

Special

* * *

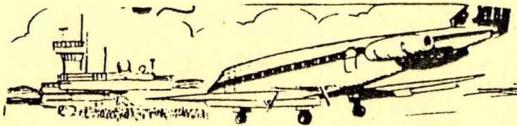


HOLIDAY



SUPPLEMENT

* * *



Holiday Supplement

Contents

- 1* Fry Sizzle and Crawl - reprinted from Women's Periodical 8
2* Real Ballerinas Don't Go
Down Slate Mines - reprinted from Women's Periodical 12

You all remember last summer and the heat, don't you? Well, I took my holiday at the peak of it, sometime in July. What's more, it was planned as a walking holiday in the expectation of at best indifferent sunshine; instead it ended up as a reluctant scramble from one bit of shade to the next holiday!

The style of the piece I wrote about it was greatly influenced by a book I had just read at the time, written by an unnamed woman in 11th century Japan and translated by Penguin under the title of As I Crossed A Bridge of Dreams. The book is a low-key, lyrical account of parts of her life, mainly journeys, full of the typical Japanese appreciation of small details. There is very little action or character interplay. Scattered through the text are haikus and short poems she wrote simply to capture the mood of the moment, or recreate some little subtlety of nature that moved her. In Fry, Sizzle and Crawl, I was trying for the same effect, to capture the mood of the places I went through and the atmosphere of that extraordinarily hot summer. It's not meant to be a story, there is no fannish hero/antihero protagonist, and the elliptical style is deliberate. I hope some of you enjoy it!

Fry, Sizzle & Crawl . . . 

Rucksacks all gleaming and oiled - mine blue, a veteran of six years of battering; Peter's red, second-hand and festooned with superfluous strings.

Here we stand on the threshold of a holiday.

First port of call is Bath. Already it's too hot, the sky's white, almost dull, but we wilt underneath the rucksacks, undreneath the hidden sun, climbing the road to our boarding house.

"They're swimming on the steps!" A shriek from me, as released from the slavery of the rucksacks at last, we cross a bridge and see our first proper view of the town centre. The white-foaming water-steps, which in photograph have been beckoning me to the spa, ever since I cut them out for some school project many years ago, are now the centre of my hopes for escape from the stifling heat. Let the Roman baths crumble, the Assembly rooms decay and the 18th century architecture tumble, so long as I may swim on the steps.

The three semicircular waterfalls that the steps become to approaching swimmers are a shallow, fizzy haven of wallowing, basking and paddling. To reach them though we must strike across a deep, small boy infested channel. Meanwhile kamikaze youths leap, alarmingly, from the walls of the shopping street above, and one or two even from a rooftop on the bridge, in some nameless rite of manhood.

Like these youths, Bath is an exhibitionist of a town. We found ourselves caught up in carnival and mardi gras, which filled the streets with beer pumps, marquee stages, Jumballoons and revellers. In the crowd of strangers swarming around me I subconsciously, as one does, expected to see a familiar face, but was no less surprised when Linda Pickersgill and her family emerged from the morass. Everywhere they're playing music, mainly folk; I indulge in a fruitless search for Peter Gabriel in this his home town, but it's more wishful thinking than real hope. Then Sunday, and there's a gymkhana on one side of town, all red jackets, horse dung smells and grass, and it's A Knockout on the other, generating false excitement over the river while we squint at the sun-blinding descent of target

and muesli like I normally have, but there wasn't any. Everybody knows greasy food is bad for ballerinas! After breakfast most people went shopping, but Kate and I went mountain climbing with Bridget and the nice scholarship boy (Peter-Fred: he hyphenates his name to make it look less common. Well so would I if my name was Fred - only workmen are called Fred). We climbed underneath some barbed wire, up past a rusting old car and over a stile Bridget found in one of the slate walls. Bridget knows all about hill walking and even had the right boots. Kate had rainbow coloured wellies which I was a teeny bit jealous of, but I didn't tell her in case she got too cocky. The view at the top was terrific, it was a pretty clear day and we could see all the sheep and old stone cottages on the opposite hill really well. We wanted to go on but it started drizzling a bit and one of the mountains had a nasty cloud round the peak, so Bridget made us go back. At the bottom by the bridge, one of the ponies, a shaggy mountain pony (not like my elegant, thoroughbred Hejaramara) started to bite Peter-Fred, who looked terribly funny trying to run away. Actually I thought he was very brave as he obviously doesn't know ANYTHING about ponies, and he didn't blub at all.

