually a great deal depended on one's boy, as everyone was too busy to look for food, and if the boy was a good one he seemed to produce everything needed while others came home with practically nothing. Eggs were unobtainable in the town, but our boy kept fowls, and if they could not cope with the situation he had innumerable friends and relations who kept them also. He would pedal off to market every morning, bargain furiously with his astute countrymen for vegetables, meat, etc., and come home with his carrier laden in time to get the breakfast, which consisted mainly of papaya (paw paw) and pineapple. Ah Jong stayed with us to the very end, but the amah left a few days before we did. Her departure was typically Chinese. I told the boy he could borrow my car to take her and her belongings out to the Ulu, where she was to hide from the Japs; he was to join her after we shut up the house. He assured me that he had a very clever friend to drive the car, and they would have it back by 7.30, when the syce came to clean it and have it ready for me to go to the office.

Next morning at 6 I woke to the tune of grinding noises which I tried for some time to ignore, but by 6.30 I could stand it no longer, and put on a housecoat to go and investigate. There was my poor little Austin half-way out of the garage with the back mudguard resting on the wheels, while the front wheels appeared to be waving in the air. The "pandi" friend was squeezed into the driver's seat with his foot on the starter; he had evidently been in that position for some time. Every cubic inch of the car was crammed with a miscellaneous collection of bundles, bags of rice, sugar, flour, and clothing, a couple of children, and I rather think there were some live fowls amongst the party. It was quite obvious that it could not move like that, so I told them to unload at least half and make two trips. The boy was most surprised that I thought it was too much, but buzzed round cheerfully, organising his family, cursing the children in-Chinese, cheering on his friend at the wheel in Malay, hurling out huge cases weighing cwt., and finally, to my surprise, unearthed the amah—she had been put in the back as a kind of foundation-stone and had soon disappeared entirely. She came out like a jelly from a



mould. The half load was more than enough, and I saw that if I ever wanted my car to go again I would have to drive it myself, so off we went. A weird expedition into the jungle, passing hundreds of other Asiatics all pattering along the road with their bundles on bicycles or balanced one on each end of a long pole swung over the shoulders—all going into their chosen hide holes to wait. . . . A cavalcade of tragedy.

The Japs by this time were in possession of Penang Broadcasting Station, and every day put over stories of what they were going to do—special messages to towns like K.L., saying that they were going to flatten every building to the ground on a certain date, obviously working on the German idea of a war of nerves and propaganda.

The German influence was seen very clearly, too, in the leaflets they dropped. These varied between short notices which stated that the Japs were liberating the Asiatics from the yoke of the evil English, printed in Chinese, Malay, and Indian dialects, to gaudy pictures illustrating the infamous way the British enjoyed themselves while making slaves of the Asiatics. One of the first leaflets I saw was quite the gem of the collection. It consisted of two pictures, shockingly drawn and painted, the top one showing a fair, rosy-cheeked English subaltern with toothbrush moustache and buck teeth complete, who sat at a table while a bevy of lovely creatures fluttered around him. A luscious blonde sat on his knee and twined about his torso, and with his free hand he brandished a bubbling tankard of beer. This was headed **AT HOMES**. Below it was a very different scene, Indian soldiers fighting for their lives, barbed wire, bayonets, dead bodies—no Europeans to be seen. This was printed in monotone in contrast to "**AT HOMES**"; the only colour introduced was a lurid red, which was splashed about to represent blood. Above it was the caption **AT FRONT**.

All along the Japs had taken care that every Asiatic was informed that they would be well treated when their liberators were in possession of the country, and soon after they had crossed the Thailand border they had somehow distributed special notes to the natives. These notes, printed in Tokio months before, had different dollar values and were to be redeemed when the Japs were the masters of Malaya.

Christmas Day was just like all the rest of the week except that there were no bombs—Office till 4 when I got off early and went to help with the rush at the Anzac Club. The latter place was getting more and more of a problem. It had been a flourishing concern all along, with a canteen for food and soft drinks, a library, billiard

table, ping-pong, darts and piano, where the bands from the Majestic and the "Dog" came to entertain the troops.

Now the Club was quite an important place for, except for about one hotel, too expensive for most of the troops, there was nowhere for a man to get a meal of any kind.

The trouble was that the nearer the Japs came, the more the troops in Kuala Lumpur increased and the women decreased, till the situation was rather serious. There were usually nine women and five Asiatic cook boys at the Sunday shift, and early in January there were only three women helpers (including myself with another job), and a floating population of about two boys in the whole of Kuala Lumpur. Luckily my office was nearby, so whenever there was a lull there I would go to the canteen, but as our clerks left it made me busier in the office. New men were put on but they never knew where things were or what we did about so and so, and I had been there from the beginning, and knew everybody's business, they had got used to depending on me — also I had charge of all the confidential papers. Often in the rush of the Canteen I would be rung up by a harassed Adjutant and asked to come and find something important, or type some secret order.

My diary at this time is just — "Office, Anzac Club; Anzac Club — Office."

On about the 3rd January one of the remaining helpers left (women had been told again and again they should leave Kuala Lumpur though no order to evacuate was ever given). We kept it going another day. I had just been to the Cold Storage and bought 40 loaves of bread, bacon, milk, etc., when it was decided that it was hopeless to carry on. Mrs. Ormston, who had been a tower of strength, was leaving too, and it was no use trying to do any more.

We gave all the things away to the Volunteers, and passed out free food to any troops who were there, gramophones, first-aid box — the troops were given anything they wanted, the place was just a shell in no time, all enjoying themselves tremendously. Then I took the cash box to the bank, and went back to the office. It was a pity. . . . .

## CHAPTER IV.

It is hard to describe the change in Kuala Lumpur. From its old pre-war life of luxury it suddenly became a place of awful inconvenience. No letters were delivered, the G.P.O. had been blown up and the post boys had run away. To get letters one had to go to the Deputy Postmaster General's private house on Petaling Hill, and dig about in bags and pigeon holes; to post them one had to go a mile or two in the other direction up Batu Road.

There were no traffic police on duty. That was no sorrow to me, as the little Mata Matas were always running me in for leaving my car in the wrong place, measuring the number of feet from the white line by their own undersize little boots.

It was made a criminal offence to leave one's car alone for a moment without immobilising it; this was done in case Jap parachutists happened to land nearby.

There is a true story told of an Asiatic truck driver who was asked what arrangements he had made for immobilising his truck. He replied with great pride that he took off the registration disc each night, "For," he explained, "you can't drive it on the roads without that!"

I had a secret switch put on my Austin after burning my fingers several times taking out red hot plugs. The poor old syce was quite mystified the first morning after we had operated on the engines, he could not think why the cars would not go, and was simply horrified when I handed him a handful of plugs and Margaret produced vital parts of her distributor. They had both been so carefully hidden by the boy that we nearly lost them for ever.

The first time I took out plugs various gaskets came too, but I noticed they disappeared quite soon. The poor little car certainly had a hard life and it was not surprising that it began to go badly. There were no garages open to the public by that time, so I told my troubles to the Transport Sergeant of the Selangor Defence Corps and he said, "Oh, don't worry about that car, I can't spare a man to overhaul it properly, but there is a nice little Austin 10 here you can have—it has more guts than yours for a quick get-away."

So I put mine on one side till a very famous elderly baronet arrived at Headquarters. He was looking for a car to take thousands of dollars to Singapore, so I offered him my Baby Austin. He rushed it, squeezed his very long legs under the wheel, and set off—flat out at 22 miles per hour to do 240 miles!

I was to pick the car up at his flat when I arrived in Singapore and, strangely enough, it was there when I went for it about a month later, just a little bent in the behind where it had been overtaken by a bulldozer in a convoy!

It was not only conditions which had altered. The look of the town had changed very considerably too. Of course some of the buildings were ruins after the raids, but they were not so noticeable as other things because most of the facades were still putting up a good show. The picturesque Government Buildings, for instance, were wrecked inside, but outside, the walls still stood, though the tower was very battered and the clock had had its face broken.

Margaret had been in the Federal Secretariat when the bombs fell. She and several officials had been lying prone in the basement while the ceiling fell around them and the wing nearby was reduced to rubble; but none of them was hurt. Margaret's car which was outside was covered with debris, its windows and windscreen were gone, but with a little tinkering and cleaning, it continued to go—fortunately there was never any wind in Kuala Lumpur, but in a good tropical downpour it was not pleasant. But she was luckier than a lot of people there; nearly all the cars lined up in the road were set on fire.

Till the end there were lovely looking cars abandoned by the roadside, looking perfectly good except for four flat tyres, punctured by flying shrapnel. There were no more tyres nor people to mend them, most of the syces had run away, so there they were, immobile. Near the bombed buildings there were burnt-out chassis; many of them had been blown upside down by the explosions, and were lying helplessly on their roofs looking like beetles which had been turned over.

Another sign of the times was the black beggar who always sat cross-legged on Java Street Bridge; a soot-black body wearing the briefest possible loincloth. Soon after the invasion I was amused to see that he had evidently been caught up by A.R.P. fervour, and the street painter, while whitening the curbs and posts, had continued the white line right up the outside of each of the beggar's arms and added a dab across his chest!

With the black-outs, Asiatic opportunists immediately set up a new trade. Their capital was a pot of white

paint and a brush, and wherever one pulled up in the town a smiling coolie would bob up brandishing a brush, offering to paint lines round the mudguard of one's car for a dollar, two dollars or three, depending on what one looked good for.

The Padang outside the Selangor Club where rugger, ericket, hockey, tennis, etc., were played, and where all ceremonial parades had been held, was now a ludicrous sight. Formerly this had been a huge rectangular lawn and, when anything was going on, the right amount of space was roped off, marked out, and portable grandstands were put in position. All kinds of goal-posts, nets, etc., appeared from some place known to the man in charge, and in between times the padang was just a large sweep of lawn. . . .

But on December 9th, as I drove past to the office, it looked like a bad dream. To begin with everything ever used for any game had been brought out and distributed with a view to preventing enemy landings. There was a dizzy and uneven pattern of posts and ropes, there were huge rugger goal-posts, there were hockey goals, heavy rollers, lawn mowers; sections of grandstand were dotted about, some facing each other, some at right angles, and on top of everything at all flat an imaginative coolie had put huge pots plants — hydrangeas, palms, chenille plants — such a medley you never saw.



Smoke haze over Singapore.

Photo by courtesy of Dept. of Information.



## CHAPTER V.

I had one game of golf about two days after the country was invaded. The Golf Club, quite near our house, but about three miles out of the town, was one of the nicest places in Malaya. Thirty-six holes of perfect golf course, 20 grass tennis courts and a large swimming pool.

Formerly we used to go there nearly every evening after the office about 5 — quite the best time of the day, and play 9 holes of golf or a few sets of tennis; then sit on the terrace of the Club House after a shower, and cool off with iced drinks. The tropical night would come down all of a sudden, the blue hills and the blue sky would change to every shade of mauve and pink, then disappear entirely, leaving a background of dark purple, lit up occasionally by flashes of tropical lightning. . . .

The Golf Club, like the "Dog," was one of the places where everyone went. Even if they did not take games very seriously most of the Europeans took a little exercise following a ball around in the cool of the evening, had a swim, or even just looked at the English papers and had a drink with someone who wanted to tell the story of his evening's round and the birdie he did at the 10th. The Golf Club was one of the few places where the army officers could get out of khaki for a while and appear in cool white shirts and shorts or express their individuality in more violent colours.

But after the invasion things were very different. The first thing the Committee did was to erect lines of huge poles all along the fairways — again to discourage aeroplanes — and the hundreds of coolies usually employed in keeping the course in order were put on to make high mounds of earth, covered with turf, on the fairways.

I walked along to the Club once or twice in the evenings for exercise. The club house was still open with a skeleton staff of boys, and the amah was waiting patiently in our dressing room, making artificial flowers as usual — otherwise no sign of life whatever. The rows of trees alongside the fairways were being used as cover for numbers of army trucks and their guards.

The last time I was there was on January 8th, the day we left Kuala Lumpur. I got up at 6.30 and went for a swim before breakfast. Everything was just the same,



green tiled pool with pleasantly cool water, vivid green grass, big Chinese pots of flowering plants, the same blue hills and warm sun. But the Club house was deserted, there were empty bottles and glasses on the bar by the pool. I lay in the sun and thought how impossible it was that the Japs were in Rawang, only 12 miles away (at least that was where they were the day before, and there was very little in between). . . .

I mentioned before that all the hotels but two had given up all idea of serving food because their staff had run away; the Selangor Club had also ceased to function after 26th December when it was hit. I went in there to telephone one day when we had a lot of important calls to make from Headquarters, too many for our telephone system—the Club phone was cut off. So I wandered through the ballroom, the bar—not a boy to be seen. I then went to the Club Chambers, thinking there must still be people living there, but the result was the same. No boys, dust on all the tables, bits of plaster which had been shaken down in the raids days before still lay about—and no telephone.

I went on to the Empire Hotel which was still serving meals, but there was no staff to be seen, a few officers were sitting at a table having a drink. I walked into the office, and, after much experiment, pushing every button and lever on the switchboard, managed to get through to the men who were to be called up for special duty. In the middle of it there was a raid, the soldiers stayed where they were and I put on my tin hat and twiddled levers urgently, the soldiers chuckled. . . .

The Majestic, Kuala Lumpur's leading Hotel, with its air-conditioned dining-room which was formerly crowded for dancing and dining every Saturday and Wednesday, now allowed anyone to sleep in any room they liked for nothing; provided they did not expect food or to have their beds made or rooms looked after! The management sent a letter to each guest saying that in future no meals would be served.

The last I heard of the Majestic, the scene of so many good parties, was that the whole building had been hurled into the middle of Damansara Road when the Railway bridge opposite was blown up by our men before they left.

The Spotted Dog also came to a bad end, it was burnt to the ground by our troops before they went; they also blew up the Bungsar Power Station, the Telephone Exchange, and all the bridges over the river.

The big raid on Boxing Day was the first which had really made much impression on us, the war was getting very near home. I realised this when an L.D.C. officer

who had been walking about the office half an hour before had his foot blown off and several of our men were casualties. As usual everything happened in the morning (they did not raid Kuala Lumpur at night much because there was no point in coming in the dark when it was easier in daylight, and there was no opposition). The A.R.P. people were very busy, they did their clearing up, casualties were counted and dealt with, and by afternoon all was calm again.

By about 5 p.m., however, one of our men reported a Chinese body he had found behind the Book Club nearby; they brought it, and two more which they found, into our Headquarters—I did not like the idea of going out of the room in case I tripped over them in the murk. One of the men and I were told off to get the corpses taken away, but the P.W.D. would have nothing to do with them, and all likely bodies (public, in this instance) were of the same opinion—the clearing up had been done hours before, they said; officially there were no more casualties, and that was that.

The whole day had been so awful and the situation was so fantastic, that I assure you that it was not heartlessness which made us end up with helpless giggles. Red tape at its reddest.

Life was certainly a muddle. I went dancing that night with a man just back from the line, and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

Early in the New Year enemy landings had been made on quite a large scale at Kuala Selangor to the West, and we knew that Kuala Lumpur would go sooner or later. The Banks had sent all their securities to Singapore under armed guard, the various bridges across the river which ran through the town were already mined, and the shops had terminated business and were boarded up after giving away most of their stocks which had not been taken over by the Military.

The Police and L.D.C. succeeded in keeping looting pretty well under control, but sometimes there would be small riots. There were a few wild scenes, such as when shops in Batu Road, which had formerly belonged to Japanese, were mobbed and looted by coolies. The authorities also had to use force and firearms at some of the places where free rice, flour, etc., were being given away to the Asiatics—some of the latter got panicky and began fighting to get more, and mobbing the distributors. That started them all going, and with a mob of many hundreds of mining coolies, unemployed and not knowing what they were struggling for, the situation was extremely delicate. The Go-down had to be closed till more soldiers arrived.

An order went round that all liquor was to be destroyed, on no account was any to be left where the Japs could get at it. Cases of whisky were collected by our Q.M., then hundreds more broken open, the bottles smashed and the contents poured away. As one drove round the town different smells hung in the air, whisky, brandy, wines, beer, liqueurs. At one place bottles and bottles of clear green Creme de Menthe, the universal liqueur of Malaya known familiarly as Hijau (Malay for green) was trickling down the gutter, followed up by Cherry Brandy—the demolition squad was doing its work thoroughly.

One morning Margaret went to buy something at Robinsons, the Harrods of the East, and found it in the hands of the Police. The Chief Police Officer happened to be at the door and told her to go in and help herself to anything she wanted. Believe it or not, she walked past all the lovely fripperies which were being waved at her by demoralised assistants upstairs, and came away with nothing but two cases of tinned milk for Ah Jong and the amah!

Things were being handed out wholesale everywhere. The merchants had no hope of getting their things away to Singapore—neither had anyone else, so it was not quite such a treat as it sounded.

With the help of the military a great deal of rubber and tin were loaded on to trucks and sent off by train, but the trains were always crowded and their running uncertain. Bombing and machine gunning had caused the engine-drivers and stokers to disappear, and made things very difficult for the Railway people, who were doing an excellent job.

I was surprised to see some naval ratings at the Anzac Club one night, stokers who had been rescued from the Prince of Wales. On being asked what they were doing so far from the sea a cheerful little man from Yorkshire answered "Still stor-rking," the navy had come to the rescue of the Railways. (Seamen from the Prince of Wales also did very good work in Penang where they ran the ferries to the mainland when Penang looked like being cut off.)

It was very interesting being at Headquarters all this time. We had direct telephone lines to Army Headquarters and Police Headquarters and the crises which developed every day kept everyone on tenterhooks—we often got outstation messages first and had to pass them on to the others.

I remember one instance, when a Jap plane was shot down north of Kuala Lumpur, we received a frantic phone message to the effect that it had crashed at such and

such a place, and that the escorting Jap planes were flying in circles round the wreckage, bombing it continually. The message ended with "they are obviously trying to destroy some evidence, and if you do not come quickly there will be nothing left but ashes."

I remember, too, the time that the landing was made at Kuala Selangor. . . . The endless conferences, the humming of telephones with news and instructions. Reports of three Jap transports off the coast, landings in the lightly defended area just west of us; running reports of what was happening in certain sectors; the possibility of our being cut off from the South. . . .

When I got to the Anzac Club that night there were very few men (no leave), but several women were standing in a group, their faces very white and serious in the dim light. One of them had been rung up by the wife of a very high official, who was hysterical and in tears, saying she must go at once, the Japs had come. Word had gone round that all women were to leave Kuala Lumpur that night; they had decided to close the canteen, and had already given away most of the food.

I told them that the crisis seemed to be over according to L.D.C. Headquarters (word had come through by that time that the enemy had been mopped up). We talked and talked, and eventually two or three of us said we were staying and would carry on. That was quite a week before we finally closed the Club. We had lots of alarms like that before the end.

I remember one time when Margaret and I were knocked up in the middle of the night. As is the custom in Malaya the servants slept in quarters away from the house and did not hear the thumping on the door, so we both emerged, very frightened, to see what was the trouble. Finding a sweating Despatch Rider on the doorstep we thought the worst had happened, surely it could only mean instant evacuation at the very best. But no, he had just called in to ask the way to someone's house, he had to deliver a message . . . I looked at my watch, it was 3 o'clock in the morning.

## CHAPTER VI.

As the first week in January wore on there was more and more talk of evacuation. Most women had gone, and our friends said we should all be away — anything might happen. Margaret was all ready to go, but had no one to travel with. I was still working hard; they seemed still to want me at the office, and I expected to be told what to do from there.

On the evening of the 7th, however, a friend came to have a very earnest talk, and make me move on, whether the L.D.C. wanted me or not. He said that everyone would be going any day now (I knew that), and that a retreating army was no place for a woman, and that when the bridges were all blown up between us and safety they would probably ask me why I had not gone before. It was all so true that I agreed to put the matter to the Adjutant next day. Even that did not satisfy him, however, for he turned up again next morning at breakfast time to rub it in some more. "The Japs might land anywhere along the coast behind us, and cut us off," he said, and added, "And don't stop till you get to Singapore."

Primed up by this, I spoke to the Adjutant during the morning, and explained that I would gladly stay if I knew I was doing the right thing, but I did not want to risk being mixed up with the Japs, and then be told I was in the way. He smiled indulgently, and replied, "You do whatever you like; of course we shall miss you if you go." . . . . Well. . . . I did not feel like staying in the firing line just to be a social asset, so I went straight to the C.O., who was a man who could give a definite answer. He ordered me off at once, but said, "Wait for us at Seremban; we might only retreat as far as that." (By this time the A.R.P. people had packed up their properties and left in convoy for Singapore, and all the M.A.S. ambulances, etc., had also gone.)

Some of the Selangor Defence Corps had already moved on to Seremban, and had established a big dump of stores, ammunition, and petrol at one of three rubber estates they had requisitioned for possible headquarters; another of these estates was already housing women, wives, and dependants of L.D.C. personnel, who were being evacuated by the Corps, in charge of a Lieutenant and some men.

It was a hectic day, finalising things in the office, packing up the files and equipment we would need to take, though a great deal of this had been done beforehand.

We had done our own packing the previous evening. Margaret was definitely going on the 8th; there was no longer anything to do at the Federal Secretariat. I had no intention of staying away out at Kia Peng Road by myself; the neighbours, never very close, had gone, and even our boy was going at last. So if I stayed behind I would have to find somewhere else to sleep.

It was a grim business choosing the few things it would be possible to take away. One felt it was unfair to take much, even if it would fit in the car, as there would probably be other people needing transport and other people's belongings. Poor Margaret was very worried about the furniture and treasures belonging to her brother, who was away on leave. We packed up a certain number of his things, and sent the boy up through the manhole in the ceiling, and, with the aid of some Heath Robinson contrivance of his own, he hauled things up into the roof—pictures of Malaya and Malays by a very well known artist, treasures from Thailand, Indo-China, and Bali. His clothes, packed in camphor-wood boxes, were left as they were, but we locked them carefully, thinking that perhaps we would be coming back in a week or two. The furniture had to be left, of course, bookshelves full of books, linen, china, cups—golf trophies. Margaret took one of her championship cups as a sample. We did not think twice about leaving tennis racquets or golf clubs or golf or tennis clothes; we could not imagine anyone ever needing such things again—they seemed to belong to another life.

It was a weird scene in the dimly lighted dining-room, belongings hurled about on the floor and table, their fate being weighed in the balance; the boy dashing about, cheerful and obliging to the last, with his gold teeth glinting when they caught the light. In the middle of all this, people dropped in, and we would break off and talk, be given advice, reshuffle our ideas, and make new sets of plans.

We packed the cars next morning, taking bedding, food thermos, etc., then walked out of the house, leaving half our clothes hanging in the wardrobe, shoes in the shoe cupboards, other things in drawers. Margaret banged the door of the nice little bungalow, and we set off to our respective offices feeling and looking like snails with their houses on their backs.

Margaret came to meet me at H.Q. at 3: I had picked up another girl too; she had missed the L.D.C. convoy, and I thought the three of us, each with a car, would

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dodge off on our own in time to reach the rendezvous before dark. However, the L.D.C. thought differently, and insisted on sending a guard and two or three odd vehicles with stores, also a despatch rider to lead us to the estate (about six miles out of Seremban). The rest of this cavalcade was not ready. I was told to get for ourselves supplies from the Q.M. store, and Joan and I spent quite an hour with the Q.M. and another Lieutenant stocking up. Besides the iron ration of bully beef and biscuits, there were mounds of lovely tinned things which had been salvaged from the shops, and we amassed a very good collection. One of the men would say, "Do you like asparagus? Better have some of that. Fruit salad? Herring roes—they are rather good," and we all selected what appealed to us, till they had to give me a haversack to put it all in. By that time it was pouring with rain—tropical downpour—so we settled down on a case of tea for a chat.

Presently there was a hue and cry from the Parade Ground. The rest of the convoy was all lined up, and where were we? . . . . It was still raining, but the kind Q.M. had another idea—we should have cape ground-sheets. So obliterated by these, and following two men carrying the loot, we proceeded to our cars.

Of course when we were all ready and impatient to be off we had to wait about another half-hour for the others. There was another hitch, some more Asiatic women and children had been found who wanted to be evacuated, so we were all given passengers. I had a small boy who was rather sweet, and entertained me all the way with tales about Ipoh, and how his father and mother and the six children took shelter in the jungle when the bombs dropped.

The O.C. transport gave us each a spare four-gallon tin of petrol after filling up our tanks, and a nice little Scot brought me a bottle of whisky for the rigours of the road. A Chinese despatch rider asked me to take his luggage, consisting of a paper parcel and a pair of boots. I said I might never connect with him again, but he grinned, "Tid apa, I can't carry them," so in they went through the broken back window.

At last we got the order to move off. Just at that moment one of the transport men asked if I had a spare tyre or tube. I had neither. He looked hopelessly round to see if they had one for me. The Major was beckoning me on; then Margaret, who happened to be in front, started off like a shot from a gun, and I dashed off to keep her in sight, followed by Joan. The rest of the convoy was rather slower in acceleration, and not know-

ing the route via Kia Peng Road (we had arranged to call at our bungalow and pick up a mattress), lost us in the first block.

The bungalow, which had been left intact in the morning, had already been looted to a certain extent — the wireless was gone, the dressing table from my room, and several other unexpected things were missing. It presented a very desolate sight. But we did not spend much time investigating, just collected what we had gone for, some butter and a few things from the refrigerator, and were off again. Once on the main road we made a few unsuccessful inquiries about the rest of the convoy, decided we had given them the slip, and headed south. Several miles further down, however, we came upon our escort pulled up by the roadside, the Corporal in charge puce in the face with anxiety, and we gathered he took a very poor view of the whole business.

We must have looked very funny to anyone not used to these dismal processions, our cars smeared with clay for camouflage, and filled to the roof with improbable possessions. Indeed, we quite out-knighted the White Knight of "Alice Through the Looking Glass" — even he did not think of taking a mattress along! Actually a lot of evacuees tied mattresses on the roofs of their cars; it was a good idea, as a protection against flying bits of shrapnel, but ours was for sleeping on en route. On we went down the familiar road, past Klang, then Kajang, where an A.I.F. casualty clearing station had been established, and where I had often been to parties in the mess. That was all gone, but every now and then we would pass huge encampments of troops under shelter of the rubber trees beside the road — camouflaged tents, camouflaged trucks, guns. . . . All along the way, too, were the columns of black, black smoke which we were to see so much of before the end — smoke from stocks of rubber being burnt so as to deny its use to the enemy.

By the time we reached our destination it was almost dark, and, to our horror, at least one head, if not two or three, popped out of every window upstairs and down, and the walls were nearly all windows. The worried Lieutenant in charge greeted us warmly, but said they were terribly full up, and he had never before seen so many women of so many different colours — it looked a grim prospect for us, the last comers. I knew we had requisitioned three rubber estates, and suggested moving to another, but he said there was only one more, Bukit Nanas Estate, about five miles away, which was being used as an ammunition and stores dump, but I remembered another one in between these two which had been mentioned in Operation Orders; it was supposed to be



empty, so we decided to go on, and camp there for the night. It was quite dark by this time, and we turned round, drove several miles along the way we had just come, and finally arrived at a bungalow in darkness. A bewildered boy soon appeared, buttoning up his clothes, and I explained to him in spasmodic Malay that we had come to sleep there. He had had no warning, and was rather startled by the camouflaged cars and jumble of people, but he gave me the telephone number of the Group Supervisor, saying the manager was away with the Volunteers. The Supervisor was very nice, had heard nothing about the estate being taken over, but said if the Military want it, of course that is all right—make the boy give you anything you want, and let me know if I can do anything. So we went ahead.

We first set about getting a meal for ourselves and the men, who were to dump the things and return to Kuala Lumpur. It was just as well we had collected a good stock of food, for we found no one else had any rations, and there was nothing in the house, the Tuan had been away for weeks. We had a funny picnic meal in the dining-room, and in the dim light had the first good look at our fellow-travellers. They consisted of an elderly Chinese woman, an amah, I should think, her young, attractive daughter, who had permed hair, and wore gay printed Chinese pyjamas; a Eurasian woman with several children (my passenger belonged to this family), and our three selves. The guard was composed of several Asiatics under a European N.C.O. (he was new to the Corps and incidentally took a still poorer view of this move of ours, and left the organising of everything entirely to me). When they had eaten he and the troops returned to Kuala Lumpur.

The Lieutenant from local H.Q. rang up, and I told him the situation. He was delighted, said he would come and call, and insisted on bringing another guard to mount on us for the night. I asked him to bring some bread for breakfast, as we had eaten all ours, but it transpired they were very short of food; it was all at the dump. After that Margaret, Joan, and I made our dispositions for the night—the Asiatics in one room and ourselves in a small mosquito-netted place which contained two beds and a mattress on the floor for me—it was very comfortable and quite cool. Joan and I were enjoying ourselves—we had never been in a situation like this before, our spirits rose as we settled in, but Margaret was filled with gloom, and thought out fate was awful. Poor Margaret, she had too much time to think, and was too intelligent to find life in the war zone tolerable, but she stayed in Kuala Lumpur to the last, hating every moment of it. We wandered

round the rooms with torches, and studied the trophies and photos on the walls. We decided our unknown and unknowing host was a rowing man, tennis player, and polo player, and went to fancy-dress dances. Joan was getting quite intrigued.

The boy was most obliging, if a little dazed, but would not let us use the chief bedroom—the Tuan might arrive in the middle of the night, and then where would he be? There was space enough without, however, and we had a bathroom adjoining our bedroom with a tong of the coldest water I ever remember in Malaya, apart from the hill stations, where water is icy.

By the time the Lieutenant and his men arrived we had made our beds; this is a short operation in the tropics, and it was only necessary to cover the mattress with the sheet we each had brought with us—we had also brought a pillow, towel, knife, fork, spoon, and mug. We gave our visitors a drink, collected long chairs for members of the guard to sleep in when they were not on duty, and they established themselves under the house, which was built on stilts.

Next morning we woke to a tremendous chirruping of birds, and for the first time saw the garden and surroundings. It was a very pleasant place backed on all sides by rubber trees beyond a garden which sloped down to a stream in front of the house, beds of cannas, flowering shrubs, and lawn. It all looked the epitome of peace until a formation of bombers flew over very high up. Breakfast was rather a problem. We still had plenty of tins, but nothing that looked suitable for breakfast, no bread, eggs, or fruit, and there was a guard of five hungry men to feed as well as the other women and children. We started off with buttered biscuits, not army biscuits, and sardines; they were jolly good, but melted away as fast as we could work, so we tried bully beef to slow it down, cheese, herrings in tomato sauce, and "meat and veg.," till at last the demand was filled, and the knapsack correspondingly emptied.

After that there was nothing else to do, the Asiatic women were being collected by the transport which came for the guard, so Margaret, Joan, and I decided on a trip into Seremban to see if there was any work we could do—Margaret had to report to the British Resident, as she was in the Federal Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur, and Joan to the Chief Police Officer, as she had been doing a job in the Criminal Intelligence Branch. We began with the British Resident, who was working in his office at the Residency, a stately white building set in well-kept grounds on one of the hills behind the town. It looked just the same as when I had been there nearly two years

before, soon after I arrived in Malaya, and had spent a week-end at the Residency on the way back from a trip to Port Dickson with friends. The country had been very peaceful then, and it was all very new to me. I remember such things as eating my first mangosteen at tea the afternoon we arrived, and being impressed by the Sikh sentries with their cunningly plaited beards and red-cockaded turbans. Now there were soldiers everywhere, and army transports and guns under all the trees.

We offered our services to the British Resident, but he would not have us at any price and most emphatically urged us to go on to Singapore; the nurses from the hospital and women who had not already gone were being evacuated from Seremban that day, he said; so then we looked for the Chief Police Officer. He was very nice, but of the same opinion. He was horrified at our staying so far out, and said if we did not go straight on we should at least stay in the town within call. We decided to find ourselves billets, and began with the Sungei Ujong Club; this was still functioning in a mild way, but lots of troops used to sleep there at night, and the town was full, they said. We were told we could have the women's dressing-room. There did not seem to be anywhere else to go. We called on the Chief Police Officer, as we had promised, and told him the arrangements. He agreed, but said we must go on first thing next day with the M.A.S. convoy. Our Lieutenant in charge was quite pleased with this scheme, too, so far as Margaret and Joan were concerned, but brushed aside the idea of my joining them, although I had absolutely nothing to do on the estate. We did not want to be parted, but there was nothing else for it, and in the afternoon the other two went back to Seremban.

During the morning a certain amount of reshuffling had been done between the two estates, and all Asiatic women were put together at Bukit Nanas, and the Europeans, numbering about 10, stayed at Clovelly. In spite of the heat, two or three of us went for a walk over the estate in the afternoon; it was very pleasant to have a free day after two months' continuous grind indoors, but it was rather depressing to see the hundreds of Tamil coolies piling up the stocks of rubber and making enormous bonfires of them.

That evening about 8 we were settling down to a peaceful dinner — there were still two boys to prepare it — when some men from H.Q., Kuala Lumpur, arrived, a carload of them, and two despatch riders, one of whom had been quite badly hurt on the way. They had passed through Klang just after a raid, and found the place a shamble — bodies still lying about — horrible. They brought an

urgent message that all women were to proceed direct to Singapore at daybreak — with the exception of three who were requested, but not ordered, to stay. My name was amongst the exceptions.

It was all very dramatic, but, to cut a long story short, two of us agreed to wait. The others pored over maps and routes, trying to choose a way with shelter, as the Japs were reported to be dive-bombing and machine-gunning the roads. Next morning they were groping about in the dark, dressing and collecting belongings with the aid of torches, while Mrs. Smallwood and I lay in bed feeling rather like underdone burnt offerings.

## CHAPTER VII.

After we had seen off the Singapore convoy I went into the town to farewell Margaret and Joan. They were staying at the Chief Police Officer's house, he having decided that the club was not suitable, and were having breakfast with several military officers who had turned up there from the north during the night. I joined them and was nearly talked into going too. We piled up their cars, then all went into the town, where they joined an enormous convoy, and set off.

After that I went to the market and bought fruit and vegetables to take back to the estate, also dropped a Chinese cook I had promised to deliver to a bus stop for one of the evacuees who had gone on. A familiar car passed and pulled up. It contained Richard, cheerful and irrepressible as usual. He had just come back from a three days' tour of the Ulu, where he had the job of blowing up tin mines. He had had no news since leaving civilisation, and was just going back to Kuala Lumpur to report at the Land Office for instructions. I told him that was a bad idea, as Kuala Lumpur had already been evacuated, and buildings and bridges blown up! So he decided to report in Seremban instead.

Back at the estate there was nothing to do, so Mrs. Smallwood and I went to visit the store dump to get bread and replenish our stores; it seemed likely that the whole of the Corps would bear down on us at any time. The Corporal in charge was very sociable, and we spent the rest of the morning there. I filled my knapsack—they were always glad to distribute stores, and find some means of getting them away. Transport was the big difficulty, not so much vehicles as people to drive them. They pressed us to take anything we could possibly want—army water bottles, cigarettes, and so on, till finally we found ourselves fitted out with khaki shirts and shorts "in case we had to take to the jungle," topped up with forage caps.

They then filled my car with petrol and re-camouflaged it for me. This was a simple but effective form of camouflage used by anyone who had not time to repaint the car—it was just a thin coating of ordinary clay smeared over the whole body to stop the dazzle. Mine had become very thin on top after the heavy rain the day we left Kuala Lumpur.

After all this exertion we were having a quiet drink and discussing the news with some men who had just arrived when word came through that we were to go straight on to the next rendezvous, down near Malacca.

One man was told off to escort us, and, after going back for our luggage and jettisoning the mattress and a few non-essentials, Mrs. Smallwood squeezed into my car, and we took some more luggage for some of the men. Filling up the cracks with stores, we started our mad career with the idea of getting to the rendezvous before dark.

The road, never very wide, was almost blocked by traffic, huge convoys everywhere, troops coming up and going down. All along the way were horrible object lessons in the shape of cars and trucks turned over. Some had nose-dived into the drains, some were on their sides, some on their roofs, while others had been set on fire.

It was very exciting when we got involved between the downward and upward-moving traffic, the army transports looked so very big from a little car. My brakes, which had never been much good, gave out altogether; once or twice I really thought our end had come.

There were various incidents to break the monotony. At one stage we got behind a convoy of steamrollers and bulldozers grinding their way along with much puffing and blowing—they had come from far up north, and had been travelling flat out for about three weeks at eight miles per hour!

With shattered eardrums, wearing tin helmets and little else, their drivers were some of the unsung heroes of the war.

Another rather sticky obstacle in our path was the A.R.P. convoy of fire engines; they bristled with ladders and impedimenta.

All military convoys had spotters, because driving along in a car it is impossible to hear the planes before the bombs drop. After one bend in the road we came upon a long line of military vehicles hastily pulling up, and their occupants being decanted into the cover of a rubber plantation alongside. They blew whistles and waved to us, and we did the same, my brakes, as usual, making the operation a very tricky one. Directly the engine stopped we could hear the drone of the bombers. They were not far off, and we crouched under the trees and waited to know if they were full or empty. They turned out to be empty ones, and when we reached our destination we knew the reason why. The railway siding belonging to the estate where we were to stop had been bombed out of existence, and the hospital train which was standing there was badly hit. This was unusual, because, in fairness, I must say that the Japs generally avoided hospitals.

We came on this scene of devastation by accident, for although it was quite near the estate where we were to stay, there were endless estate roads coming and going, and the right one did not pass that way.

We eventually found the homestead, and it was just light enough to see that it was a charming house on high ground, with a most English-looking garden; evidently the owner had taken great pains to make it look like home, and had actually managed to grow roses. The door was opened by a boy who told us that the Tuan had rushed in earlier in the day, packed a few things into suitcases, shot his dogs, blown up the electric light plant, and dashed off to Singapore.

We got some more information from the Asiatic clerk of the estate. He said the Tuan had been on duty with the Malacca Defence Corps, but that the unit had been disbanded in the morning, and the Tuan had gone, and was not coming back. He had left him to pay off all the coolies and give them stocks of food.

To look at the house you would think the owners had just gone out for the afternoon. It was beautifully furnished complete with made-up beds; the bedrooms all had lovely bathrooms, and towels were hanging over the rails, soap in the soap dishes. In the dining-room there was a plentiful supply of knives and plate, a large dinner service, glasses, jugs; the pictures were all on the walls, and in the main bedroom there were lots of personal photographs. It was a lovely house. Mrs. Smallwood and I were very pleased with our lodging, and decided we could stay here happily for some time. Certainly the telephone was cut off, and we had no communication with the outside world, except by despatch rider, but we thought the Japs would take some time to get down so far; the boys, though jittery, agreed to stay on for a while.

Soon after dark a large convoy of our men arrived with lorry loads of ammunition, rifles, office equipment, some of which had to be unloaded to allow the lorries to go back for more. All the vehicles had to be distributed under cover of the rubber trees, and by the time all this was done, avalanches of exhausted men came in.

Mrs. Smallwood and I had been at work with the tin-opener, and prepared a very good meal from our bag—hot soup and a cold collation of great magnitude. Again the others had practically no food, and would not have bothered to eat anything if we had not insisted; some were almost too tired to eat, though they had had no lunch or breakfast; they had had practically no sleep for weeks.



Collyer Quay. Singapore waterfront with native boats in the foreground.  
Photo by courtesy of Mrs. R. W. G. Giblin.



Coolie women working in a tin mine.  
Photo by courtesy of Mrs. J. N. D. Harrison.





The famous Causeway connecting Singapore Island with Johore.

Photo by courtesy of Mr. P. H. Ford



Sampans on the River — Singapore.

Photo by courtesy of Mr. P. H. Ford

However, a drink and a meal cheered them up wonderfully, and it was desperately interesting hearing everyone's adventures since we had seen them in Kuala Lumpur. We sat round the table in the dim light of candles (fortunate loot from the Q.M.), and talked and talked and talked. . . .

One man told of some people he knew in the north who had dug in behind the lines — the story cannot be told here, but it was an absorbing one, with plenty of local colour. Another told of a civilian we knew who had potted off in his own car, and turned up some time later with a load of live bombs salvaged from an evacuated aerodrome hundreds of miles away.

There was a friend of ours, a police officer, whose job was over, and who was expected to evacuate to Singapore. He salvaged a truck which was being put out of action, and going round to make sure nothing was left behind, he discovered a whole dump of rifles and ammunition which had been abandoned. This he loaded on to his truck and started south with the L.D.C. They had not gone far, however, when they met an English regiment coming up to go into action. D. thought this looked more like his cup of tea, so he trundled off with his booty to join the soldiers. He knew the country like a book, knew the Malays and their language, and would tackle anything. I wonder what happened to him. He has not been heard of since that day.

Though the Malayan campaign was such a complete fiasco, there were some wonderful individual efforts, word of which never got as far as Singapore.

With us that night was a man who had been driving one of the lorries of ammunition. He had nothing to do with the Defence Corps, but had quite an interesting story. He was a young doctor who had been in the Volunteers, but had been on leave, and there was some hitch about his official position. Consequently he found himself in Singapore with a war raging in the peninsula and nothing to do. Having heard of the serious shortage of drivers for trucks (apart from the military, all the truck driving had been done entirely by Asiatics), he collected any men he could muster, and they made themselves into freelance drivers. Their idea was to salvage anything they could, and help the military and civilians to get as much as possible to the safety (as we then thought) of Singapore. Their method was to set out in one truck till they came to an abandoned vehicle; they would then put it in going order, and one of the band would drive on in it, until each man had his own transport. In this way they collected quite a fleet, filled them with valuable supplies, which would otherwise have been abandoned, and ferried them down to Singapore.