In the afternoon we all went for a ride on an old steam train just like the ones in the train books my little brother reads. It was a bit tame really though the view was good. All the smoke from the engine kept coming in the window and Steve, the other boy, wouldn't stop messing about and hiding under the seats half the time and being very silly. I hoped the guard would throw him off, but he didn't. Back in the dorm we had a good pillow fight with Alison, Margaret's daughter, who was so savage she beat us all easily, even Steve. In the end I had to throw a blanket over her from the top bunk to shut her up. Of course it didn't work for long. There was ages and ages before dinner because Brian was cooking (I think he tells so many jokes he forgets to work) and so I starved and Kate starved and Peter-Fred starved. Laura didn't starve because she's a vegetarian (I think this is something to do with her being common as well!) and she and Steve were allowed to cook their own meal. I considered becoming a vegetarian too for about five minutes till I remembered that real ballerinas have to eat meat or their legs will never be strong enough for 'arabesques' and 'pas de deux'! After dinner we played cards. I kept losing until we started on a silly game Brian and Caroline knew where you had to give your neighbour all your best cards and try not to win any tricks. As I never win tricks anyway I was quite good at this game and came tie winner with Bridget. We were all allowed to stay up late for New Year and sat in the dark while Steve set off indoor fireworks. The sparklers were useless cos they ran out in about ten seconds or so, and besides I wasn't given one. The other fireworks just made smoke or pathetic little coloured flames. They were meant to be volcanoes erupting and things, but they didn't look a bit like them. The elephant trunk ones were the best though. You lit them and acres and acres of black crinkly stuff oozed out all over the floor in horrible writhing columns like snakes. I bet mummy would scream. I must buy some for Simon.

Sunday 1st January

Today it rained. You couldn't tell till you'd been tricked into getting up because the stream outside makes it sound like it's always raining. Breakfast took ages to make as no-one was up and the shoppers had bought more mushrooms, sausages, eggs and bacon, but still no muesli. I went to do ballet exercises in the washroom. By the time we'd had breakfast it was afternoon, so we all drove off to a slate mine. I didn't really want to go in case I twisted my ankle but the others wouldn't let me stay behind. I had to borrow some beastly black wellingtons from Margaret, which wasn't fair as Kate was allowed to wear her rainbow boots. Caroline made me go in the landrover because she wanted to be in the car. I laughed when we got to a steep path only the landrover could get up and the people in the car were told they'd have to walk half a mile up to the mine in the rain. Except Graham spoiled it all by going back for them. The scenery was terrific - there were loads of empty, tumble-down slate houses, a sort of dead village, as well as scree and waterfalls. The mine itself was dark and creepy and full of water. We all carried a torch, except Bridget who carried two because she thought one of us would forget ours (that's prefects for you, always worrying about the wrong things!). Inside, we all scrambled down an old railway track, clinging like grim death to a rusty old cable because the slope was so steep. I fell over once and thought I'd fall all

Feel like a winter break? Why not North Wales, where it rains all year round so you can get that lovely summer drizzly feeling even in the middle of winter? Well, you might not buy it, but I did. The holiday in this next article was really the Women's APA New Year get-together, but you might not recognise it as that! Coresponsibility for a lot of the concepts and schoolgirl vocabulary must go to Kate Davies who turned out to have read the same sort of comics and girls school stories as me!

Real Ballerinas ...

Don't go down slate mines

(in case they break an ankle!)