The men each carried rations for a week, slept occasionally in their truck or an empty house, and worked like niggers doing their own loading, driving huge transports with every peculiarity along the roads cluttered up with traffic for days and nights on end without let-up. This man had dinner with us, but after that he was going back up north to fill up his lorry again, having dumped our goods.

After a good night on real beds we were wakened soon after daybreak by a commotion outside; a Despatch Rider with a popping motor bike and a car-load of men had arrived with word that the Japs were advancing at a great rate and that we were to move on again. The boys had disappeared by this time, so Mrs. Smallwood and I got the breakfast while the officers conferred. It was decided to proceed in two lots, big convoys were much too vulnerable; I was in the first section with five other cars and we got away about 8.30. (We heard later that this estate was taken over that afternoon by the Australians, who dug in and made a stand there for a while.)

For the first part we travelled on estate roads, but soon came back to the main road, more cluttered than ever with traffic. It was much the same sort of journey as the day before, a little hotter than ever with frightful glare. Mrs. Smallwood had now been picked up by her husband so I had no passenger.

Streams of troops were coming and going, a cheerful looking lot, and they always gave us a wave and a cheer. There were not many women about by that time. By about one o'clock we were famished, and called in at a huge Palm Oil Estate, where the rest of the party were to meet if possible. This estate belonged to a French company. Everything was done on a very large scale, miles and miles of palms looking neat and suburban, like palms grown in pots in country hotels. The Manager had a fine bungalow on the hill, there was a factory, a number of Assistants' bungalows, and a very fine club. Members of our party knew the Manager and we were taken to the club and given the run of the bar, and ate our rations from their warm little tins in a nice comfortable lounge, which was comparatively cool.

There were several women there, wives of members of the Company from further north, who had evacuated some time before and were living with the Manager. It was funny to see women again dressed in smart clothes and peacefully sitting knitting. The heads of this Company were ardent Free French supporters, one was De Gaulle's representative in Malaya.

It is ridiculous to think that it took us all day to do about 90 miles, but that was good travelling under the circumstances, and we reached Singapore about 7.30 p.m.

## CHAPTER VIII.

On our way down the country Singapore had always loomed as a fine safe fortress, when we got there everything would be all right; but when we actually arrived in the dark on January 12th the prospect was not so rosy.

The convoy gradually split up, Mrs. Smallwood and her husband went to stay with friends, various cars broke off to go in different directions, and finally I was left with two men on the roadside.

We rang all the hotels but the answer was always the same, "absolutely no room, we could put one man in with 15 others, but a woman — no." The situation was getting very delicate. The men were all right, at least they could go to barracks at Tanglin Club or somewhere, but there was nowhere for me.

Eventually a kind Sergeant from Perak, who had joined the Selangor Defence Corps about a week before, said I must go with him. It sounded rather like Mlle. from Armentieres, but he said he had a wife somewhere about, and he thought she was sharing a house with some other people from up north and, of course, they would fix me up. We found her and she turned out to be very nice indeed, living with two families squeezed into a little house, and they gave me a camp bed on the landing and were kindness itself.

Up to that time Singapore had been raided regularly every night, but had had no day raids. That night, however, marked the change over. The moon was no longer useful to the enemy so they began day-bombing in earnest. We watched a dog fight next morning after breakfast, and it was grand to see a few of our planes go up and do battle, at last we were in a place where we were hitting back. After that I packed up the car again, said good-bye, and set off into the blue to find somewhere to stay, and to try and get in touch with some of my Kuala Lumpur friends who had come down earlier. The trouble was none of us knew where we were going, and it was impossible to find people or be found by them. It was one of the dreariest days I can ever remember. I wandered round the town, sent a cable, did all the endless registering for identity cards, absolutely alone and homeless, and there seemed no prospect of matters improving.

The L.D.C. had melted into thin air. The Evacuation Bureau people did their best with the queues of homeless people all telling tragic stories. Some were very bitter; they said that "All the people who ran away as soon as the first bomb dropped had now dug themselves in with good jobs and good billets, and we poor fools who tried to do our duty cannot even find a floor to sleep on."

In spite of my misery the day was lightened by a few funny incidents. At one time when I was sitting waiting at one of the tables in the Evacuee Bureau while the man in charge was away interviewing someone, a Section of Asiatics from the Selangor Defence Corps marched in headed by a Sikh Sergeant. They saw me, their faces lit up, and you could see them thinking "Ah, here is the Office." They marched straight over to me, saluted smartly, and asked *me* for orders and instructions about where they were to find lodgings!

I was always meeting the few Asiatics who had evacuated with the Corps, the poor little things seemed to haunt Empress Place and thereabouts. Always they came up and asked my advice and I invariably told them something which seemed to satisfy them, though, of course, I knew no more than they did. I managed to give them quite a lot of things they needed from the remains of my collection.

There was one very decent Chinese who had meant to stay behind, but when he saw that there were no drivers for some of the lorries he had got straight in and drove one down. He had nothing, not a change of clothes even, so I fitted him out in the shirt and shorts I had acquired from the Quartermaster's Store at Seremban! It was just about the right size.

I met several people I knew in the streets, but none of them knew the whereabouts of anyone else; I did not know Singapore very well as I had only spent one hectic week-end there in the good times, staying at Raffles and being taken about all the time.

I made an appointment to have my hair washed, but just as I got to the shop the alert sounded and everything was closed immediately. I went to another shop to buy something — all closed there, too. The raid lasted an hour or so, and by the time I was back at the hair-dresser's it was time for someone else's appointment. So the day wore on.

After several more visits to the Evacuation Bureau I was told a home had been found for me, at Holland Park; then "moan" went the siren — another raid.

I had one address, given me by a friend in the F.M.S. Volunteers whose Headquarters had been moved to Singapore. I tried to ring him up but there was no phone

yet, the only thing to do was to call in on the way to Holland Park. Consequently, in the middle of the afternoon, during a raid, I strolled into the mess (which I found out later was holy ground, no women allowed). Fortunately Pat was sitting on the verandah, the only person about. We were most relieved to see each other and immediately had a fierce argument and felt better.

Pat: "What do you mean driving round in an Air Raid like this?"

Me: "Poof, this is out in the Suburbs, they would not waste their bombs out here."

Pat: "My dear girl, this is alive with targets, they always bomb this part; yesterday they hit a petrol dump over there and it is still burning."

Me: "If it is so dangerous what do you mean by sitting on the verandah smoking your pipe instead of squatting in a trench?"

Pat (inevitably): "That is quite different" . . . . .

Many people did drive about during air raids in Singapore, though I suppose it was foolish. In Kuala Lumpur it was forbidden, and all cars except those belonging to the military or A.R.P. and containing men on duty were stopped. In Kuala Lumpur, too, pedestrians were soon rounded up and sent into shelters, but in Singapore there were no shelters to speak of, though the streets were lined with good deep cement gutters which were used in times of crisis. In the suburbs these drains were often rather leafy because all the streets were lined with trees, and sometimes of course, they were wet and dirty. A very large man told me of how, during one raid when the bombs were falling nearby, he sprang into one of these drains, lay down flat and cringed in terror every time there was a deafening bang. Presently he began to feel something wriggling about underneath him, he did not know which was worse, the bombs up above or the unknown object underneath. When the raid was over and he had heaved himself to the surface he fished about in the gutter and dragged out a woman almost smothered and covered with mud — she had taken shelter first and he had rather unfortunately chosen the same spot; not looking very carefully in the heat of the moment! He said he shook her out, gave her a drink and put her in a taxi and she did not seem to bear him any grudge!

In spite of the bad start in Singapore I was really very lucky and was billeted with charming people, where I had a bedroom and bathroom to myself, and as I had got in touch with Pat he took me to see friends of his, and I gradually got in contact with others I knew. After a few days I came across Margaret and Joan; they were both billeted with some people to whom they had been

given a letter on their travels. Joan's father and uncle had arrived and she was going to set up house with them.

It was not much use being in a beleaguered city with nothing to do, and I set about finding if the L.D.C. still wanted me or if I should get some other job—I had one or two offered me. The first day I went to the Straits Settlements Local Defence Headquarters and gave my name and address; I met odd members from Kuala Lumpur who said they thought the Selangor Defence Corps was going to be kept on although Selangor was no more, and that they wanted me to stand by. This went on for a week, indirect messages came telling me not to take on anything else; the heads were having heated meetings with other heads who were bent on disbanding them, and they were determined not to be disbanded. (One of the reasons why the C.O. was so anxious to keep the Corps' identity was to look after the Asiatic members who faced quite a lot to come with them. The Selangor Defence Corps was practically the only Corps to retain any of the Asiatic members after it retreated.)

Meanwhile I spent my few days' leisure at the Singapore Anzac Club. They were having difficulties like those we had known in Kuala Lumpur, most of the women had gone and they were glad of some help. It suited me well, too, it was much more cheerful working like steam there than mooning round by myself when everyone else was busy; and it was cheering to be recognised by men who had been familiar figures in Kuala Lumpur, who would tell wild tales of their adventures since that time. Here the canteen only stayed open until 6 p.m., but going hard from morning till dusk was quite enough.

Eventually the Selangor Defence Corps got things settled to suit them and took over certain security jobs such as special constables and guards at outposts. They set up Headquarters in one of the most fantastic offices one could imagine. They requisitioned a mansion in one of the suburbs of Singapore which had belonged to a Chinese millionaire of great fame. The building was a real palace set in acres of garden which was laid out with marble statuary, several grass tennis courts, a doggerly, and so forth. The house was emptied of furniture, but a few things were left behind including a billiard table (excellent air raid shelter), and a stuffed elephant and rhinoceros which stood together forlornly in a corner with their faces to the wall; these were all in the main hall downstairs, but the place was so vast that they were hardly noticed. The floor was marble mosaic and the roof was supported by immense white pillars; there were windows and doors all round three sides of the hall and a

regal staircase swept up to the second floor opposite the main entrance. The lighting came from innumerable chandeliers, but the chandeliers did not look their scintillating best with all globes removed save one in the bottom-centre of each, and even this was covered by a cone-shaped blackout shade, which looked like a gloomy little drip of ink amongst the splendour. On the post at the foot of the staircase was a bronze stature of Venus, more than life-size, standing precariously on one toe and holding aloft a wreath of lights.

Upstairs was another large place which looked like a ballroom and off it several enormous bedrooms and their bathrooms—so large that one felt some sort of motor transport would be needed to take the occupant of the bed to the bath.

This was what we saw when we first arrived. To begin with one desk was supplied for the Adjutant in the lower hall, soon our filing cabinet was brought in and dumped beside a pillar and was lost. Eventually six or seven large desks, some cupboards and numerous chairs were accumulated, but the hall still looked quite empty. There were all sorts of rooms and offices at the back, wonderful refrigerators, and the Quartermaster had a great time spreading himself about in the store rooms allotted to him.

Incidentally when all the Corps was collected at the new H.Q. the Lieut. who had been in charge at Seremban, our first rendezvous from Kuala Lumpur, greeted me with a broad smile and said, "Young woman, you will be getting me into trouble if you go on requisitioning rubber estates the way you do—that one you took over at Seremban was not supposed to be for us at all". . . . Fortunately he had a sense of humour, and anyway nothing up-country mattered in the least by that time, but it was considered a good joke against me! To clear my character, I looked up Operation Orders and found I was right all the time, but evidently the heads had decided they would not need the third estate and did not mean to use it.

Soon after going back to the job I took a flat with a girl whose name I did not even know. It came about this way.

Some friends of mine who had a little flat in a good position had been trying to get me one in the same building, and I was vaguely looking out for someone to share it, if such a thing were found. One day at the Anzac Club I was talking to one of the helpers, a nice girl from up north who was having a miserable time where she was staying, and was on the look out for somewhere else to go—at that time almost impossible to find. While we



were talking Margaret came in and greeted this girl as an old friend — she had been at Oxford with her sister — we decided there and then that it would be a grand idea to take a flat between the three of us; but Margaret was a doubtful third as she had just put her name down for a ship and was going to sail as soon as she could get a passage. Some days later I was spending the night with my friends in Orchard Road; we had a calm night, but next day at about 10 a.m. there was a terrific raid, bombs all over the place, and the block of flats where my friends lived rocked about and received a good many bits of shrapnel. The husband had come home after a night on duty at Fort Canning, and was caught luxuriating in the bath when the raid started. He leapt into the bedroom and put on some clothes, but when he went back to the bath it was full of bricks and tiles from the roof. That evening Betty rang me up saying that a Dutch woman in the opposite flat had decided things were getting too hot for her and was sailing next day, so I arranged to come at lunch time and negotiate for the flat.

I rushed into town before the office (where I was due at 8.30) to find the nameless girl at the Anzac Club, but they told me that she had given up going there and had taken a full-time job in a military office — they knew no more. Well . . . there was just one more hope, to search the places where she might lunch. It sounds silly in a place the size of Singapore, but I had once seen her at Robinson's. So in my lunch hour I rushed into the city again, praying there would be no alert to shut everything up, and went straight to Robinson's; the cafe was full up, they were turning people away. She did not seem to be there, so I left to try another place; the lift came up and out stepped Henrietta, the girl I was looking for. We rushed off to another lunch place, swallowed something while I told her all I knew, the rent, no linen or cutlery, must move in immediately, and take it before three that afternoon, when the occupant was leaving. Off we galloped again, into my car and out to Orchard Road to fix it up — we were on the doorstep cheque book in hand about an hour after I had left the office to look for what seemed like a needle in a haystack.

The flat, on the second floor, was satisfactory, except for a few odd holes in the roof; we were not enamoured with some of the furniture, and the lamp shades the departing tenant was so proud of, but agreed to pay her a lavish rent for them and pay the landlord monthly. That was all arranged in a couple of minutes, but the unfortunate woman was in such a dither that we could not get her to sign anything or, more important, give us the key. She would pick things up, sigh, put them down again,

then a Czechoslovakian friend came to bid her farewell, and we were left standing while they got very sentimental. After half an hour of this Henrietta and I were nearly demented. We were very sorry for her, but thought with horror of our respective offices where we were long overdue. We did half her packing for her and did our best to get her moving, but she seemed quite incapable of getting herself off, and I am sure if we had not been there she would have missed the boat. I had to drive her into town, the car groaning with luggage though the trunks had gone before. We had to collect the child aged 2, who was nearly left behind, and follow up the rear with buckets, spades, dolls and bags and parcels which shot out into the gutter when the car door was opened. The last straw was when she asked us to stop at a jeweller's shop to pick something up, then sauntered out after we had been seething with anxiety to get away, to say that it was not finished and would we please wait!

What a day! But we got the key eventually and the flat was ours. We moved in the following evening after the day's work. The next thing was to find someone to do the work—boys seemed to be out of the question, there were none, so all our friends searched for an amah for us. Several nice little things turned up and seemed quite happy about the work until they saw the hole in the kitchen roof—that finished them all. In vain we told them about the wonderful shelter downstairs, and pointed out that as we had had one bombing there was a 100 to 1 chance we would not get it again, but one might as well save one's breath as talk logic to an amah who has made up her mind—so that was that. It meant rather a struggle going to the market every day before the office, and it was an awful business standing in queues at the Cold Storage, nothing was delivered by that time and all the housewives of Singapore were lined up for provisions before the limited supply was sold out. There were no potatoes, seldom any bread, or eggs, very little fruit or vegetables of any kind, butter was rationed quite severely. However, Henrietta was a most cheerful person, quite lighthearted after getting away from her dreary billet, and neither of us minded much what we ate or when we ate it, and got a lot of amusement out of the things we dished up. We were only in in the evenings and the flat was always full of people. It was a very different proposition to living in a flat in Kuala Lumpur; then I was taken out to dinner nearly every night, and I had a standing invitation to lunch every day. Here there was nowhere to go and the blackout was terrific, so our friends from messes, etc., came to visit us. Raffles Hotel, which had

once been so gay, was now in rather a muddle, though pleasantly light inside and the depleted band still played (in khaki). It really brought the War home when the men of the party had to go out into the kitchen of world-famous Raffles and bring in the dinner—the boys had run away! One picture theatre still persevered, but the only time I went there we nearly choked with the exhausted air, it was full to overflowing with troops, everything shut up because of the blackout, and the heat was ghastly.

There were soldiers everywhere as everyone knows from the figures published of the men who were left behind and taken prisoner—the whole of the Malayan Peninsula was concentrated in that one city. It was most difficult to get a meal anywhere except in one's own home.

The first Saturday after we moved into the flat we had a house-warming, we had to tell our guests to bring their own knives and forks, and some took the precaution of bringing along a few tins and bottles in case of accidents. It was really a nice easy party; when it came to getting the meal, some of the visitors (their rank ranged from a Lt.-Col., a Major, a Capt., a Lieut., to a Private) fought as to who should cook it, and when it was over they did the washing up, and a good time was had by all. The hostesses just did a little supervising and bound up fingers when they were cut by tin openers or burned on the gas ring—the casualty list was quite large. The main dish was a large mixed grill, made in two pans into which we tossed everything I had been able to buy in the market that morning; I had had a good day and managed to secure eggs, some bad potatoes which had yielded a few good parts, bacon, kidneys, bananas, and the rest was made up of tins of sausages, tomatoes, mushrooms and all sorts of things. At one time there was an air raid, and, of course, with our insecure blackout and two holes in the roof all the lights had to be put out, but fortunately it happened before the chefs had started operations or I don't know what would have happened.

The Blackout business was always a great trouble to us, there was so little time to do anything to it. The night we moved in there was nearly serious trouble. Henrietta and I both arrived about 6 p.m. after an exhausting day, and humped our luggage up the stairs, cleaned out cupboards, and put things away. We lit the dim lights after shutting the shutters which were all covered with cardboard, and thought the last tenant had been very strict about blacking out. The next thing we knew was a thunderous knocking on the front door and the fiercest policeman I have ever seen strode in to the room quaking with rage and righteous anger—our blackout. He towered over Henrietta and me, expecting to find the flat

full of spies, and said we had a dazzling light in one of the windows. We swore this was not true, but were marched downstairs to look, and sure enough a stream of light shone out from the bedroom wall. It turned out to come from a window we had never seen. The mosquito net was pushed back against the wall, and as it was almost dark when we arrived, we had not noticed there was a window behind it. The policeman melted after a while and we found he had known Henrietta's husband up-country. We were not fined or put in gaol, but he led us to believe that anything might happen and probably would. Very nerve-shaking!

Altogether that was rather a bad night for us. Henrietta had salvaged a lovely Dalmation puppy which she brought along; it was very sweet and affectionate, but not house trained or disciplined in any way. We put it on the tiny back verandah on a cushion in the child's playpen, but it wanted to come inside and moaned and tried to beat the door down. Our troubles were not over even when we got to bed. Henrietta had no nightgown at all, having been whisked away from her home in Perak at about 10 minutes' notice. She had obeyed the order about taking practically no luggage so that she could fill her car with people and had swept up a pair of her husband's pyjamas as being the most suitable sleeping garments for the retreat. When his regiment arrived in Singapore, however, he too had lost everything, so Henrietta nobly gave back the pyjamas. She would have nothing to do with the nightgown I tried to talk her into, said they were useless in a raid, and after a long debate on the most suitable wear for these unsettled nights, she dressed herself in an aertex shirt and very brief scanties ready to step into a pair of slacks if the house fell down!

The nights are warm in Singapore, but often it gets cool enough to need a light blanket in the small hours of the morning. We had one of these between us, and spent a restless time, first one waking up uncovered and stealthily taking advantage of the other's unconsciousness to get a little bit back. Then the other would roll over and tweak it off again. But what with the raids, the dog and the blanket problem we did not get much sleep. We talked till all hours, were very amused at the circumstances which had flung us, perfect strangers, into a large double bed in an oddly furnished flat which had holes in the roof and shook like the Haunted House in a "Silly Symphony" when there was a raid. "Really," said Henrietta, giving a mighty tug at the blanket, "we might easily be Robertson Hare and Ralph Lynn. I always thought their scenes were exaggerated until now."

Then the banshee screamed again and nearly blew us out of bed. (The siren was very near to the flat and its wail was deafening.) Henrietta rushed out to pacify the puppy and, tripping through the moonlight with her curly hair and short pants, looked like a chorus girl about to take the stage.

The "All clear" sounded soon afterwards, that again came as a piercing yell, the puppy was now settled in on his cushion in our room, and for a time we enjoyed peace.

The next excitement was a good shower of rain, though "shower" is rather an inadequate word to describe Malayan rain. Of course the kitchen was soon awash, but a long time afterwards queer splashing noises made themselves heard in the dressing room off our bedroom. This little place had been fixed up as the baby's room and was not a great deal of use to us, as all the space was taken up by a child's cot, a small cupboard for children's clothes, a bath on a stand and baby's scales, etc. Everything was painted blue with nursery rhyme pictures on the walls and on the furniture; it was quite attractive but not exactly practical, as none of us could fit into the cot, though we thought it might come in for the puppy. However, we stuffed the cupboards full with all the things we did not want which the late occupant had left behind, and the layout gave our visitors a great deal of harmless amusement. We had noticed the crack in the roof earlier, but thought that if the rain was going to come through it would have done so straight away as had happened in the kitchen. On going in to investigate, however, we found a slow but steady drip coming regularly from the inverted parchment light shade; the water had seeped through, run down the cord, and the shade still bravely hanging there, had begun to overflow and drip from the point! It looked so silly. However, there was a remedy at hand, and we slipped the baby's bath into position and tried to sleep again to the accompaniment of loud "pings" as the water hit the tin. Definitely not a good night. But we did not have many more showers; fortunately it was the dry season.

Perhaps I have painted a rather dreary picture of the flat. Actually it was not at all bad when we had settled in and banished the surplus doyleys and covers, and we got very attached to it. It had been well kept, contained a beautiful refrigerator and wireless, the furniture was new, of the modern suite variety, and was all solid and comfortable. The entrance was through the sitting room and out of that opened the dressing room, bedroom, with bathroom beyond, and through another doorway the dining-room and kitchen. A little balcony ran between:

the bathroom and kitchen and doors opened from practically every room into every other one, so there was plenty of air if the lights were out.

From the back balcony descended the fire escape, which we got to know very well. Besides descending it occasionally to take tins to the garbage bin, our friends in the lower flat had a superior air raid shelter, and we often used to forgather there on the bad nights.

There were generally wonderful sights to be seen from our back premises, and we always meant to do up the balcony and sit there in the evenings — at the time it was rather cluttered up by the play-pen and often people got caught up in the line which held bits of washing while we waited there to decide where the attack was being made, and see the fires and searchlights. Then, if the planes seemed to be coming our way, we would spin round that spiral staircase like firemen down the greasy pole, not stopping till we were under cover of the shelter.

The balcony looked over trees towards the Naval Base, and when, for a time, that part was getting its load of bombs every day and night, there was always a fire burning. The trees made patterns in front of the flames, and with the searchlights swishing backwards and forwards across the sky it was very beautiful, especially in the early evening when the sky still held some of the fantastic colour of the Malayan sunset.

## CHAPTER IX.

Meanwhile the Selangor Defence Corps was settling into its palace. It was queer to find that all the secret files I had cherished for so long were just so much waste paper now that Selangor was over-run. A few new men were attached to the Corps, but many of the original ones had gone to join the R.A.F., the Army, and other things; it was sadly reduced in size.

After a week or two in the new office things were straightened out and I realised that, now that the confidential papers were negligible, there was not very much work that any ordinary Asiatic could not do; and we had taken on a Chinese clerk who could cope with the correspondence. (People did not correspond much by that time, anyway, everything happened so fast that letters were out of date by the time they found their way to their destinations.)

As so many women had left the country there was a definite shortage of office staff at the various Service Headquarters—it was essential to have Europeans in these offices for security reasons. So I said good-bye to the L.D.C. and joined the Army.

Most of my friends had been advocating this change all along; they said the L.D.C. would have me swimming to Batavia if anything happened to Singapore . . . but I was sorry to leave the old Corps (Corpse, as it was inevitably pronounced by the Asiatic personnel); they had been very good to me and I was a very privileged person there.

However, a Major friend on the Staff took me off to Army Headquarters, piloted me past sentries and barbed wire, and deposited me in the Intelligence office, at Sime Road, where advance H.Q. of Army, Navy, and Air Force were established.

Here rows and rows of attap roofed huts rambled about the hillside, bristling with barbed wire and beautifully camouflaged. Good use had been made of the rubber plantations as cover—I have flown over the area and been amazed at the way the buildings were made to disappear, even the car park was camouflaged by nets which were spread above the whole roadway which led to the two rows of garage sheds; the colour toned in amazingly well with the surroundings.

This H.Q. was six miles out of the city just opposite the Bukit Timah golf course. Last time I had been in Singapore I had spent Sunday evening at the Golf Club—a most attractive place. At sunset we had sat on the Terrace and the band of a famous English Regiment, the men in peacetime white uniform, played on the grass in front of the Club House. When it got dark the group on the fairway was flood-lit, and stood out, an unreal splash of white, against the dark jungle covered hills.

But things had changed since then. Now cows grazed on the links and rambled about the greens, and there were gun emplacements all along the road near Headquarters, where cheerful half-naked men sat behind their guns ready for action. Of course the golf course was guarded like all open spaces, as parachute troops were expected to land there. Occasionally our men would have exercises or alarms, and the clerks (who, of course, were soldiers) would disappear with their loaded rifles and leaves and twigs in the nets which covered their steel helmets. Some looked quite ferocious, but most of them were more like small boys playing Indians.



## CHAPTER X.

It was a very interesting time to be in the thick of things and our various friends dropping in in the evenings had startling or amusing stories to tell of the war from first hand.

Henrietta's husband had joined the Argyll Regiment up country, that famous regiment which had covered itself with glory all down the Peninsula, and which had had a worse doing than any — unfortunately it was a very small number of the originals who survived to tell the tale in Singapore. In spite of all they had been through I never met more cheerful or optimistic men, they were real soldiers who fought as if they were enjoying the fight as well as defending their country. They adored their superior officers and would go anywhere for them. They were very proud of their regiment's traditions.

When Noel got leave he usually brought along one or two fellow officers and often a tough little Scot called Smith was among them. It was only necessary to set Smith going to be entertained indefinitely with all the things one wanted to know about the battle. He would describe the Japs' way of fighting, how they "infiltrated" in parties of five, wearing shorts and sandshoes. One man would carry a tommy gun, two would carry ammunition, one rice, and the fifth, water. There were millions of these groups — quite independent of other supplies — and our men never knew where they would turn up next. They were clever at disguising themselves and hiding in large numbers up cocoanut trees, etc. Smith would describe how there would suddenly be a "bur-rst of fi-re" and they would have a "T'riffic baht-tl," and his eyes would light up as he acted the scene.

The Argylls were stationed at Tyersall Park and one day Henrietta and I went there to a pahit party in the mess — but they did not go in for many frivolities of that kind.

Then one evening Noel and another came in to say they would be away for a while, they were going into action again . . .

Some days later they were back, leaping up the stairs two steps at a time, the little tails of their Glengarry caps flapping behind them. They were finished earlier than expected, everything had gone off beautifully . . .

We discovered that their little job had been to pilot all the troops across the Causeway and see it blown up. We were now cut off from the rest of Malaya and were all concentrated on the little Island of Singapore, 12 miles from top to bottom.

This was rather a shock at the time, we had not known that things had come to that stage; we were always told not to listen to rumour and only to believe the B.B.C., but according to the wireless our troops were still fighting the Japs in Johore, holding them at one of the lines one heard so much about.

The enormous reservoir which supplied Singapore with water was in Johore and the pipeline went over the Causeway; of course that, too, was blown up. However, water seemed still to be coming from the tap and Noel assured us that there were plenty more reservoirs on the Island (as we were later informed in the press, Singapore had only been connected to the large Johore reservoir for a few years.)

Soon Smith was off again with a vivid description of how they "blew the Brig" as he called it. They had seen all our troops across, a beautiful piece of organisation it seemed, then the Argylls were the last to come over, led by a Piper playing the bagpipes.

When they were all on the Island the fuses were lit . . .

They had a few very blood-curdling days whilst waiting for the troops to arrive and cross the half-mile causeway. At one time they were digging themselves in in an open padang with dive bombers and machine guns a constant menace. There had been a lull for some time, when suddenly the enemy was back again and bombs began to fall — a signal for pretty quick action.

Smith and another man leapt into a small trench, crouched in the approved position with thumbs in mouths and fingers in ears and waited. There was a detonation close by, a shower of gravel, and Bang! . . . something enormous — hard and heavy — hit Smith on the middle of the back and knocked him down. He said his life story flashed through his mind, he thought he was really gone this time; then realising to his surprise that he was still conscious, he made investigations as to what had hit him.

It turned out to be a Brigadier!

Also taking cover at very short notice the Brigadier had leapt into the first trench he saw, a running jump, and had landed with both hobnail boots on Smith's spine just as another bomb burst about 50 yards away.

We had another very interesting visitor who used to drop in at our flat, the leader of a band of Commandos, I had known him in Kuala Lumpur as a crack polo player and the head of the Political and Criminal Intelligence.

One of the men who saw what might happen in Malaya, he had spent years trying to explain quite a lot of things to the Powers that Be. After the end of Kuala Lumpur John joined the army — actually he had been working in with them for a long time, as his job and theirs overlapped continually. At any rate he was made a Colonel straight away and allowed to choose a certain number of men for special jobs. He picked men who knew the country well, spoke Malay and/or Chinese, were fit, and tough, and intelligent, and of course, absolutely fearless.

When they finally reached Singapore after amazing adventures, he and his band lived for a while at a house not far from the flat, and John, with or without a fellow brigand, would suddenly appear at all sorts of queer times, probably not having slept for a day or so.

One night, soon after an alert had sounded, John appeared at the door looking very sinister and sleuthy, leading by a chain an enormous jet black bloodhound about the size of a Shetland pony. (Actually it was "Dopey," one of his own dogs brought down from Kuala Lumpur, a cross between a Dalmatian and Alsatian. Dopey was just being brought on a social call though he looked like the Hound of the Baskervilles.)

We had not yet had our meal, so John stayed and had bacon and eggs at about 9.30, that was the first meal he had all day. In fact Henrietta and I had the cheek to criticise his methods of training very severely, and would often lecture him on feeding his men well when food was still obtainable as it would be time enough to starve when supplies ran out. However, he believed in being tough, and anyway, they had no time to waste going to markets and shops. They worked day and night.

When they finally got Headquarters of their own out at Holland Park they had no proper cook, and lived on the odd tin of something or a few fried cinders, slept on floors, but they looked quite well on it.

Members of the band were always slipping away on mysterious errands. . . .

They were a wonderful group of men, John was very proud of his officers, and a little while before the end he was at last given a free hand and immediately began to put into practice his scheme for recruiting Chinese guerillas on the Island. He managed to get equipment for 1,000 of these, and with the original European nucleus he set out to enrol his army.

They had a great time recruiting, held wildly enthusiastic meetings by torchlight in queer native quarters, and when 1,000 volunteers were asked for 6,000 applied. I believe the enthusiasm was amazing. Some of the cheer

leaders were men John had rounded up and put in gaol some years before as Communists, which caused us all great amusement.

The idea was to train the Chinese to fight in the way which had proved so successful with their countrymen in China, but by the time that red tape was overcome and equipment available we were all isolated on the Island.

There was still time to prove their mettle, however, and I know they had plans worked out for combating enemy landings in the mangrove swamps and places where they finally got a foothold. But of course the Japs struck quickly. I doubt if the Corps had even got its arms, let alone had time for much training, but you may be sure that they accounted for a good many Japanese one way or another.

Of course they were all in action when the landings were made, and I never heard of them again. . . .

Pat had been accepted in this Brigand Band, but was having great difficulty in getting his release from the Volunteers, he was dying to do something more active. He used to arrive at the flat with bits of new and big ideas. I remember one evening when he was very enthusiastic about a planter he had been talking to who had made two trips behind the lines and had brought out some hundred of our men who had been cut off. This man said it was money for jam, there were no Japs to be seen off the beaten track, and if one knew the Asiatics and spoke their language it was all quite simple. He had spent the entire day trying to persuade the Higher Command to give him 2,000 men to go up behind and attack the Japs from the rear, he knew the way to get there—but all he got was a flat denial, in fact they forbade him to go again by himself. It sounded so obviously the thing to do that we all got thoroughly worked up and exasperated about it that night.

There had been quite a sensational story in the paper that day about an officer in the Argylls posted missing for a week or so, who had suddenly turned up from Sumatra, having escaped from behind the lines.

We were talking about this and, funnily enough, this same Captain came in with Noel that evening and we heard a first-hand account of his experiences. He had been wounded in the feet, and in spite of having difficulty in walking, and not knowing the Malay language, he had managed to paddle down rivers on improvised rafts, get a certain amount of food from some Asiatics (though most of the Malays were far from helpful), and in this way he had succeeded in travelling down to Malacca or there-

abouts, where he obtained a boat big enough to get across to Sumatra. From Sumatra he flew back to Malaya and was promptly married to a well-known Singapore girl.

It seemed frightful that we had to be driven down the Peninsula like a flock of sheep, penned up meekly in Singapore Island, while the entire army of Nipponese dogs barked at us across the Straits of Johore. . . . It was agreed that there was practically no garrison left behind to look after the conquered territory — at least not in those early days.

## CHAPTER XI.

For some time after we had reached Singapore men were coming back from leave. Margaret's brother, a doctor, arrived by plane to rejoin his Ambulance Unit; and then Tony returned about a week later.

The arrival by plane was often a tricky business, the windows were always covered over before Singapore was in sight, so there was no hope of seeing what was happening, and on the day that Tony arrived the city was being raided at the time they should have landed. The pilot, having no guns or any protection whatever, turned away to let it blow over, and after making three such approaches, finally landed at the airport. This had been badly knocked about by the enemy, making landing quite a perilous affair, and even before they had left the aerodrome the Japanese planes were over again and the passengers told to take cover.

Poor Tony, all his belongings had been left behind in Kuala Lumpur, so he wrote them off cheerfully and set about getting himself new tropical things, and took a room at Raffles Hotel. Next day the Raffles dhobi got a bomb and all Tony's second outfit went up in smoke! It was at that time that the boys disappeared from the Hotel and the guests were helping in the kitchen; however, later on more boys were engaged or the old ones returned, and things went back to normal.

It is hard to describe what a muddle things were in by that time. To drive through the town there did not appear to be a great deal of damage, but many big buildings were gutted, and some of the native quarters were badly battered. Then a bomb or blast got the clock tower of the Victoria Memorial Hall and broke the face of the clock, but the hands still continued to move round their course in mid air. Next day a huge notice appeared on the tower "THEY CAN'T STOP OUR CLOCK." And neither could they, though it was rather hard to tell the time by it!

Raffles Square, the busy centre of European shops and banks, was very knocked about during the first attack on the night of 7th/8th December, when the town was still brilliantly lighted and war had not been declared — but it was not hit again before I left.

The Cricket Club was bombed, and cars outside set on fire, and part of a plane fell on the padang in front.

Each time one came into the city there was usually something new to notice, and the suburbs were very knocked about as troops and supply dumps were distributed everywhere.

With queer things happening to the reservoirs and the enormous number of people of all races crammed into the Island, and the likelihood of essential services being knocked out, everyone was supposed to be inoculated against typhoid, vaccinated for smallpox, and various things.

Henrietta and I finally found time for the T.A.B. injection and had a bad day recovering. Then Henrietta got dengue fever, and when she was better I got it — the first time I had had any of those tropical complaints. We were very sorry for ourselves.

Still working at the office but crawling home in the evenings to go to bed and sweat and shiver, aching all over as if we had been beaten, our spirits were considerably lowered. We were easy prey to the kind of friends who told us that we should "Put our names down at the P. & O. office for a passage home, that all women should leave the country as anything might happen at any moment. Of course if the worst happened everyone would be evacuated, but it would ease their minds to know that we were not in the shambles in the end." So we put our names down to be notified if there was a place on one of the ships leaving.

Most women had done this on reaching Singapore, and were told to call at the Shipping Office every day to see if anything was sailing. Many of them with children in England or Australia were naturally most anxious to get away, but each day it was the same answer — nothing today.

Then one heard that ships had gone away with enough room for hundreds more passengers. . . .

Late in January a huge convoy of big liners left, taking the women and children who had been waiting, plus army wives, and practically the only people left were those who had jobs and meant to carry on.

It was early in February when Henrietta and I put our names on the list, and it really looked as if there would not be any more ships. Then one night we had word that there was one sailing for India next day. I did not want to go to India but Noel insisted on Henrietta leaving, and did his best to talk me into going too. It would have been nice to travel together but it was out of my course.

They could not see why I wanted to go back to Tasmania anyway, and thought I should go right on to England with Henrietta. "That is the place to go," they said,

"and there are lots of jobs to do. Oh yes, your people will be pleased to see you for a week or so, and then they will get sick of you. . . . You like England, don't you; well, that is the obvious thing to do." . . . .

By that time I had recovered from the fever and felt quite fit to go on with my job. When so many were leaving I had asked a senior officer at Headquarters if they wanted to get rid of all the women from there, but he said no, we were releasing men, and if it looked like a general evacuation we would probably be sent.

I had my blood up by that time and definitely wanted to see the thing through. Henrietta said it was curiosity and that my curiosity would get me into trouble, but she hated going herself, I knew.

We sub-let the flat to a Major and a Captain from 2nd Echelon (who never took it over, I found out later), and Tony's friends with whom he was staying asked me to go there too.

They had a lovely home in Chancery Hill Road, the boy, Ah See, a perfect wonder, was still with them, as well as an amah, and it was good to be waited on again.

Pen and Ken were a grand pair, most cheerful and amusing, though we did not see much of Ken, who was continuously on duty with the Volunteers. Pen was a wonderful person, with all the courage in the world, she was nursing at a hospital (which had been badly hit at one stage), and had decided to stay on whatever happened. She and Ken had a baby of 9 months old and had sent him home to England with his grandmother a month before. To see them one would have no idea what it meant to say good-bye to their adored Christopher.

One morning we were having breakfast on the porch and there were weird noises going on in the heavens, it had been an extraordinary noisy night but we were fairly used to that, and in my ignorance I did not notice much difference. Suddenly Tony said "Do you realise you are under shell fire?" It appeared that the Japs had trained long range guns on to various points from the South of Johore, and the shells had been whistling over the house all night. We discovered later that one had knocked the roof off a house two doors down the road, and finished up in the tennis court.

Tony seemed rather worried about our being there; Ken was away and he felt responsible. He knew about guns and seemed to know where the shells were coming from and going to, and whether they were near or far away. Pen and I got to know a little about them too. When the doors shook in a certain way and there was a noise like an express train about to come in the window it meant they were rather close.



The enemy was still looking for the range and any minute a shell might hit us and it would be good-bye, but somehow we felt it was more likely it would not hit us. Unlike bombs, there seems nothing one can do about gunfire, and there were no warnings, which was rather a relief. We did not feel it incumbent on us to dive into dirty drains or under tables.

But to cut a long story short, the house was never hit, nor did we meet any shells while driving to and fro, and we came and went in our separate cars just when we wanted to, not even thinking of them. One target was evidently Newton Circus, a point on the road between us and the city, and they also were very severe on sections of Bukit Timah Road, though not the part I used going to Headquarters.

Several people wanted us to move and stay with them, but Pen said she could not be bothered, and really we felt quite as safe there as anywhere else, and it was nice and comfortable. Pleasant surroundings were worth a lot.

I remember we had a craze for jig-saw puzzles. Pen had a special table and there was always an enormous puzzle of about 1,000 pieces in some stage of progress in front of a low sofa. We would all come home tired, and start doing the insidious thing, then after a bath and change and dinner would probably start again, all diving for pieces at once. Tony would talk all the time, and when he got anything to fit would carry on a commentary such as "With his usual skill, Churchill again picks out the one important piece and cunningly slips it into place . . ." Then after staring at the board for hours and trying impossible bits into wrong places he would have another success and be off again "Look at this, incredible" . . . till someone would clout him over the head with a cushion.

Ken, of course, had always been quite irrepressible, and a real menace. It was impossible to be serious for long when he was around, but he talked the most amusing nonsense of anyone I have ever known.

It sounds silly, now, to be playing with jig-saw puzzles while shells whistled over the roof, but at the time it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

All the same, we were not very happy about the situation. The usually light-hearted Tony had already realised that Singapore would fall, and knew that he had returned in time to be taken prisoner, but not in time to have the satisfaction of doing much beforehand, in spite of his eagerness—about the worst thing that can happen to a man. The night the Japs landed he explained his idea of what was really happening to Malaya, which proved to

be very accurate. Bone-headed enough to believe that Singapore could hold out like Malta, and with a certain blind faith in our luck, Pen and I laughed at the grim picture and said he was getting pessimistic. I don't like to remember how we laughed—we, who got away. . . .

(I am sure that Tony would never attempt to escape, he took the view that our officials were there to look after the Asiatics and should not desert them however ghastly their fate might be—and he knew something of what to expect, having spent two years of Hell in a German prison camp in 1917-18.)

Meanwhile life went on as usual.

One Sunday afternoon T. and I were on our way to see someone from Kuala Lumpur when we met about ten Australians, tired, dirty, and unshaven, who had been bombed out of their position somewhere in the centre of the Island, and were looking helplessly for their Headquarters in Singapore. The various Headquarters moved so often and were distributed to such an extent that it was no easy matter to find them, especially if one did not speak Malay. So Tony went into a Police Station to ring up likely places and get transport for these men who were knocked up. Eventually he fixed it all up and we waited to see them safely off—which meant spending about an hour propped against the railing of the little Police Station talking to them. They were mechanics who had been working on machinery in a factory; they had been bombed all the morning and described in lurid digger language how they took shelter in a ravine, and when the factory was eventually smashed up the unit had scattered and split up, having left rifles, equipment, and everything in their dash for cover—some of them still carried spanners they had been using when the blitz began. This particular lot had walked a long way and had called in at the Indian Camp where they were given food and a few Comic Opera clothes, as many of them had been working almost in the nude. They were thoroughly shaken and very tired. Eventually a lorry arrived and took them to their base.