December 30th

Today I went to Wales. I ended up on the trip to get away from all those horrid New Year parties Mummy and Daddy always drag me to when I'd rather be practising ballet or riding my favourite pony, Hejaramara (well that's what I call her, her real name is Candy, but that sounds so American and common that I never use it). Luckily Kate was going too, which made all the difference, because she's a real ballerina like me and a pretty good sort besides. I wouldn't have gone if I'd known we'd be travelling with two of the grammar school boys, scholarship boys at that, whose fathers work in TRADE I wouldn't be surprised. That made five of us in the car which was an awful squash and Caroline (who's really Irish even if she does sound awfully English) insisted on sitting in the front all the time. One of the scholarship boys was all right, but one of them kept making TERRIBLE jokes, which was abit trying for me and Kate as he sat on the same seat as us all the way there AND all the way back. The journey was so rotten that Kate and I had to scoff all the choccies we were supposed to be taking to Margaret as a present for putting up with us - but who cares! We needed all the cheering up we could get. The car broke down in the last mile, well it broke down before that but that was a proper break-down, this time it was just cos it couldn't do the hill, so we all had to get out and push, even Kate and me, though we told them and told them that the scholarship boys should do it all, but Caroline wouldn't listen. Anyway it was stunningly super outside, there were loads of stars all spread across the sky like glitter or powder and you knew it was real because you could hear the sound of water running through the trees. It was really scary when the car had gone and we were left alone on the road in the dark - I couldn't see anyone even when they were right by me. We kept calling to each other, and when Kate caught up I held on to her so we wouldn't get lost. That was the best part of the day. The dorms were cold and we had to make our own beds with NYLON sheets. Kate didn't know how to (nurse always made me make my bed when I was little, but Kate, you know, is such a baby she's never learned) so all her blankets fell on the floor when she climbed in. We all laughed, except Laura who has allergies to blankets. That's probably because she's common, though she's a good sort really and will do anything Kate or I tell her. There were six of us in our dorm - me, Kate, Laura and Caroline, plus Bridget who's a prefect, and Sue, one of the day girls. Luckily all the boys were in the other dorm, so at least we didn't have to put up with them!

December 31st

This morning Caroline and Brian (the little scholarship boy who tells the jokes) cooked breakfast. It took them hours and hours because they would insist on doing more mushrooms than I've ever seen before in all my life. I wanted fruit-juice

parachutist, trailing red smoke. Exhibitionist, yes; the Ladies toilets, without exception have some of the crudest graffiti I've seen in a long while. Is it the water I wonder as I eagerly follow the recommendations and look out for potential (or merely potent) Dorians and Martins (to a chorus of 'No-one's never had a brother like Martin')

Bath to Salisbury: an hour wait at the floral city's station. There's even flowers between the rails. How do they survive the diesel fumes? The train when it finally arrives is hot and sticky from a points failure at Bristol. *Midnight's Children* is cool by comparison. I resolve to buy some shorts.

Salisbury is obviously a musical city. Radios sound from open windows. The youth hostel is the only one we encounter with a record-player (always the Beatles) and exploring a graveyard, we discover a rock band rehearsing in the church. An American choir serenades the tourists in the Cathedral. The Cathedral is the coolest place in Salisbury after Marks & Spencers and the foyer of the medieval cinema, where Darth Vader peers down from a wooden balcony onto stained glass windows and a set of carved seats.

An architectural snobbishness prevails, buildings without genuine antiquity must aspire to mock medievalism or be ostracised. While up on the hill, a mile and a half out of Salisbury, the stones of Old Sarum laugh, for they, the skeletal castle and cathedral, are the true ancestors of the city, deserted and plundered but historically superior. Such a small area to have once been called city, but fragments of the wall remain to prove it.

I now have a pair of turquoise shorts and Peter a green hat whose only historical significance is that he will leave it in Salisbury bus station to make way for the hat with the band where the magic feather will grow.

The bus from Salisbury takes us, once more rucksack-blighted, to Fordingbridge. Let me linger a moment on the name. Fordingbridge. Fording-bridge, the village with the stream. A watering hole, an oasis. We swim; down to the bridge where the water's deep; back through the reeds and shallows. Heaven has spoken.