That same evening after we got home two Tommies appeared at the door, they said they were looking for a canteen though there was not one anywhere in the vicinity, and they seemed to be lost. They said one was slightly wounded so we washed his arm; it was not much, only a scratch. They had some beer and we told them the way, but they stayed on and on. They had absolutely nothing to say but grinned and murmured an occasional yes or no. There was a curfew at this time, and no troops, except those on duty, allowed out after 6.30. We mentioned this to our guests and suggested they might get

into trouble, but they grinned and said "No." Finally, at about 9 o'clock, Pen asked them to have dinner with us, which they did, and by 11 o'clock we were just about played out by the one-sided conversation, so Tony said he would help them extricate their truck from the lantana hedge where it had come to rest, and with that they went. They were an odd couple. It was quite a common thing to see small groups or even single men wandering in a dazed way towards the town—unshaven, eyes blood-shot, perhaps carrying a rifle, but often having lost their arms en route. (I must be careful not to make misleading statements about arms; I was telling this to someone in Tasmania and she earnestly said "How dreadful, what horrible sights you must have seen—anyway, I suppose they were still lucky to have their legs!"). But to return to the stragglers, they were remains of units which had been "shot up" in the North of the Island, had scattered, and been cut off from their comrades—so they would wander vaguely in the direction of the city; we often picked them up and gave them lifts.

## CHAPTER XII.

I do not know how we would have managed without cars. In January, when we all migrated to Singapore, they did not distribute the month's coupons — petrol had been rationed for some time, but we were normally given a generous issue because there were huge stocks at the various installations. But, owing to lack of coupons, it was very difficult to get supplies and in the early days in Singapore we were told there was no way of getting more — consequently many people with big cars sold them to the Army. The motor registration people were giving coupons for three gallons at the most to people from up North. Still driving the Austin 10, which I had driven down from Kuala Lumpur, I went to the Registration Office to see what I could do. The car was pasted with notices "requisitioned by Government," L.D.C., etc., and I thought that might help. I told my tale and got the three coupons, but the tank was then showing empty, and I was not going to risk driving round to look for petrol pumps — many of which were dry — so tried to persuade the authorities to supply it from their own pumps, which dealt with the Sanitary Board lorries and such-like. That was impossible, they said, and I was shown out.

Though I was not there when it happened, I always gained great face from the battered rear view of the car, shrapnel holes on the boot and side and two back windows shattered, and when I came out of the Registration Office in dejection that day, several men were examining the exhibit, and wanted to know where I had come from — battered cars were not so common in Singapore at that time. I told my story again, and presently one man, quite against the rules, quietly poured 4 gallons of petrol into the tank. And I still had my coupons! I was set for the time being.

Malaya is a hopeless country without a car, too hot to walk even if there was time, and so many people were stranded when they had handed in their large cars to the military. It was impossible to get buses to most suburbs, and offices were distributed all over the place — for instance, Sime Road was 6 miles out of the city. People who had cars in commission gave lifts to others, and notices were put on bus stops to hail any sort of

vehicle that passed. Henrietta had handed in her big Dodge and we made several attempts to collect my Austin 7 from Sir John Campbell for her to use, but something had always happened to stop us. I also tried to find the whereabouts of the wounded man to ask if he wanted his Austin 10, but could not trace him anywhere, and practically looked on the car as mine as it was going to be destroyed in Kuala Lumpur if I had not driven it away, there being no more drivers. (I was later offered a Bentley and another enormous and superior model, but I had the little one packed and they took too much petrol anyway!) However, when Henrietta had gone and I was leaving the flat in a downpour of rain, all my belongings piled into the car, its owner appeared, alive and well, and short of transport! So next day with the help of Tony's Syce I got back my little Austin 7 and returned the warrior to its rightful owner. The 7 had developed a few new peculiarities after its adventures on the road, but with a little humouring it still got about and I had acquired a 4 gallon tin of petrol which helped to set the wheels in motion.

Driving in the Singapore blackout was a difficult business unless the town was familiar. I had to go out in a downpour one night soon after I arrived, to a place to which I had been taken several months before. Not sure of it even in daylight, I took one wrong turning in a residential area and then was finished. There were no landmarks I knew, not a light anywhere, the windscreen was a sea of water, not a soul to ask the way. Eventually a man in some sort of uniform hailed me and said rude things about my light (there was only one, and that, 1 inch in diameter, but there should have been newspaper over the 1 inch and it had melted!). However, I asked him where I was and he said "You are on your way to Johore!" and very kindly led me, in his car, to where I wanted to go. Fortunately I did not have to drive myself again at night because I lost the remaining inch of headlight quite soon.

I was going to Headquarters, harmlessly nosing my way across Bukit Timah Road one morning; the military traffic was always heavy there and all the drivers, particularly the Indians, most wild and reckless. Presently there was a whizz and a whirr, and the next thing I saw was a Despatch Rider lying across the bonnet of my car and staring in at me from just the other side of the windscreen. His motor-cycle was somewhere twisted round the bumper bar, and one of his feet was in the crumpled remains of my last headlamp. I thought his leg was broken but he felt his bones, grinned, said it

was quite all right, and heaving the remains of the bike on to an army truck which was passing, swung himself aboard after it. . . .

When I was in the city I often used to call in at the Adelphi Hotel to see Pat's uncle, who was living there. He really should have left the country directly after evacuating from his home in Kuala Lumpur. He was over the age limit for war work and could not get anything to do, but he would not agitate for a passage home because he felt that all the women and children should go first. So he lived on in the hotel with nothing to do but wait and be bombed every day — a man who loathed crowds and strangers and any sort of fuss, and who had always lived a very quiet life exactly to a routine. He had been in Malaya for 30 years and had had the same "boy" for at least 20 years. His whole house staff (enormous because they were all descendants and relations of the originals and could not be discharged) were like children to him. These had all been left behind in Kuala Lumpur, where he had told them to live on in the house as long as possible. The entire staff were so rattled and upset by his departure that the boy, usually so efficient, had lost his head completely and instead of packing the clothes the Tuan would need, he had sent him off with a suitcase full of dirty linen, sheets, pillowcases, etc.! I always admired the way he put up with the life in Singapore which must have been utterly distasteful to him, he never complained and was always the same, very calm, very quiet, but there was a humorous twinkle in his eyes when they lit on some of the sights which used to come into the lounge, and the expression on his eyebrows would say, "What next?"

I should mention that on 8th February, the day the shelling had begun, the Japs had also made a landing on the island. I remember the date well, as something momentous had happened on the 8th of every month. December — War, Malaya was invaded. January 8th, Kuala Lumpur was evacuated and we began the move to Singapore; now February. And sure enough the first landing was made on Singapore Island.

This was a terrific bombshell. I, for one, still thought that a landing in any force would be impossible with so many men and guns all ready. At first we did not know the extent of the landing party, there were all kinds of rumours, and by the evening we heard that, yes it was a bad show to have allowed any Japs to land, but there were not many and they were being mopped up. We had known before that the enemy was concentrating in huge numbers on the south of Johore just over the straits, and I remember that night, hearing the terrific bombardment

which went on for hours and hours, feeling so pleased thinking we were really giving them a taste of our guns. Unfortunately it was the other way round, and it was an enemy barrage covering their invasion troops!

They landed in force in flat barges which must have been heavily armoured because men who were in the fighting described how, when their bullets hit these craft, one could see sparks of fire as they struck against metal sides and flipped off again. The slaughter must have been unbelievable, but still the Japs came on. . . . And that was the beginning of the end. . . . More and more troops landed, bringing tanks and what equipment they needed, but they must have augmented it very considerably by arms of ours which they had taken. . . .

Once the Japanese were on the same island one never knew where they would turn up. For the most part they were in the north, although landings had been made in several places. Soon the population began to cluster more and more to the centre of the city and in the vicinity of Fort Canning, and on the Tuesday (10th) our Headquarters at Sime Road were evacuated. Whenever I think of that day I smell burning paper; we did not bother about writing letters but only destroying them along with secret records and documents. Burn, burn, burn. There were fires everywhere, chiefly in shallow trenches outside the office. Cheerful, sweating men were dancing round the fires looking like demons in hell as they stirred up the piles of paper to allow the air to get in and make it burn faster. We made records of all the files which were tossed into the flames and a great deal of rubbish, as well as some things of importance, went up in smoke that day.

We were told to report to Fort Canning next morning, and by that time the Japs were so close that the office equipment not already moved had to be abandoned. I heard the Corporal who tried to go back telling the Sergeant about it next morning.

The very odd part about the whole campaign was the lack of knowledge of the whereabouts of the enemy. On that last day I drove all about the town, trying to find people, trying to return things, and never knowing whether I would run into the enemy or not. In parts of the town the streets were lined with army transports, hundreds of troops, guns of every size, while other parts were absolutely deserted. We knew the Japs were in some of the suburbs but had no idea how far they had come. I found later that they had been in the Botanical Gardens (I had passed very close to that), and one man told me he had been sniped at at 11.30 passing along Scott Road near the Tanglin Club. I had gone that way half an hour later but the road was deserted.

Fort Canning was seething. The various Headquarters which had formerly been distributed all over the town had been forced to retreat to their final stand—the Fort, and it was difficult to see how everyone was going to squeeze themselves and their impedimenta into the building. We had been allotted a small room, and the troops were busy sorting out the few records we had brought, searching for pet typewriters, and squeezing things into place. Most of the paraphernalia was still on the balcony and just would not fit. There were small braziers there also where still more papers were being burnt. The A.R.P. had given up bothering about warnings by that time, there was one alert in the morning but the raiders had got rather out of hand, and the raids went on all the time in one place or another. When the planes were dangerously close the spotters blew whistles and we went down to the ground floor and stood about in passages. In spite of an influx of new inmates there was an air of complete calm—and men stood waiting for the raid to blow over, ruminatively smoking pipes and chatting casually; it was all most soothing! I met several men I had known in Kuala Lumpur and had not seen since hostilities started, and we swapped news.

Then a Signal Officer I had never seen before came up and asked why I was still there; he had just shipped off the Signal girls and all women were supposed to have left. There was no senior officer in Intelligence office to ask (they were all somewhere in the bowels of the earth conferring with Gen. Wavell and lesser Generals and Brigadiers), but the young man was most insistent and said I should report to Q. Movements. Back in Intelligence office I found a Lieut. who said he had not heard any order, but if Signals had received it, of course it would apply to Intelligence. (There had been quite a number of women in Intelligence originally, but for the last week there had only been myself and one other—an intrepid person, who had every intention of staying whatever happened. I do not know what happened to her but she was not there on that final day—she may have been wounded or forcibly removed.) The Lieut. told me to go to Q. Movements. After wandering round endless corridors and making inquiries—everyone seemed to be new arrivals and to know nothing—I found the Movements office. Naturally, the heads were away from there also. There was a sympathetic Captain in charge who said of course something must be done; he was under the impression that all women had gone but he had no authority and thought the ship was full. "Just sit down," he said. He rang up a string of numbers with no success, other men kept coming in and asking him to see to this and



that, and he would quieten them, shrug his shoulders and try something else, saying "We *must* get you on to this boat which is in at the docks, I'll try so and so." The chase seemed endless to me, sitting near the door by the balcony where a group of Majors, Colonels, etc., stood with field glasses watching the bombing. Every now and then one would say pleasantly, as if they were watching sports, "Oh, another big fire started, the docks have caught it again. By jove, look at that formation over there, they are giving them Hell, the wharves have been pasted for a week" or words to that effect.

Eventually the Captain gave up the chase, said all he could do was to write out a chit himself, saying I was to be allowed on board. I still have this precious document, addressed to the world at large, scribbled on a piece of scrap paper, saying "Please allow Miss Reid to proceed on board the 'E.S.' as a member of the Royal Corps of Signals Party. 11th Feb., 1942" — stamped with the Staff Capt.'s chop.

I was told I could take what luggage I could carry, including bedding and 5 days' supply of food, and be on board the nameless ship at 1 p.m. It was situated at such and such a go-down — the docks. I did not know the place, nor had I any idea of its whereabouts, apart from knowing it was in the most persistently blasted area. (The Japs had announced by radio from Tokyo that the British were not going to be allowed to get away with it again — Singapore would be no Dunkirk — all ships attempting to leave would be suitably dealt with, but I had not heard that at the time.) I went back to Intelligence and told a Sergeant developments. He said there was no work to be done and we decided the best thing possible would be to go and get my luggage (with the idea of coming back before leaving). So I extricated the car from the medley of camouflaged vehicles at Fort Canning and set out for Chancery Hill Road again — about two miles out.

The scene had changed even since the morning, more big guns were being put in position in the gardens of small houses each side of the road where it crossed Dunearn Road, and the gunners were busy camouflaging them with trees and leaves. At first there were concentrations of troops, and then I seemed to pass through the active area and the house was quite peaceful. I packed up, taking my time, then spent quite an hour trying to ring up two or three people to tell them I was leaving. Most numbers were completely blank. It was an utterly helpless and infuriating feeling, either the lines were down or else their H.Q. had moved, or the houses had been evacuated. There was no way of communicating with anyone. . . .



Singapore as it looked before the Black-out, December, 1941. The Tower of the Victoria Memorial Hall (and the Clock the Japs could not stop) is seen in the centre.  
Photo by courtesy of Mr. P. H. Furdham.



A Street in Singapore.

Photo by courtesy of Mr. P. H. Furdham.



One of the Bungalows at Fraser's Hill, showing the type of country.



Chinese Temple, Kuala Lumpur. A stick of bombs fell here in the big raid on 26th December.

At last I got in touch with Pen at her hospital. She said, typically, "Help yourself to anything you would like in the house." (Like a fool I did not take a thing, thinking they would probably need all the food, but by the way things went during the rest of the day I am sure none of them would ever get back to the house again — and the store room was packed ready for a siege.)

After that I wrote some notes, collected things we had borrowed for the flat to return to their owners, and went back to town. I had promised to collect and return the keys of a car which had been lent to Henrietta, so earlier in the day, on my way to the office, I had called at 2nd Echelon and picked them up, but had great difficulty in finding their owner, a senior officer at Fort Canning. I wrote him a note of thanks and made a man swear that he would deliver the keys, the distributor rotor, and message, directly the owner was available. It seems so futile now, he already had one car and I am quite sure he never collected the little one again. On returning to Dunearn Road, I realised that the guns being erected there were not anti-aircraft, as I had imagined, but guns to deal with troops, and everything seemed to be pointing my way! I thought I would be potted for a Jap any minute. However, the troops waved me on and then the "Good-lucking" began; passing stray troops they would wave and call out "Good Luck"; if I stopped to ask the way, it was always "Good Luck." It surprised me very much at the time, as it seemed just like any other day. Then I did the silliest thing, drove round to various suburbs to find friends who I knew would be rather anxious if I just disappeared into the blue — also I was still determined to deliver the borrowed goods!

I did not much enjoy driving around by myself that day; it gives one a horrid feeling to think that if one of those bombs or shells hit the car no one will ever know what happened. Also I felt very weak about finding those awful docks, but I knew if I got in touch with my friends they would know where to go and what to do. I still did not know if the sketchy little pass would be taken as valid if I did find the ship.

Anyway, on I went, nosing round the suburbs with all my worldly goods packed into the little Austin, which was making funny noises in the engine. It must have been a comic sight, with my tin hat spinning about on my head, nursing the car and shying at bombs! It was during these peregrinations that I passed the place where Japs were said to have been sniping half an hour before. I did not know that then, of course.

Once, a loud detonation caused me to pull the car up and jump in a ditch just as the bough of a tree fell across

the road a few yards in front—there was an Indian soldier as a fellow ditch sitter. I remember the whites of his eyes—not another soul in sight.

I got to Volunteer Headquarters eventually after an obliging Tommy had moved a truck which was standing blocking the road, they had a sort of strong post at the foot of the hill (I could get to most places when I waved my military pass with my photo, and every conceivable chop and signature on it), only to find a street of empty houses. A Despatch Rider arrived as I pulled up, there were planes overhead and thunderous bangs made us both cower under the hedge, but I think the din came chiefly from the A.A. guns in the garden. Anyway, the Despatch Rider said Headquarters had been evacuated, which was fairly obvious, so I went on again. Then there was another dreary and hopeless search in the various buildings in the city. At the Colonial Secretariat I came upon the Financial Secretary and the Under Secretary (formerly of Kuala Lumpur), both studiously writing things in books and looking the epitome of calm concentration. They looked up when I entered and said "What, you still here?"

By this time I felt so helpless and angry and frustrated that I could have sat down and wept. If I had not been so busy!

I did find P's uncle at the Adelphi. I thought he might like a lift to the ship as there were no taxis, and if one had no car I do not know what happened. He seemed very relieved to know I was going, but said "No, I can't come, I have no pass" . . . . Just then a police officer came up saying he had been told to round up any women and children he could find and send them to a ship, he gave me complicated instructions about how to get to my wharf—said "go at once, it will take about half an hour to find the way" (it was then 12.30). There was no time to get any provisions even if I could find a shop open—no time to go back to Fort Canning. I concentrated on getting to my destination (we had heard of a ship which sailed the previous day leaving before its time, and half the would-be passengers had been left behind). Having gone so far and lost touch with everyone, I meant to catch that boat if I got blown to smithereens in the attempt. The policeman's instructions for the shortest route petered out, the landmarks were hard to pick up in the chaos; so, knowing the rough direction, I decided to follow the coast as closely as possible. At first there were people about—Asiatics—then only troops, then again streets and streets of absolute desolation. It was necessary to pick one's way through the debris of a bombed roadway; mangled telephone and

electric wires hung in festoons from their poles right across the roadway, they were hard to avoid. Then I got lost again. There were several troops taking cover in a drain. I pulled up and asked the way. They had no idea, but suggested that I joined them in the gutter as planes were over. Anxious glances at my watch warned me not to waste time, and one of the men nobly came out into the open street to point the way to a Police Station where I could get directions. The Police Station was empty, footsteps echoed hollowly, but when I penetrated to the back I found two Hume Pipe shelters crammed with police and soldiers, and at last got good instructions.

On one of the empty stretches I came on a straggling group of soldiers hurrying along, they looked as if they were going somewhere, so I pulled up to ask if this was the way to the docks. They turned out to be the defeated, unshaven, difficult kind, asked was I going to catch a ship as they were coming too, and with that they climbed all over the car. The poor little machine was fragile at the best of times, and just would not go at all with the extra weight. I told them at this rate none of us would get there, so they philosophically got down saying "Good luck to you" . . . . After another deserted stretch I came to a gate guarded by a soldier who approved of my pass (and wished me luck!) and I drew up at the gangway at two minutes to one.

There were several men on the wharf, one in some sort of khaki uniform was wonderful. He took charge of my pass and found it worked, carried my luggage, made a space for me on deck and generally played host and gave me quite a welcome—though he was going back to the town himself . . . . When he was leaving I asked him if he would like a motor car, he said "Yes, rather" (I think his own had been blitzed), so I said "Do take mine . . ." It was a grand feeling, I don't often scatter motor cars as tips! I showed him the double ignition key, gave a brief history of the car's eccentricities and he departed cheerfully to go back to his Headquarters. I wonder how long he continued to drive about. . . . I hope the little car was as lucky for him as it was for me. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if the engine had petered out or a bit of shrapnel had punctured the tyres that day in Singapore. I certainly would not have been here to tell the tale.

In spite of the rush to be on time, the ship did not pull out until dusk, and then only went into the Roads. By that time people just walked on board, no tickets were needed by women. All the afternoon more and more people streamed on board, men brought their wives, said good-bye and went back to the inferno. The wharves

and go-downs were full of goods, many of which had lately been landed — toys for Xmas which had taken a month or two extra to come out from England, teddy bears and tins of chocolates — also stacks of ammunition and arms — unpleasant company during raids.

Planes came over at intervals all the afternoon but no bombs fell very close, which was surprising. There was an A.A. gun on the wharf nearby, which rocked the ship in its effort to protect it. The crew and R.A.F. men bustled about helping everyone; they thought of everything, even collected toys for the amusement of the children on board.

In spite of the greater risk from bombs and shells, we were lucky to be able to board the ship from a wharf, some people had first to coerce launch men to take them out to the ships they were bound for, and then scale rope ladders with their belongings. One elderly and dressy woman told us how she had been taken all round the harbour looking for a ship to take her on board (there were sundry mine sweepers, ammunition ships, etc., which left Singapore about the time we did). At last one Capt. agreed to have her and she was hauled on board. They took her into a mess filled with men and women and told her there was no accommodation for women and the going would be rough. She, in her best social manner, said "Oh never mind about that, any sort of cabin will do for me." To the tune of raucous laughter it was explained that there were no cabins, and she could sleep on deck and consider herself lucky. A young man who later found his way on to the *Plancius* had come on the same vessel. He had decided to cut out suitcases and for some unknown reason had packed his belongings in a trunk—in this he had put everything, even his passport. When he got to the wharf, where the launch was to be waiting, he saw coolies hurling things over, so he staggered with his load to the edge and threw the trunk over the side and prepared to jump in after it. There was no launch there—the coolies were carrying out a little "scorched earth" policy. . . . After that he had no possessions to worry about, not even a toothbrush.

## CHAPTER XIII.

For anyone wanting to study human nature in the raw, let me recommend a voyage on a crowded evacuation ship. With so many people herded together in a small place their various tendencies seem to be magnified, and peculiarities which would pass unnoticed in ordinary life, assume gigantic proportions. In real danger, most people behave very well, but when that is over some of them get the idea that they are fighting for their very existence when they want a particular place to sleep, or think they are being diddled in a queue, and believe me, they put all they have into the struggle. If one is not involved in the battle it can be very amusing.

To reach Tasmania I travelled in five different ships and each is marked in my memory with definite characteristics. First, the *Empire Star*, a gallant ship with a gallant crew, zig-zagging its way through mine and submarine-infested waters, bombed constantly all one morning. Though there were 2,500 people squashed into a vessel built to carry 20 or 30 passengers, the only food on board a meagre supply of army biscuits and bully beef, and the bathroom and lavatory accommodation quite hopeless, I still have very pleasant memories of that ship.

During the worst hours of the bombing attack, the first day out from Singapore, the women and children were all ordered below into the little saloon—and there we sweltered, portholes shut and scarcely room to move—for hours and hours. All this time we were practically on the Equator.

It is funny to compare "crossing the Line" in peacetime with this wild day. In the old days there had been the ridiculous pageant of Father Neptune coming on board accompanied by his Barber and other buffoons in fancy dress. Much lathering, much ducking, and much horseplay. This time it looked as if we were to have the ducking part only, and then be forced to pay a return visit to "Father Neptune" in very unpleasant circumstances. . .

It was amazing how well most people took the bombing. Certainly everyone had had plenty of experience of raids beforehand, but this was rather different with the prospect of the ship sinking any minute in shark-infested waters, and, of course, we had no lifebelts and practically no lifeboats.



A few people passed out now and then, but we never knew if it was caused by fear or heat, probably the latter, the atmosphere was unbelievable.

Children screamed incessantly and terrified mothers tried to comfort them. One heard tales of everyone's evacuation from their homes in different parts of Malaya; there was certainly enough concentrated drama in that steaming Turkish bath to give material for any number of novels.

Fear took people in funny ways. One woman held forth for a matter of hours on how she wanted to stay behind and how unafraid she was, but when a bomb came close she would bob under the table with the first of them. When the raid was over, she would emerge, straighten her tin hat, and continue likening herself to a lion.

No one could deny that it was very nasty hearing the zoom of the planes, then a loud voice calling "Get down, all down," and bodies would prostrate themselves along the walls, under tables, as close as possible to anything that gave a modicum of protection — then there would be the bang and shatter as the bombs fell, then silence. . . . Each time we wondered if it was all over, but each time, after a pause, the engines would start chugging again.

Several of the bombs actually hit the ship. Once a fire was started near the magazine, but the crew and volunteers, working with superhuman skill and energy, saved it from spreading to the danger point.

We heard later that the escorting Destroyer had signalled that there were 200 planes over us at one time, and four ships just behind us were sunk.

The sea all round us was boiling with explosions which rocked the ship in an ominous way, and we would pitch and swing about as the Captain literally dodged the bombs which were falling. Though we did get hit several times, it was very fortunate that none of the "near misses" was near enough to spring the plates — that would have been the end.

When we finally reached port, someone took round the hat for a collection as a thanks offering to the Captain and crew for getting us through the ordeal the first day out. Several thousand dollars were collected in a very short time, and one of the R.A.F. men presented the money to the Captain, who made a speech from the bridge. He said that though he and the crew had done everything they could, it was no work of theirs that had saved us that day; it was just a miracle we had come through it all. He said the money would go to a Sailors' charity, but he would keep enough for a new flag to replace the tattered remains which flew from the mast, and would have a brass plate inscribed to tell the story.

After each bad buffeting one of the men would come in and tell us what had happened. He was a big cheerful fellow, wearing a pair of shorts and an identity disc; several days' growth of beard gave him a woolly appearance, and his body was almost black with soot and dirt except where runnels of sweat had worn clean channels down his chest and back. When he had told his story there would be loud cheers, and after he announced that we had brought down a plane with our game little guns, the excitement was terrific. Those men on deck must have been really marvellous; they stood their ground in the face of remorseless bombing and machine-gun fire to shoot at the enemy with anything they had, Lewis guns, tommy-guns, even rifles.

Quite early in the morning the casualties began to come in. A bomb which fell among cabins aft did a lot of damage, a man was killed and another shot about the eyes—the latter was brought into the saloon. (This first bomb also shot away one of the lifeboats, and the second one finished off another.) The little guns spat away gallantly but they had a very tough time of it, and one entire gun crew was blotted out by enemy machine-gunning—ten men killed.

The Second Officer had his elbow shot away and wounds in the thigh, he was brought in and laid out near where I was sitting. Presently a doctor was found, an R.A.M.C. man I had known in Kuala Lumpur. He was very breezy and cheerful, and told me to turn my back as he was going to clean out the wound and it was in an awful mess. The next moment I found myself absorbed into the business, trying to stop the patient from watching it himself, while, with his good hand, he squeezed one of mine till the bones crunched; he must have been in appalling agony. Then I found myself watching, fascinated, while the doctor and nurse delve amongst the bits of human flesh and sorted out the bones from shrapnel. At any ordinary time I should probably have been sick, but it is funny how a run of danger numbs the feelings about such things. It was a relief to have something to do, even if it was only waving away flies and fanning to make a breath of air for the sick men.

That morning was a very long one, but it came to an end eventually; then they brewed tea in the galley and carried it round in a large dixie. It was grand if one had a mug, but there were no cups on board, and it was just too bad for those who had none. Cigarette tins did good work, and one or two glass sweets bottles, and a few minute coffee cups were unearthed from a locker, and were the subject of much wicked intrigue and skulduggery.

After a while, a lunch of bully beef and army biscuits was shuffled round and ravenously eaten by young and old.

## CHAPTER XIV.

It was heavenly to get up on deck again and breathe a little real air. The debris had been cleared away and the ship did not look as knocked about as she really was. The sea was smooth and oily, and the sky clear blue and innocent of planes; in fact, the world looked a very pleasant place.

With characteristic resilience the R.A.F. men produced a concertina, and by 2 p.m. were having a sing-song. We might have been on a pleasure cruise, all sitting on our haunches or luggage and dreamily singing "The Lily of Laguna" and "Down Mexico Way."

The world got better and better every minute.

By that time I had found quite a number of people I knew — three girls who had stayed behind with the Signal Corps, some V.A.D.'s, and several R.A.F. officers, so we all joined forces, and having some old campaigners in the party, managed to get the squatting rights on a corner of the deck. We barricaded this off with suitcases, and the three Signal girls had it at night (there was not room for more), and they had the exquisite luxury of a bedding roll each, and space to lie out flat. One bed was rolled up each day and we would sit on the remaining two; food and drink, when there was any, would be pooled on the floor in the centre.

There was not room to move about much, as the small deck space was a solid block of humanity of various races, sexes, and ages, but it was worth while to gyrate occasionally and look over the rail at the teeming life below. When we got near port someone was always trying to shave, wash, pack or unpack knapsacks, play poker, or even sleep while others trampled over them all the time. They were most good natured, and put up with any amount of buffeting, played jokes on each other, and went on with quite a lot of horseplay.

Men who wanted to get a little peace and lie stretched out would climb on to the gangway, which was drawn up level along the side. They lay along the steps, rather a perilous position, but tropical seas are smooth when there is no monsoon. The only trouble was the great temptation to drop things over on to the sleeping men was too

much for some people — also they came in for dregs of tea which were tossed over the side by people handing on the mug!

We on the top deck must have been much more amusing to look at than the troops. We were a mixture of Europeans, Chinese, Eurasians, and all sorts, wearing anything from shorts, slacks, every kind of dress, to Chinese pyjamas. There were some very trim slack suits and some women managed to look spruce and neat even after sweltering down below and sleeping in their clothes, but some showed definite signs of wilt on the third day.

Naturally, anyone with jewellery brought it with them, even if they had no other luggage, and the obvious thing was to wear it in case of wreck. It was quite common to see a rather grubby woman in shirt and slacks just dripping with diamond rings and wearing several brooches pinned on her pocket; whilst others showed occasional glimpses of necks strung about with pearls and pendants which jangled with identity discs.

I had put a pair of slacks, fortunately uncrushable, and a shirt on the top of my suitcase and successfully queued up for the one bathroom the first night and was able to change into them — I did not get the chance to change again for 5 days.

In the evening in Signal corner we would talk about the good old times when we bathed twice a day and the meals we had eaten that were not always a lump of bully beef and a dog biscuit. We talked about places all over the world, but it always came back to Singapore — most women had husbands there and everyone had friends; one V.A.D. had only been married four days, and her husband was left behind. At that time we still thought something would be done about evacuating if it was not going to be held. Little did we think that the several ships, minesweepers, and tankers which left about that time would be among the last to get safely through. Two or three more left Singapore on 13th, one of them, the *Kuala*, was sunk, I do not know what happened to the others. Some of the *Kuala's* passengers eventually got to Sumatra and away — others were killed or taken prisoner. Later still a handful of men escaped from under the Japs' noses, hidden in native craft.

It was amusing to see people getting thinner before your eyes. After the first day out from Singapore the great thought was always "Batavia in a few more days, we can have a soaking bath and a huge rijstafel at the Hotel des Indes — lovely." One of the R.A.F. men arranged a party for the night we got to Batavia, and we planned what we would eat and revived memories of Batavia "last time." The 10-mile drive up from the port,

the nice Dutch town cluttered up with hundreds of bicycles, the artificially cooled swimming pool. Hotel des Indes with its open lounge and punkah fans everywhere, its famous rijstafel served with ceremony by 20 Javanese boys, each carrying a different dish—rice, prawns, eggs, fish, chicken, sauces—a blur of wonderful tastes and smells.

Things did not work out just as we had planned, however, for when we berthed at Tandjong Priok, the port for Batavia, we were met by trim Dutch Transport women in khaki uniforms and fierce Customs men, who took complete control of us, hustled us into buses, and away to another ship. This is grand, we said, what efficiency, not a moment's delay, and there is a ship waiting to take us away; no matter if we miss our big clean up and dinner party, we'll be heading for home. But, alas, this, too, was rather optimistic. We were certainly put on another ship, a nasty crowded one, but we did not leave that wharf for three more days, and were forbidden to set foot on shore all that time. A guard of Dutch soldiers and police, looking like Walt Disney grasshoppers in their green uniforms and brown straw hats, marched up and down day and night, and it was not even possible to go to the gateway to buy the native fruits at the stalls there—and we craved for fruit. We were virtually prisoners, the Dutch were taking no risks because they had no check on the people on board the incoming ships, there were no passenger lists, and only a few of us had passports or any form of identification. One could not blame them.

The first day they had not been quite so strict. We were allowed to go down the gangway and pick out our luggage from the jumble on the wharf. Feeling badly in need of exercise Jean (one of the Signal girls) and I strolled off along the dock. Nobody took any notice of us, so we wandered along for half a mile or so till we came to a large iron gate partly ajar. We squeezed through, going further and further, till we came to a native market. I had 10 Dutch cents, and we bought a pommelo, which is like a huge grapefruit, and we were enjoying ourselves very much. We began to realise, however, that the rain was getting heavier, it was a long way back, and of course we had no hats and no prospect of changing our slacks and shirts; that did not worry us unduly, the pleasure of getting away from the crowd offset any qualms on that score—the heat would soon dry us off. Presently we got on to the main thoroughfare down which we had driven in the morning, and, as luck would have it, ran into two R.A.F. men from the Empire Star who were looking for our ship. They were in a taxi, so took us back and shepherded us through the gate. The eyes

of the head Customs man popped out with amazement to see us coming in, he was sure he had not let us out of the gate and was baffled as to how we had escaped.

Luckily I had worked pretty fast the morning we arrived, and being in the first bus the guard system was not then working. I saw a post office just outside the gate, and, even before going on board, I slipped past the Customs man and sent a cable saying I was in Batavia and on my way home. It started off as a most chatty piece of correspondence, but had to be pruned considerably to fit in with the 8 guilders in my pocket—they would not change Malayan money by that time.

Thinking back I am rather surprised at the way I equipped myself for this journey. A few days before leaving Singapore when things looked hopeless, I took out all the money I had in the bank in travellers' cheques, cashable anywhere, and always carried them in my bag. (I asked for a letter of credit, but there were none in Singapore—all used up. I was lucky to get the cheques as some banks had run out. Many people had drafts on Batavia and had to sit on the boat for three days unable to go up to the city and cash them.) This bag I had bought before leaving Kuala Lumpur; it was huge and easily took passports, the endless identity cards and military passes, my wallet, powder, lipstick, comb, and so on, and was the kind which hung from the shoulder by a strap. It never left me day or night for three months. Amongst my other money I had put the Dutch guilders which I guessed would be useful en route. They certainly were, for without them my family would not have heard from me for a month after the fall of Singapore.

Amongst the other bits of equipment I had brought was a towel (the only one I had for a month), a pillow, much needed when sleeping on deck or in the hold, a knife, fork, and spoon, and the precious enamel mug which was used by us all on the *Empire Star*, and made it possible for about 16 of us to get drinks of tea from the dixie; we even used it to bath in, it was borrowed for shaving, and if anyone had been sick I know what would have been the role of my green mug. . . . My life's work on the *Empire Star* was keeping track of my treasure, people had no conscience in the grim battle for wetting the whistle, and if the mug got beyond our small circle it had to be kept in sight. Fierce strangers would come up and demand it, but one of us would keep them under observation till it was returned. We were back in the stone age, remember, each man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost.

I had brought three small suitcases of my most vital luggage. Before leaving Kuala Lumpur I had shed my

trunk, tennis racquet, and such superfluities, but I clung to what warm clothes I had knowing that the last part of the voyage would be cold. (As it turned out it was colder than I anticipated; we took two months to get to Tasmania, and it was almost winter by that time, also we travelled by some peculiar route to avoid submarines, and found it very fresh in the vicinity of the South Pole.)

My remaining cases I had packed in the priority system, as there was always the likelihood of having to leave something more behind. I left the least precious of them in Singapore. There were many things in it I would love to get my hands on now, but nothing which I needed more than the things I brought.

I did not forget the eau de Cologne and powder for dry cleaning purposes, but there was one thing we all forgot—books. In the hurly burly of Singapore, the exhaustion at the end of the day, the murkiness of the blacked out lights, we forgot about such things, but it was a bad mistake to make for a voyage.

The departure from Batavia was in keeping with the whole voyage. We had spent three days sitting by the wharf wondering what was to be done with us next. I had concentrated unsuccessfully on trying to get a passage direct to Australia, as I had no desire to go tripping round the world at that time. The odd bits of news we did hear were far from reassuring. The Japanese were streaming southward, and it seemed that if we did not reach Australia very soon they would be there first. They had already taken Palembang aerodrome (I learned later that units of the Nipponese fleet on their way to Sumatra were only 4 hours behind us on our voyage from Singapore to Batavia!), and then we got the perfectly ghastly news that Singapore had fallen. . . . The capitulation had been signed early on the morning of Sunday, 15th February, and all our men trapped, over 60,000 of them—no more would get away. . . . It is not possible to describe the feelings of the people on our ship that day. It seemed too terrible to believe, but we had to believe it.

## CHAPTER XV.

It is strange that Batavia was never bombed. There had been a few mild raids some time before we arrived and during those three days alongside reconnaissance planes flew over occasionally, but it would have been easy to send bombers from Palembang; I know we all expected them. Some of the more influential passengers were getting very agitated about it, and were pulling strings to get us away—the Sunda Straits still had to be negotiated, perilously close to Palembang.

Eventually we sailed for somewhere in India or Africa on 16th February at about 5 p.m. We were all ordered below just at that time to reorganise our sleeping quarters.

I had slept in different places each night on this ship. At first I found myself "tween decks," my claim was pegged out on an inviting looking mattress stuffed with loose straw, just near the dining saloon door. The mattress was quite clean, and there was plenty of space, but even so there were a few flies in the ointment. With a stationary ship and no ventilation the heat was terrible, water from a leaky pipe dripped on my bed all night, and what turned out to be mosquitoes bit my feet continually—it is a wonder we did not all get fever. The light was dim, but was kept burning all the time; the men were supposed to be in the lower hold, but had to pass through our quarters to get to their ladder. They seemed to ramble about all night—and there were two vacant looking Javanese boys continuously on guard, with rifles, to see fair play! At one stage in the game a man got D.T.'s, and was carried out, screaming drunk, on another man's shoulder like a sack of potatoes. They passed through an avenue of startled women. (After that episode the bar was shut for the rest of the voyage. Also a rule was made that all arms were to be given up to a Naval Commander, who would keep them till the final port; all the men had been armed, and it was considered that some of the more temperamental would probably lose their heads if we were torpedoed, and anything might happen.)

Altogether it was a bad night, and by 5 a.m. I could stand the heat and the bites no longer, and got up for the day. I found many others had done the same, and the decks were already crowded.



There were quite a lot of cabins on this ship, and some of my friends managed to get berths, cabins were supposed to be given to anyone ill, elderly, or travelling with children, to begin with, then to any other women. One of the girls with the Signal party was feeling ill with a very sore throat, and suggested I came in with her if she could get a cabin. The purser was very firm — said there were no more cabins unless one had a doctor's certificate — so we hustled C. off to the doctor and told her to look her worst. She came back to say that he was only too-willing to give her a certificate, but told her to sleep in the hospital! This was a terrific joke, and I lost my bunk. However, we all spent the evening together and then waved C. off to the hospital with many rude remarks.

Imagine our horror next morning when a message came from C. that she wanted us to collect her luggage, she and another woman were being called for by an ambulance, and were being taken to hospital in Batavia — suspected diphtheria!

She could hardly speak by that time. We never discovered if it was because of her throat or whether she was trying to avoid spilling germs. But the last we saw of her she was smiling cheerfully from the back of the ambulance. From that time I have never been able to hear another word of C. Batavia was taken not long after we left, and there seems to be no way of finding out whether she got away — or ever if the diphtheria really developed.

A change of air seemed indicated on the second night, so Jean and I did a reconnaissance of the cabins of the top deck in the morning. We had heard that some cabins were empty, and in our desperation pulled off quite a daring burglary. Smuggling my towel, we did a door-to-door inspection of the cabins, and, finding one empty, went in and locked the door behind us. Emptying the carafe of water into the hand basin, working as quickly as possible with a certain amount of suppressed giggling, we systematically bathed all over by sections, one after the other, while we took turns to watch the door. It was *marvellous*. We had then been five days without taking off our clothes, and the only washing possible had been an occasional dabble in a mug.

In its good days our vessel had been quite a fine passenger ship, but for some reason best known to the authorities all bathrooms were now locked and the water shut off. During our explorations we had discovered two alcoves, one each side of the ship, between cabins occupied by the elderly and infirm, which each contained a kapok mattress which just filled up the space. This looked much more inviting than the hold, and very much

more airy, so we marked them with the crockery allotted to us. (On boarding the ship each person was given a lifebelt, knife, fork, spoon, plate, and drinking bowl.) During the day Jean and Audrey got themselves into a cabin to look after one of the girls who was ill (it was then that C. and I tried to do the same), so at nightfall I was on my own.

About 9 o'clock, stumbling over chairs and bodies on the deck, I found my way through the blackout to the top deck, and there settled in for the night in my alcove. There was a rail for my bath towel, and under a blacked-out porthole at my feet was a locker which did for a table, and on this I spread out my brush and comb and Elizabeth Arden box. I was very comfortable. Of course it was just part of the passage, and I could not get undressed, but we were used to going to bed like dogs, just lying down as we were. Soon the people in the cabins round about stopped talking, all was quiet, and I went to sleep.

A little while later I woke up to a terrific commotion. The lights had been put out previously, but what seemed to be hundreds of men were tramping round, flicking torches, flinging down mattresses all along the passageways round me, taking off boots and dropping them on the floor. I soon realised I should not have parked myself there, but the only thing to do was to lie low and pretend I was asleep, there was nowhere else to go. No one noticed me for some time, then one man who had been ranging round swearing quietly to himself about something he had lost, suddenly flicked a torch on to my alcove and said, "Here it is. Oh, Lord! There is something on it." . . . Then silence.