Our next stop, Cranborne, is obviously the countryside. The bus driver accompanies an aged passenger to her door and we are dropped off right outside the hostel. It's small and prim compared to Salisbury. The warden looks like a headmistress and in the common room the piano has replaced the record player. The primness is an illusion, a gang of scouts and several school parties rapidly transform the ambience into youth club, school trip and barely repressed orgy.

I'm billeted with the party of little girls.

"They're sweet," Peter assures me, enviously. (He's stuck with the scouts.)

Sweet yes, but totally out of control. Giggling like extras from *Daisy Pulls It Off*, they bounce in and out of bed, teddies flying, torches clashing like light sabres, chattering ceaselessly. Yet at the last minute we're saved by the arrival of teacher, obviously a witch in disguise, who quietens them within minutes. All quiet, but for the girl who rolls out of her top bunk at four in the morning. I sleep through it all.

From Cranborne we are faced with countryside, more countryside and only countryside. Walking holiday, this is it! 92°F or not. With the help of one fairly out-of-date ordinance survey map, we throw ourselves on the mercy of the footpath gods, those cruel deities whose yellow arrows lead you through thicket and nettle to abandon you on the edge of some impassable field of wheat, far from your intended destination. This is our day of greatest adventure, the day when we pick up the three magic pheasant feathers to help us in the perilous journey through Martin's wood (No-one's never had a bruvver like Martin...); the day when we discover the mysterious post field where grow all those white posts you see at the side of the road in country villages. It's also our day of greatest discomfort. Out on the road, having failed to propitiate the footpath deities, I trudge along to the rhythm of

Sizzle sizzle, Watch me fry
Drizzle drizzle, Or I die

But the feathers guide us to a village just before 2 O'clock in time to sip lager, examine the massive fish caught by one of the locals and grumble about the weather.

Meanwhile at Buckingham Palace, a bevy of overdressed society ladies faint at the garden party and Princess Diana creates a sensation by wearing no stockings. I read it all in the Daily Express, which I approach for the first time since giving up my paper-round. Do we truly live in the same world, I wonder?

Next morning, and we discover the bus we wanted only runs on Wednesdays. Naturally it's Thursday. So we go back to Fordingbridge (ah, Fordinbridge!) but there's barely time to buy new flip-flops before it's on to Ringwood. Ringwood is a definite disappointment, another watering hole according to the map, but we can barely find the river and there's no hope of swimming. Today I'm back in skirt to protect my nascent sunburn. My back's also covered up, but the blue rucksack has no mercy and plants its straps firmly across the soarest points. The only consolation is we discover a disused railway, the bed still running firm and straight into the distance either way from the great iron bridge across our little, reedy river.

On the bus again, and now we're really out in the New Forest. The road winds through open moor, green, shrubby and glowing in the sunlight. Ponies wander onto the road and the bus is forced to drive round them. I forget my water fixation for a while and smile.

Next stop: Burley. The village has tourist written all over it. Souvenirs, cream teas, postcards... The youth hostel though is out beyond the golf club, in the forest, hidden by holly trees from the seventh hole. On the other side of the road is open moor again, where you could run forever. It's windy, fresh and lovely for walking, but even in the midst of a heatwave off the tracks lurk unexpected boggy patches, unfit for human flip-flops. Peter makes desultory compass readings but we still drift off the moor further up the road than intended.

Burley hostel is the most chaotic of them all, perhaps because of its lemon yellow doors or because only half the warden's beard was white. The kitchen is a battlefield between the forces of yesterday - dirty plates and saucers - the forces of today - foolish would-be gourmet cooks - and the forces of entropy - gas rings in varying states of disfunction. We'd decided to make a salad that evening and were glad of it.

Next morning I wake to the gentle sound of a pony nuzzling his way into my dormitory.

We try to leave chaotic Burley. The bus to Lymington only runs on Wednesday. Naturally it's Friday. We go to Christchurch instead and I fall in love again. We don't get to the beach, but there's the river, the Norman keep and the priory. Besides it's more than that. Bath was exciting and magnificent, but Christchurch leaves me feeling that it's here I'd like to live. Here I'd be happy. Then it's on to Lymington, all too soon, believing that there my long pilgrimage to the sea will reach its end. Not so. Lymington has no beach.