At this stage I thought a good snore was called for, and produced a beautifully modulated snort, gentle enough, but positively whistling of adenoids. It had a dynamic effect. The various figures receded like an outgoing tide to a spot further down the passageway. I followed up this success with a few more restrained snores, and was not challenged again.

Very early in the morning I got up and crept down to the deck.

It transpired that some senior naval officers who had been allotted cabins had given them up to evacuees, and had arranged that they would sleep in the passage outside when the occupants of the cabins had settled down for the night.

## CHAPTER XVI.

After the episode on the upper deck I decided to stick to the nether regions, and joined forces with some girls I knew in the lowest hold. It was much nicer there than 'tween decks because there were wind chutes and the ventilation was really good. I put my belongings on an empty mattress next to the others, and thereby claimed it as mine.

We were sitting talking when a small but fierce Eurasian woman attacked me for taking her place. We were all most startled at this as she had been established about four beds away, but evidently was determined to have the place I had taken, and began to spread out her possessions. She seemed so set on it that I was prepared to move off, but the other girls were not keen on having this firebrand as their next-door neighbour, and spoke up on my behalf till matters got quite heated. It was all very silly as there were three empty places next to mine. Eventually, thinking we had won the day, we went up on deck.

When the ship began to move away from Batavia at last we were all ordered below, and when we reached our hold there were all the lines of palliasses as we had left them, but all my belongings had been moved along, and the Eurasian was spreadeagled on the disputed bunk, putting herself between me and my friends.

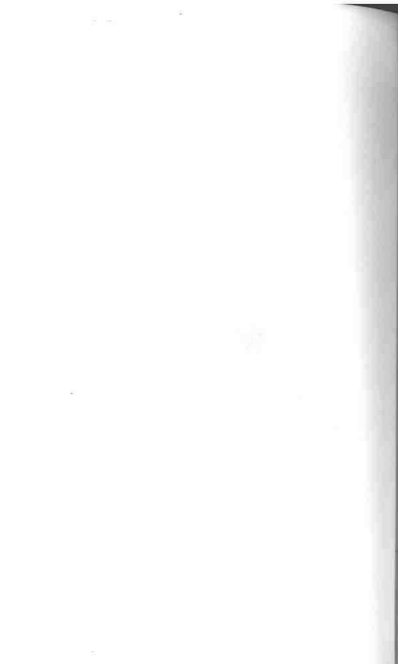
I would like to have a movie of the scene in that hold. There was the huge space usually occupied by cargo, rather like a large barn with posts here and there propping up the ceiling. Hooks had been put round the walls, and on these were hung any clothes which were unpacked, giving the impression of Petticoat Lane. Some ingenious people with Heath Robinson instincts had erected rope or string clothes lines and various contraptions designed to keep the light out of their eyes.

As ordered we all sat on our mattresses wearing our lifebelts, and waited developments. Over the three-foot pathway between our line of beds and the opposite row was a Dutch woman with a permanently crying baby; near her sat a pretty English girl whose husband was in the R.A.F. Further along a Russian woman with a lovely face and doubtful past was lying on her back, fast



Fires on the outskirts of the city.

Photo by courtesy of Dept. of Information.



asleep, her hands crossed on her breast like a pre-Raphaelite saint. Our party sat and talked aimlessly, and were glared at by the woman, small, thin, and stringy, who was so keen to sleep amongst us for no known reason.

Not far away several Chinese squatted on their belongings, gabbling cheerfully to each other, giggling as they adjusted the bulky lifebelts for the first time. Above the murmur of voices speaking in different languages and dialects rose the jangling din of an elderly gramophone playing American jazz. At first it was quite popular, but played again and again it palled, and someone asked its owner to turn it off. She took umbrage at that and put the same record on again. Feeling became stronger, and the only thing that prevented some of the women from throwing things was the knowledge that they would never get them back, and belongings were scarce! Actually, I think, one of the things which rankled about the gramophone was the fact that the owner of it had been able to bring such a non-essential with her, while others had absolutely nothing.

About this time some men of the "Committee" (a mysterious band who had appointed themselves to run the affairs of the ship) arrived to reshuffle the sleeping arrangements and explain how to tie the lifebelts. They stood in the passageway earnestly wrenching the lifebelt strings and trying to make themselves heard above the din created by the gramophone and women saying rude things about that machine. . . .

It appeared that it had been decided to move all women out of this nice ventilated hold and give it to the men, as most of the women were supposed to have cabins. We were to be sent to a smaller place like this for'ard, and were told to move in rotation starting from the opposite side to our position. By the time we got moving our 50 or 60 bedfellows had already established themselves and there was not a square inch for us, so about 12 of us were then taken to a dreadful cavern near the galley. Potatoes were stored there, and the washplace for the Javanese crew was at the end. (Barbarous looking dark heads would protrude above Ali Baba jars as the boys swished water over themselves in the half dark.) Both the deck where we were to sleep, and the scuppers, were filthy, and smelt of cattle. Flies were thick — an unpardonable sin in the East, and very dangerous. The smell was overpowering. This was a little too much, and we struck.

The Committee was most apologetic, but said there was nowhere else to go. Someone brought along some Army nurses, who condemned the place as quite unfit for

habitation. The only remaining spot was the dining saloon (no one was allowed to sleep on deck), the mattresses would have to be taken up each morning at 6.30, and there was nowhere to put any clothes, but at least it was fairly clean.

Then I had a lucky break. Jean said there was room for a mattress on the floor of their cabin, and I moved in there. It was quite a squash, but the luxury of being able to undress and being with nice people who saw the funny side of our varied experiences was a tonic. The way we dovetailed ourselves and our belongings into the small space was a work of art.

There were many jobs to be done on board and practically no staff, so the chores were tabulated and volunteers were called for to carry them out. Men were needed to sweep the decks, police the endless queues, and man the couple of Lewis guns which were to protect us from aeroplanes and submarines. Women were required to work in the galley, clean bathrooms and lavatories, as well as cabins.

Jean and I did a shift in the galley each day, sometimes twice a day, and being among the pioneers, we chose our own jobs. Sometimes we washed up in a cage, where there were tubs of greasy water and steam gushed out of pipes all round us, but we preferred the job of receiving plates, etc., from the dining saloon (where there was an occasional puff of cool air to be had through the door), and passing them from hand to hand to the washers-up. We made a chain. One took the dirty dishes at the doorway, passed them on to the next, who scraped the residue into a garbage tin, and so on to the tub.

I remember one day when Jean and I were put on different shifts. We were very annoyed because we had our little routine worked out, and decided to complain to the Committee. Jean, drawing herself up to her full five feet, tackled the man in charge, ending up: "You can't do this to us, my friend and I are the Human Chain." The man was rather bewildered, and shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, "I don't care if you are the Bearded Lady or the Hind Legs of the Elephant"; but he evidently decided that it was best to humour us, as we were always put on together after that.

The heat in the galley was terrific, the floor was usually awash, and one stepped on soggy pieces of bread or sausage. It was a work of art to stand up, especially when the ship was rolling; our efforts were very comic. Just as one was steering a pretty course through the crowded passageways (there were about six of us on at once, and sundry men) with a pile of dishes, a flying piece of humanity which had lost its foothold would suddenly

slither across one's path, grasping for something solid to hold on to. It was rather like being a novice on a skating rink. Funnily enough not much crockery was broken, but this was only due to the solid construction of the thick plates and bowls, the treatment was far from gentle. Needless to say we kept a special outfit for working in the galley, known as our swilling suits.

The first job we did was to help prepare the evening meal, it was nice and simple. There was a stack of bread, a machine to cut the loaves into slices, yards and yards of solid Dutch sausage, also cut up by machine, and a gallon tin of margarine. The system was to take a slice of the doughy bread, spread it with a whitewash brush dipped in the margarine (everything fatty was liquid in that atmosphere unless it was kept in the refrigerator), then a slice of the sausage would be slapped on top. There were 900 people on board, so it is easy to imagine the stack of these so-called 'sandwiches'—they were piled up on large wooden trays and put through the hatch.

The passengers, on the word go, filed past the kitchen door, a plate in one hand and a bowl in the other. The bowl was filled with an unpleasant mixture of watery tea, tinned milk, and sugar, poured from an enormous tin kettle. Feeding time at the Zoo. It took about an hour for the people to file past.

This was the routine night and morning, but at mid-day a one-course dinner was provided, either stew or thin, cool, slices of underdone beef and boiled potatoes. But everything tasted the same whatever it was. The food was lined up near the galley door in a series of bins just like garbage tins, and as the diner moved past he held out his plate to a Javanese boy who would dive head first into the bin, pick out a slice of beef with his fingers (everything was very much *hand dōne*), give it a shake to make sure that there was not an extra piece sticking to it, then with a flick of the wrist send it spinning to its target. The plate would then be presented at the next bin and the same procedure would be followed with potatoes boiled in their skins. We used a kind of soup plate for this meal, it was very practical as it was easier to retain the bouncing potatoes with the help of the concave middle!

Occasionally a piece of pommelo was added to this repast; it was always difficult to know how to carry this as it did not go with meat and the other hand was always occupied with the little bowl of drinking water which went with this meal. Some people used to float the pommelo in their drinking water rather than get it covered with gravy.



At first this diet seemed wonderful after bully beef and dog biscuits of the Empire Star, but it was very limited for every day for three weeks, and by the end of that time the sight of sausage nearly made us sick, and the quantity of doughy bread we had eaten made us feel blown out but still hungry.

Although we had volunteered from a sense of duty we discovered that people who worked had many advantages. Jean and I had a friend in the galley in the person of O.C. refrigerators, and he was always producing titbits for us, perhaps a bit of cheese, or some sections of pommelo or a biscuit, or some jam to put on our bread instead of the eternal sausage. This man had a good sense of humour and worked like a slave although he was just one of the passengers. He spent all day in that sweltering galley, and if we were short-handed he would wash up or join the human chain, or just dash along with a joke he had suddenly remembered.

There was really plenty of food on board, but it was not given to the ordinary passengers; invalids had special diets—there were some wounded on board and a good many evacuees had cracked up—and the officers had proper meals in the mess. After a shift in the kitchen the workers were often asked into the mess, sometimes there would be steak, or curry, with sweets or fruit. How our eyes would glitter at the sight of oranges! It was undoubtedly those extra perquisites which kept us well and energetic. Also it was far better to work than sit on a lifebelt and brood!

Jean was simply grand, she had a wonderful sense of humour and said the funniest things in her broad Scots accent, she was very small and slim and always managed to look clean and spruce in perfectly cut slacks; she was an ideal companion for a voyage like this.

She and I used to take turns with the top bunk and the floor. The floor position was the most popular as the top bunk was squashed up under the roof behind a kind of funnel which ran through the cabin, and it was extraordinarily hot in the blackout. Of course the floor was not exactly a bed of roses. I shall never forget the morning when Jean woke up to find her nightgown had been partly eaten off her in the night by one of those enormous tropical cockroaches! The expression on her face was one of the funniest things I have ever seen.

Another time when I was on the floor I woke up about 5 a.m., the ship was rocking a little, and each time it heaved, dirty water from the sink lapped over me and my bed. The cabin wash basins were the old-fashioned kind, when you had washed you tipped up the basin and the water disappeared. I had come across them in other ships

but never thought where the water went; if asked I would have said it ran into the sea. That was one of the many things we learnt on this voyage, the water just runs into a tin at the bottom, and if it is not emptied it overflows — I was underneath, and I know. The others shook with laughter to see me staggering out with a brimming drum of very second-hand water. Water was very, very precious and was never finished with until it was too thick to be of any use. Officially we were not supposed to wash at all, but being au fait with the kitchen we managed to get a bucketful every now and then to fill our tank. The bathrooms were locked, even the salt water was not turned on. Later in the voyage the showers were made available for an hour or two hours per day — this was not much to a complement of 900 people, but it helped.

Then, one ill-fated day, someone left the tap running, and we were all penalised by having everything cut off again!

It was a frightful crime to wash clothes, but we simply had to, and even managed to wangle a little hot water for this occasionally.

There was a ship's iron, subject of many queues, till some wily woman decided to take it to her cabin so that she could bring it out and use it when she wanted to . . . This caused frightful consternation. The whole ship was in a ferment, threatening notices were pasted on the Board, and feeling ran high. Of course the culprit was much too frightened to appear with the bone of contention, so hid it and lay low. Consequently there was no iron for most of the voyage. Then, mysteriously, it was in its place one morning, and the queueing up began again. No sooner had the public ceased to worry about the "iron" question than it disappeared again!

Jean and I knew someone with a small travelling iron of her own, and she would lend it to us on condition that we swore not to tell where we had got it or lend it to anybody. Consequently we would press our clothes with an audience of fierce men and women glaring, muttering, and catechising us about its owner. If they told a good story and were reasonably cheerful, we would do their most urgent bits for them. It was a ridiculous business.

Up to this time no one, least of all the ship's officers, had any idea of how many people were on board, who they were or anything about them. No one had a ticket and very few possessed a passport or any sort of identification. It was a Dutch ship requisitioned by the British Government, and all the people who escaped from Singapore at that time were automatically taken straight to this clearing house directly they reached Batavia. These, plus some naval and military and R.A.F. men transferred to India, were the passengers.

Several days before Colombo it was decided to take a census. Some of the more reliable men helped the short-handed Purser, they took up positions in the lounge at several different tables and did one letter of the alphabet at a time. Each passenger had to queue up in the line of his or her particular letter and give all details about themselves. Rough lists were made up, and as there was no office staff, Jean and I and several others offered to type them out. Next day we set to work in the Purser's office with an odd assortment of typewriters, balanced on desks and lockers, and got through the business in a day and a half. Jean and I spent one day from 9 till 6 in the Office going hard, we did not even leave it for lunch, but a friendly Colonel did the queueing up for us and brought the mid-day issue of stew. In the evening we were duly rewarded by a drink with the Purser and a gloriously satisfying meal in the mess.

It was quite amusing working in the Purser's office, all sorts of quite interesting people came in and out, wanting things. I remember a bearded War Correspondent who was in a flutter because a despatch case containing important documents had disappeared; he was trying to trace it and suspected foul play. On being asked where he was heading he replied "Chungking, where else?" He was one of the men who ran the ship's newspaper, a type-written sheet which was pinned up on the Board each day. Its editors got a certain amount of news from the radio and wrote little bits of their own on topical subjects — there were often pithy comments about "the iron."

At 10 a.m. each day all passengers were ordered below to give the volunteers a clear deck for their sweeping operations. It was most amusing to see ex-rubber planters, engineers, and Government officers scattering the dust with their brooms — they worked with terrific vigour and a ruthless disregard for anything in their path.

The *Plancius* was quite well equipped with chairs, though not half enough for the number of passengers, but as it was compulsory to carry one's lifebelt all the time there was always that to sit on. The evening was the worst time. After the final issue of bread and sausage at 5.30 we would go up on to the crowded deck and find a place for what Jean called the "evening sit." There was absolutely nothing to do but sit and talk (even smoking was disallowed because of the blackout). We talked Malaya to a frazzle. There was a policeman on board who had directed me to the ship the last day in Singapore, he looked on me as a brand he had plucked from the burning, and would arrive every evening to give some more advice. He took the view that I should

go to New Delhi — the hub of the war and the universe — I could easily get a job at Headquarters. Australia was out of the question, etc., etc. . . .

There was another man from the Ministry of Information whom Jean had known before, who used to arrive about dark and sit and talk with us. For days I had no idea what he looked like though his voice and outline against the sky were quite familiar. He had known Malaya for many years and was interesting about its more obscure parts. I do not know where he went in the daytime, but I think he was one of the few people who had any books on board, and he would hide somewhere and read.

Some evenings we sat in the saloon, stiff with people, and talked above the queer noises people produced from the piano, while our eyes streamed because of the smoke in the air. Sometimes there were sing-songs there. At 10 p.m. everyone was ordered inside, and the decks were cleared for the night.

All the way to Colombo an escorting Destroyer was somewhere in sight, and sometimes, when we were well out, she would flash signals with her aldis lamp in the darkness. We could not see what our lamp said, but some of the Signals people picked up messages from the Destroyer. One night our ship had evidently asked them to broadcast to Colombo to expect us, and that we had 800 evacuees on board. The Destroyer flashed back that they would not risk using their radio, "even if the Archangel Gabriel were on board." I remember "archangel" tested the readers on the rail very severely — it is a tricky word to read letter by letter in morse.

## CHAPTER XVII.

On waking on Sunday, 22nd February, it was grand to see Ceylon on the skyline. Although we were pretty disillusioned by this time, we thought a British port could not fail to let us land, but it was most depressing to be told it would be a day or two before our papers could be fixed. We were also told that Colombo was being evacuated, no ships were going to Australia from there, and that we would probably be taken to Africa whether we liked it or not. It seemed we were going further from home every day, while the Japanese went nearer. . . .

While anchored at Colombo we were allowed to open the portholes at night when the light was out; this was a delicious luxury.

One night, soon after we had gone to bed, I was talking to Jean about a suspicious looking man I had seen lurking round the cabins earlier in the evening—there had been a lot of thieving going on, and it was one of the rules of the ship that cabin doors were never to be shut (in case of shipwreck and so that a watch could be kept on the sealed portholes). I was describing the man, an evil looking person I had not noticed before, when there was a movement outside the window, just near Jean. She put her head out and saw a bent-up figure sneaking along the 2-foot way that ran along under our windows—a place only used by the boys cleaning portholes in the good old days. It was the same man.

Jean immediately asked what he was doing, and said he had no right to creep about outside the women's cabins, but he just scuttled away as fast as he could. She then bobbed in again and said with a grin, "he has a guilty conscience all right, or he would have told me to mind my own business." He lurked at the dead end further along till he thought the way was clear, then crept back again.

We told this story to one of the men of the Committee and he implored us to come and call him next time we saw the creeping man—there had been several reports about him, and this man wanted to be the one to catch him. He asked us, earnestly, to brand him in some way next time we saw him. He then confided the information that he (himself) "was doing a job for the Secret Service." This revelation did not thrill us as it would have done earlier in the voyage, as it was getting rather common—

half the male passengers on board had told us the same thing (each separately, with terrific secrecy), but even the dumbest among us realised that it was not exactly the opening gambit in the conversation of a real Secret Service man. However . . .

The port of Colombo seemed very full. Troopships, submarines, craft of every kind, down to the usual little row boats and launches which were jockeying for position to take us ashore. I remember a tug called "Herculese" which fussed around us all day. It had a huge buffer across its bows made of frayed jute or rope, which gave it the look of a little man with an enormous ginger moustache—none too well-kept.

Finally, on the Monday, after playing hide and seek with the embarkation officials most of the morning, we suddenly came on the right queue, got our passports chopped, and found ourselves able to go ashore, free women (though of course, we were not allowed to stay the night on land—only people with blood relations resident in Ceylon could leave the ship, even for a night).

At the G.O.H. we met lots of other Malaysians who had left earlier and were thirsty for news. We had an enormous lunch with a Colombo friend of Jean's who did not bat an eyelid while we went through the menu systematically from top to bottom. He had a Malaysian with him who had been on leave in England and had just reached Colombo on his way back as Singapore fell. They both knew Jean's husband, who was left behind in Malaya.

Colombo had changed since my last visit there. Shops were banded and notices pointed one to Air Raid Shelters, but the chief difference was the lack of motor cars in the streets—there were hardly any—our friends told us petrol was very scarce, but they had sufficient to take us to the Galle Face one day. The latter place was much the same but its approaches were set about with guns and encampments of troops.

We had dressed ourselves in our cleanest and best, trying to look as little like evacuees as possible, high heeled shoes were quite strange after weeks of golf shoes, and we cursed them softly as we tottered round the town on feet that were fast becoming blistered, carrying our parcels. However, we were glad we had made an effort not to look too dreary and destitute, evacuees were rather common in Colombo, and some of them were evidently getting quite a kick out of it. We were in a shop buying sun glasses (I had left mine in my car in Singapore) and while we waited for the change the man gave us a hair-raising story of our trip as he had just heard it from a fellow passenger, and we were supposed to sympathise. We took it as rather a compliment to our disguise.

The Colombo people were very good, and a Committee came forward to help evacuees. They had a bureau where people who had lost all their belongings were given clothes. Some of the passengers were fitted out completely in beautiful things. One man who was rather destitute gave us an account of the outfit he had acquired for his arrival in England. He was a very long, thin man, who had been getting thinner and thinner; he had a long, thin, sharp-pointed nose, wore horn-rimmed spectacles, and always smoked a cigarette on a very long holder; he only owned a shirt and shorts, tin hat and sandshoes. The Bureau was not prepared to deal with men to any great extent, but had "obliged" him by finding a pair of grey flannel slacks (very short in the leg), a blazer (he was rather hurt because the pocket had been removed), a pair of royal blue socks, and a green sweater. In this outfit, garnished with his own battle bowler and sandshoes, he intended to present himself to his family in London!

We had been told we were to stay in Colombo 4 days, so when a dhobi came on board he was mobbed by us all and given our laundry which he undertook to return before we sailed.

I had had a harrowing morning, nearly getting passages direct to Australia, then, when it seemed almost fixed, I would be dashed to the ground again to find it was impossible. Then we sent cables, it was very hard to know what to say when one had no idea where one would be taken next (all I could think of was "Still coming, circuitous route"). After we had lunched again with our friends we met some people from the ship who said she was sailing that afternoon at 4. Later on we came on more passengers, almost frantic — had we heard about the early departure, and where was our laundry? They were on the trail of their bundle, which represented their other shirt and shorts. So, with panic in our hearts, we joined in the chase.

Where were we to find a nameless dhobi who looked like every dhobi there had ever been? It seemed a difficult conundrum. We whizzed round shipping offices making inquiries, dived in and out of lifts, told our breathless story to amused clerks — we must have our clothes, clean or dirty. Eventually we were calmed by the information that everything was under control and that the dhobi would be back on board before we sailed, but the clothes would not be washed. . . .

Then we weighed ourselves for the amusement of finding out how many stone had dripped off in the last month. The machine was one of those robots which rings a bell, flashes a light, tells you the time, and finally spits out a little card containing a horoscope and a forecast of the

future. It was with a very mirthless laugh that one of the evacuees, whose husband, home, and everything else had been left in Malaya, showed a piece of pasteboard saying "The best part of your life lies before you."

After buying up supplies of food and reading matter we got to the Customs House in time to board a little row boat with lots of other passengers — rather too many for comfort, as we were very low in the water, and whenever we got side-on to the ripples, water came over the edge and made us very wet. The gangway was obscured by an oil tender, the ship was still fuelling, so there was nothing for it but to scale the sheer side of the dirty old tender, pushed one way, pulled the other; then jump numerous ropes and pipes and barriers (getting very black in the process), thence to the gangway. We took the hurdles at top speed and then sat on deck and got a lot of amusement out of watching others doing the same course — by that time we had heard the news that we were not to sail till midnight and it was quite in order to go ashore again till then!

We had no intention of doing this, however, having said our good-byes, but three men on board (two police officers and "Uncle Ikey") insisted that Jean, Audrey, and I should have dinner with them — they were going to India by train next day and must have a farewell party.

We were very firm, no more wet little row boats for us, thank you. They cried that down and said Uncle Ikey would organise everything. (Uncle Ikey was said to be a millionaire though he had left a few of his million dollars in his wardrobe in Singapore — he could always be relied upon to arrange anything.) Then we said we were tired and our feet were ruined, and there were no taxis. They all swore on "Unk's" word of honour that transport would be guaranteed — and so it went on. Finally the conversation languished and the three men disappeared. Soon they were back again saying that everything was arranged and a glassed-in launch was waiting, puffing at the gangway. . . . We went.

True to his word, Unk had a seven-seater taxi waiting at the Customs House; we all got in and were driven round the round-about to the G.O.H. just across the road — quite ridiculous, however. . . . There we discussed the next move, dinner at the Galle Face or a place in the native quarter where one could have real pilau. We were feeling a little stronger by that time and decided on the pilau at some obscure place known to Uncle Ike and the taxi man. It seemed to be miles and miles away and very difficult to find in the blackout, but we came on it eventually and the feast was set before us in a comic room decorated with mirrors and queer pictures. Mounds of rice, chicken, curry, eggs, and all accompanying etceteras.



It was one of the funniest parties I remember. Unk, with a little encouragement, gave vivid accounts of his experiences in various parts of the world — America, England, France, Vienna, Malaya, China — incredible stories of New York, which ranged from 5th Avenue to the haunts of gangsters. The smiling Cingalese boy and his entire family would spring in and out through the swing doors, bringing more and more food.

We had got to the stage of eating oranges which seemed to wind up the meal, when there was a commotion outside, a party of sailors had arrived. They were rather drunk and argumentative — they wanted to come into our room. Suddenly our hosts decided that there was going to be a rough house, and, before we knew what had happened, we were whisked down the stairs between the three men in best police style, and were again in the 7-seater heading for our ship.

Then the hitch occurred. Quite a mile from the dock the taxi ran out of petrol. It was now about 11.30 and we had to be back on board at 12 — no more taxis or telephones — it looked like a long walk. . . . Then Unk had his great triumph; for no known reason, another 7-seater taxi (very rare at any time of day) happened to cruise along, going nowhere in particular. He hailed it, and within a few minutes of the break-down we were on our way again, Unk's reputation untarnished.

They escorted us back to the ship in another magnificent launch, a private one which had been pressed into service by some means best known to Unk, and the last we saw of our hosts was a dark shape receding rapidly into the distance, the wake of the launch making patterns in the few lights reflected in the oily water.

We did not sail till 8 next morning.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

The fourth girl in our cabin had had a miserable time, she had been ill all the voyage, and a few days before Colombo the doctor had put her in the hospital, saying she must have proper food. She seemed to be getting better, but was not well enough to get up or go ashore, so we had bought a few things she wanted (she was one of those who came away with nothing but what they stood up in).

Early on Wednesday morning, after we had sailed, I went down to the hospital to see her, and found an empty bed. The woman in the next bunk said that she had been taken ashore on a stretcher the previous morning! We were overcome with remorse and anxiety—goodness knows what had happened while we had been gallivanting the night before on that weird expedition. . . . It was terrible.

However, it did not sound quite so bad when the doctor told us the full story. Some relations of hers had come on board and insisted on taking her back with them to be properly looked after. This the doctor had encouraged, as she was very ill and the hospital had more than it could cope with as it was. A permit to land had been obtained . . . and an ambulance. . . . We looked remorsefully at the face washers, hair pins, toothbrush. . . . We never heard of H. again.

After Colombo, the meals improved considerably; the Committee had been busy and had complained to all authorities including the Governor, that something must be done. At least three men told me that they personally were responsible for the improvement—"I saw old so and so in Colombo. . . ."

By way of celebrating the New Order we had a most amazing meal the first night out. I was so impressed that I wrote it all down in my diary. Instead of the usual mountain of dog sandwich, we were confronted by a line of bins like those used for stew, etc., at lunch time, and on presenting the soup plate to the presiding boy one collected the following:—From No. 1 tin, a ladle of prunes, from No. 2 tin a ladle of custard, from No. 3 a piece of pineapple, and from No. 4 a hard boiled egg. Then if this were not enough one could add a piece of bread and jam. Bigger and brighter vitamins.

By breakfast time the menu had relapsed again and our old friend the sausage had returned, a little drier and more curled at the edges; supported by porridge made of rice. That morning a large Dutch woman sat at the same table and settled down to a real meal. First she scrubbed down the table with a garment belonging to her baby, then she set out a large plate of the rice porridge and several rounds of bread and sausage, a tin of cocoa, condensed milk, bag of sugar, tin of biscuits, a thermos, and tin of jam. She spread jam on the porridge and, taking a hairpin out of her bun of hair, enlarged the hole in the condensed milk tin and poured a generous layer of milk on the top. By the time I left she was making cocoa and spreading pickles on biscuits.

Pickles were strong favourites on board. For a long time we could never understand why such dirty plates came to be washed up when the only food given out was the standard sandwich. Each day there were hundreds of plates covered with green slime and the smell of onions. It transpired that there was a dry canteen on board, it opened for half an hour at a time, usually when we were below in the galley. Stocks were low, but the passengers who queued up for an hour or so were sure of getting pickles—the supply of these seemed inexhaustible. Satisfied customers said that they tasted quite pleasant and livened up the sausage.

Thriving on our extra rations, and with less passengers and more space, conditions on the *Plancius* were improving.

## CHAPTER XIX.

On Saturday, 28th February, we saw land again, and discovered we were at Bombay, and not Mombasa or Durban, as some people averred. We anchored in the harbour, and soon officials and an Evacuee Committee came on board.

Rumour was rife, but everyone, including the Chairman of the Evacuee Committee, agreed that we had no hope of getting a ship away from there for at least six weeks. The town was quite full but they had been dealing with evacuees for two years (had even had them from the Caucasus), and had reduced the process to a fine art. There were hostels in the town and all army wives were being sent to a hill station.

The prospect was rather ghastly. All my friends had husbands left behind with the Volunteers or some sort of army job, they would be sent to Simla or some hill station (three days' journey); I should probably be landed in a hostel with the dregs. It was made plain that we were not going to be encouraged to get away — anyone capable of doing a job was to be given one — India needed all the able-bodied people she could get.

There were some Australians on board who had been fighting hard to get back to their own country; they had formed a Committee, and held meetings and wrote letters to the Governor and other officials asking for help.

When the Evacuation Committee came on board we formed queues for each letter of the alphabet and gave our names at our particular tables, filling in lengthy forms. Then the Committee left with all the information and spent the next day sorting it out. They were extraordinarily efficient and it was simply wonderful what they did for us. Everything was provided free, and the organisation to get everyone fixed up must have been tremendous.

We remained in the harbour all Sunday, and on Monday morning we tied up at the wharf about 8.30. After several hours in queues each passenger was given a label saying where they were to go and giving their host's name.

It was quite entertaining seeing what names were on the various labels and guessing what sort of a place people were going to—at least it was for a while till I realised that I was the only one on board who had no ticket. My form had been lost. I was sent from one person to another, and after much battling and waiting in queue after queue, each official disclaimed all knowledge of me. I was getting rather desperate by this time. I knew there was nowhere in the town I could go and get a room for myself, all the hotels were full. Jean and Audrey and all my friends were upstairs being dealt with by the military—they were to be sent to Simla that afternoon. Jean was having a titanic struggle of her own trying to stay behind in Bombay so that she would have more chance of catching the first ship to leave.

At least my passport was in order, and we were allowed to land on the wharf and change our money and pass the Customs. After writing "nil" across enormous sheets of paper and standing in a queue for an hour the Customs people were satisfied, then another long queue and my Ceylon rupees were changed into Indian ones. Still I had nowhere to go. Everyone else was bustling about, being met by friends or billetors, or sent away in buses to hostels (the thought of that had once filled me with horror but my present fate seemed even worse!).

However, at last I was rescued by a member of the Committee I had seen the first day, who had everything taped. I was to be looked after by the President of the Australian Association in Bombay.

Then I began to meet friends; people from Malaya who had evacuated before came down to see who was on board and look for news. One of them told me that Margaret was still in Bombay, and gave me her telephone number.

About 2 p.m. a deputy for my host arrived with a car and took me and several others to lunch, and then to meet the President of the Australians to be sorted out. No sooner had we introduced ourselves to our host than an alert sounded, a practice alarm, and we were immobilised for two solid hours! Not a soul was allowed outside all that time, all traffic was stopped, and the gharry wallahs had to take their horses out of the gharries, and tie them to the wheels. Bombay was not doing things by halves!

Our host was very kind and sympathetic and asked questions about our trip and what we wanted to do, said he would do everything he could to help, but passages were very difficult to come by, ordinary civilians had no hope.

There was a hitch about the billet of the married couple in the party, they were Scottish, by the name of Scott, and it had been arranged for them to stay with some

Scottish people in one of the suburbs. Someone had blundered, however, and the rather shy reserved Scots family who went out to receive their fellow countrymen found themselves welcoming a pair of Chinese! There was obviously a mistake, so they asked the name of their visitors so that it could be reported to those in charge. The answer came in uncertain English "Meester and Meeses Scott!"

The Scottish ones had been missed entirely.

As soon as the alert was over I was taken to my billet. I was to stay with some charming people who lived in a most comfortable flat. It was glorious to be in a room to myself, with its own bathroom where I could soak for hours. I shall never forget the sensation of feeling really clean again. It was wonderful to be able to leave the window open and catch a breeze—I revelled in it all. . . . Then a good dinner of real food, which tasted delicious—and servants to wait on us. . . . It seemed like heaven.

My hostess came from Queensland and we found several friends in common. It is funny what a small world this is. Of course there were many Malaysians in Bombay and it was not surprising to find people I knew there, but the most astonishing thing was to be recognised by an Indian assistant in an out-of-the-way draper's shop near Colaba Causeway. It turned out that he had been in Doshi's shop in Kuala Lumpur and had left for his native India just before the Japanese struck. . . .

When I met Margaret in town she arrived in a pair of sandals and was full of cheer. She said she had "gone all arty"—she was staying with some friends of her brothers, who were very nice and very interesting, and had asked me to come and stay there too. I went there several times to meals and it was certainly an interesting household. These people had lived in Bombay for many years, had a great number of Indian friends and were vitally interested in the India Question. They were very artistic, had a fascinating house furnished with the local rugs, low divans covered with Indian weaving—Indian pottery, modern pictures, and shelves and shelves of lovely books. Margaret's hostess wore attractive clothes, usually made out of the brightly coloured native prints.

They were most hospitable and kept open house to all their friends, English and Indian, who came in at any time of day or night and would immediately get involved in earnest debates about anything from art, literature, and politics to fire brigades. In fact, they were rather a mixture of intelligentsia and A.R.P., if such a thing is possible. Both Mr. W. and another young man who was always there were volunteer fire fighters—a little Indian

tailor came one day I was there to make them spare uniforms. He measured them up, while everyone criticised the position of the pockets in relation to utility and aesthetic appeal, then two Indians got to work on the floor and had the suits cut out and made up in no time.

They were always ready to talk about Singapore and were interested in it as an awful object lesson for what not to do in India.

It was very strange to be in a city again where life was almost normal. The first evening my host and hostess took me to see a tennis tournament at the Gymkhana Club; we went to pictures, and one day went out to Breach Kandy where there are two wonderful swimming pools, one covered and one open. These were crowded with people, including Malaysians. I remember Breach Kandy as a dazzle of colour, a bank of vivid green grass, little tables and chairs under brightly striped umbrellas, bathing suits of blues, greens, reds, white, and sunburnt bodies plopping in and out of the water under a clear blue sky, in which burned a blazing sun.

Most days were spent in trailing to the C.I.D. office, standing in queues again with the Plancius passengers — first to hand in our passports, if any, then to collect them — then to obtain exit visas. Then meeting the Australians at the Taj Mahal to discuss the matter of possible ships.

Here, too, there was a noticeable petrol shortage and very few cars were on the roads. The nights were very quiet, often the only sound would be the klop, klop, klop of horses' hooves as a gharry passed by — each time I heard it I was reminded of Florence and its carrozzas. Bombay and Florence sound just the same at night — a strange comparison.

The shops were beginning to feel the pinch of the war a little, but there were fascinating things to be had in the Indian quarter, and Margaret and I prowled round the Market. Our friends had told us all the places to go to. One day we found the shop where Gandhi's people from the Ashram sold their weaving.

Unfortunately, I was practically out of money. We were taken all the way to Bombay for nothing, but if we wanted to leave there it was necessary to pay our own passages onward — and I was thousands of miles further away from home than when we left Singapore. My travellers' cheques for £50 were rather inadequate, but I found I could come 2nd class to an Australian port for £45 if a ship could be found which was going that way. This was cutting things fine!

Life went on much the same for about a week, then on the Friday I met one of the Australians, who told me to be ready to leave next morning; do this and that with my

passport, pay my passage to the Commissioner of Police (it sounded funny but this was no ordinary voyage) — and be on call at the telephone. I dashed home to find a message had been left to this effect and my thoughtful hostess had already sent word to the dhobi and cleaners to have my laundry returned that evening.

Actually we did not leave till the Monday morning.

I was extraordinarily lucky, both in Bombay and Singapore, in my billets; instead of being treated as an unwanted incubus, I was welcomed most hospitably and made good friends in both places. It was funny to find amongst the passengers of the Empire Star my hostess from Singapore, an evacuee herself, with her small daughter. All I could do in the way of returning her hospitality was to give her priority rights on the green mug!

There were rumours that our next ship would be the Queen Mary, then we heard the Queen Elizabeth and sundry other great names; but actually it turned out to be another rather passee Dutch passenger ship, which had been fitted out to carry troops. There were about 40 passengers as well.

Of course all my friends were sitting on a hill somewhere in India and it was like beginning the voyage all over again. The small saloon was supposed to be kept for First Class passengers, and the smoking room for Second Class, but after going into the latter one evening I resolved to do it as little as possible — everything shut up, the heat terrific, and one could not see more than a few yards ahead for smoke, our eyes poured with tears.

There were no chairs at all on the ship, so after dinner I would go out and lean on the rail to get some air. Presently a figure would lean over the side nearby and make some remark about the phosphorescence which was specially bright in the ripples made where the ship cut through the water. We would finish with that subject and go on to something else, and usually I heard the story of their lives. Some were very amusing, some interesting, most of them were very homesick after being away for a year or more. There was one dreadful person who made puns all the time and was very facetious. When I thought the time was ripe I would say good-night and go below, but it was too hot to go to bed very early so I would come out again on the opposite side and lean on the rail there — presently I would hear "The phosphorescence is bright to-night" . . . it was always the opening, but it could lead anywhere. One night I heard all about Greece from a man who had lived there for 9 years up till the invasion, then when I changed to the starboard side did phosphorescence, Manchester, and ama-



teur theatricals. Another evening — after we had dealt with phosphorescence — I discussed the Provost Corps, India and the Indians with a young and enthusiastic M.P. Officer who had just been promoted; then on the port side did phosphorescence — England, his mother and sister, and life on the ocean wave with a Petty Officer.

I remember one night when we were thrilled and amazed to see searchlights in the sky, then signalling by lamp. First we seemed to be going away from the light, then it showed again and we went toward it. Public opinion decided it was one of our destroyers. (We were not being escorted now.) Much later in the evening a ship came right up near us and flooded the deck with light. We did not know at the time but heard later that the ship behind us had been torpedoed that night. There would have been no hope for us if a submarine had sighted us. We zigged and zagged religiously, but as our speed was about 8 knots at best (there was something wrong with the boilers), there would have been no running away. It took us 5 days to get to Colombo again and we were not in convoy.

Our second Friday, 13th since leaving Singapore, passed uneventfully and the following day we arrived in Colombo. This time we did not even land, but transhipped in the harbour on to a large, fast troopship, which sailed again that evening.

## CHAPTER XX.

Each change of ship was for the better and by this time we were being well fed, had enough water, any amount of salt water, and proper bunk per person. On this last ship there was a luxurious swimming pool and we played deck games. There was an enormous lounge with a high roof, and though it was officially for 1st class passengers and officers any women were given the run of the ship. In fact, the only difference between the 1st and 2nd class was the time for meals, 2nd class were served first in the same dining saloon. This was not entirely a disadvantage. There was a great shortage of stewards, and what there were were very overworked, and one day I saw our man tipping our half-emptied glasses back into the water jug and putting them ready for the next sitting; the same was done with the bread and butter plates! I sat at a table with 4 R.A.A.F. Sgts. who were on their way home after eighteen months' service overseas—they were on the crest of the wave.

One night we were invited to a concert given by the troops somewhere in the bowels of the ship. It was a very spontaneous entertainment; they sang and played and recited with terrific abandon—I remember one popular Corporal who began a long Banjo Patterson recitation and kept forgetting the words. While he scratched his head and looked worried his friends would prompt him from all over the hall, finally he gabbled out one verse at top speed and sighed and said, "Oh Lord, there's reams more," and bolted back to his seat to loud cheers. The ship's cook brought down the house with cockney humour, there was community singing . . . .

There is not much to say about this part of the trip, which was almost a normal sea voyage apart from the blackout. Parties were the rage—big parties, little parties. All the men who had private hoards decided now was the time to bring them out. I remember finishing up one night with a supper of rich plum cake, which had followed a New Zealand Major round the Middle East for months, beer, and tins and tins of Stewart Island oysters. In the background a portable gramophone played "The last time I saw Paris."

Some of the men had lost everything, but most of them had piles of souvenirs and presents to take home — Sarongs, saris, amber, silver filagree, fezes, foreign money, menus — a wonderful hotch-potch to remind them of the things they had seen and done on their travels — though I do not suppose they would be likely to need reminders. Personally, though I did not have much to show for it, I am not likely ever to forget Malaya and the last two years. Anyway, I, too, have some souvenirs — one is a 1942 pocket calendar with a Red, White, and Blue V for Victory, inscribed with "Greetings from Malaya"!; another, one green enamel mug — large.

The first port was a matter of speculation, we were travelling at first in great heat, then it got bitterly cold. Those of us from Malaya were in misery, specially the ones without many warm clothes; some people used to carry round a ship's blanket to wrap round themselves. Then one day we saw land, and found ourselves coming through the Rip into Port Phillip Bay — it was to be Port Melbourne.

At long last all our papers were in order, and I rang up some friends to say I had arrived. There was a squeak of surprise from the phone, then "Oh my dear," more squeaks, "Have you got any clothes, or are you wearing a sarong? We will come down straight away." And down they came, bless their hearts, in spite of the petrol shortage; bringing with them money in case I was in the hands of usurers, and coats to cover my supposed nakedness . . . .

We were back in Australia, and had beaten the Japs to it . . . .