"But there must be!" I wail. "There's a pier, so there must be a beach." But Lymington's a harbour, 3 miles to the Isle of Wight, Sealink, marinas, fishing boats but no beach. I'm hot, my sunburn's itching, I've passed knowingly at least three beaches on the bus. I just want to cry. Peter starts looking at timetables and concludes: "We can get out to Milford and back before the last bus to Norleywood." He's right. We bus out to Hordle Cliff where the sea's a two minute walk down the cliff. The water's cool, rough and bliss. The current's almost too strong for swimming; I engage in my habitual struggle to the nearest breakerwater, head turned away from the waves as I won't put it in the water, fighting forward inch by inch, fighting time that is remorselessly taking this day, taking this holiday.

Norleywood is a frontier town. Houses but no shops, no post-office and no pub. The hostel is a wooden cabin with outside toilets and its own colony of tents. Compared to Burley it is sanity and cleanliness personified. The bunks are partitioned off into pleasant groups of two. When we go to cook (Vesta biriani & white cabbage) the kitchen's almost empty. Sanctuary. Then late evening the peace shatters. A group of disabled arrive, total novices to hostelling, high spirited but capable of turning the task of arranging a sheet sleeping bag into a major and noisy battle. A disturbed night for all concerned.

Morning comes (or becomes) and with it our faithful companion Mr Sun, with his hat on (hip hip hip hooray!). We set out for Hurst Castle.

"Look, there's the sign!" I call, spotting a green National Trust board. We recklessly leap from the bus and start off down a country road. More sizzle. No sign of the sea.

"I'm getting bad feelings about this," I say eventually. Peter agrees. We walk on and on. No more signs. Obviously we are supposed to be a car. Damn the National Trust.

We sight sea just before lunch. I change into my bikini and doggedly declare that I shall swim before eating, come what may. A path, long since abandoned by the footpath gods, takes at last to the stone dunes, the causeway to Hurst Castle. Beyond the dune is the water, perfectly flat but with a current as strong as at Hordle Cliff. We throw ourselves in over the blocks of concrete, granite and other stones shoring up the causeway and wallow in the blessed cool. There are no breakwaters to fight for. Opposite is the Isle of Wight, but it's so misty we can barely make out the Needles.

In a day full of trekking, we start on our second trek. We scramble along the crown of the stony causeway, exposed to the sun every step of the way, the castle a squat haze in the distance. It never grows any larger in my camera's viewfinder. Ahead of us are people and posts, people toiling along the causeway or posts stuck forever in the same spot. Occasionally though a post disappears. We put on all the clothes we have but they don't cover the parts being burned. We don't even have a camel. I notice periodically corpses of broken flip-flops. Suddenly it goes terribly quiet. We're no longer fighting our way over stones - crunch crunch - we're on a path, and yes, there's the castle, the castle wall, the shady castle wall. Collapse.

Later we explore the castle, which is full of cannon sites and ex-ammunition stores. It was built by Henry VIII to protect the channel and the Isle of Wight, and was still used in the last war, so looked very military. I wanted to turn it into a youth hostel, like Ehrenbreitstein in Koblenz, but I guess it'd be too damp.

Then comes the third trek when the sun should have cooled but hasn't. We're still burning. We hold out as far as possible, then it's back in the sea to cool down. Now the current has changed and it's taking us the way we want to go. Without bags and clothes we could float back to Milford. The sea's calm and quiet; in the distance all the sailing ships are flocking back to the Isle of Wight, now beautifully clear, tantalisingly near. We take it in turns to swim till we're tired.

It's Sunday and no buses run through Norleywood on a Sunday. This is it then. We must walk beneath the blue scruffy rucksack and the red stringy rucksack; back to Lyminster. It's our first cloudy morning and in the distance there's a continuous grumble of thunder. Peter contributes the marching song for this stretch:-

The cars go zoom

The guns go boom

While we plod on and on

It's the last day. Plod. Tonight we'll be in a real house in Southampton. Plod. What a lifetime we've lived on the road. Plod. But just one week! On and on, feet on automatic pilot, brain miles away. Lyminster comes as a surprise: civilisation so soon! It's only ten o'clock and we have a day ahead of us and all the buses of the Hants and Dorset region at our disposal.

The holiday dies finally on a railway platform in Southampton, when the Oxford train arrives five minutes early and I'm left bereft on a bench by myself, waiting for the train to London. Another station has claimed me. Another ending.



the way down, or at least knock over Peter-Fred, but I didn't. It's probably just as well. Graham kept on telling us creepy stories about dead miners and showed us one of their bridges, which was a single rotting plank over a ravine. Caroline wanted to cross it. Steve tried to wake the Balrog by throwing stones and messing about dangerously on the edge. Later we crossed one of the bridges, but it was much wider and only a bit rotten in the middle. Kate nearly farked it cos she's afraid of heights, but we got her across eventually. Then we had to climb up a staircase set right into the rockface. Some of the stairs were missing and there were only rusted iron stakes to stand on, and even some of those weren't there! The worst part was walking across a ledge, especially as Steve made everyone stop when I was about halfway across and trembling on the edge with fright, just to have our photos taken. Some boys are SO stupid! At the top we climbed up a waterfall and found ourselves in the passage we'd started from, just in the place I'd looked down on the way in and said I wouldn't go down there for anything.

When we got back I was supposed to be helping cook dinner, but I got Alison to do my part of the work and Peter-Fred did all the rest, so it wasn't too bad. Kate cooked something all by herself, but only because it was all in packets. (She said it was from cook at home, but I think she really bought it in a SHOP!). Peter-Fred isn't a very good cook, he made the rice go all yellow and funny, and the meat tasted of ORANGES! I liked Kate's stuff better even if it did come from a shop!

We went to bed early so as we could have a midnight feast in the dorm. Kate went out and bought some pop and Laura sneaked in her tuckbox. In the end we had to invite the boys because they heard about it and threatened to tell if we didn't, so we did. I didn't mind Peter-Fred being there cos he's nice and quiet, and even Brian's not so bad when he's not telling jokes, but Steve's always noisy and rough and says nasty things to me and makes INSINUATIONS, so I don't like him! Anyway, Kate drank lots of the flat red pop that's not quite like ribena and I had some of the brown fizzy stuff and we all tucked into bread, jam and Christmas cake. Laura ate so much that she kept saying she would be sick, then ate some more. Next we told secrets, all except Peter-Fred who didn't know any, and scary stories in the dark. I was attacked by a horrible, nasty invisible hand, a cold, clammy spectral hand, but didn't quite scream. Caroline came in and told a good story, but then started doing naughty things with Brian because it was dark (but we could all see them anyway) and Steve did even naughtier things with Laura (I suppose it must be because she's common - Caroline doesn't count cos she's Irish, and we all know what the Irish will do for sixpence!). I went and sat on Kate's bunk and we ignored them and talked about ballet and gymkhanas. I have more ponies than her - we've got seven and she's only got six. She says they'll be getting another two soon, but I think she's only making that up because she's jealous. Peter-Fred looked a bit left out, maybe because he's too poor to afford sixpence, so he went off to bed. Bridget came in, but didn't tell on us because she's a brick, even if she is a prefect. Kate made everyone apple pie beds, even me when I was out of the room, but I found mine before getting in cos I knew she was going to make them.

Monday January 2nd

We all had to get up early because we were going home. Then we ended up waiting HOURS for breakfast because Brian was cooking again and was, guess what, mushrooms. There was still no muesli. Kate was up in time for breakfast today - she nearly missed it yesterday because she's so lazy and stayed in bed all morning. Real ballerinas get up early! We all said goodbye and all the other boring things grown-ups will insist on saying when they're trying to get away from each other, but finally we got in the car and crawled off. It was working even worse than on the way there, reminding ^{me} of that old joke of my brother's about the Rolls Canardly, you know the car that rolls down one side of the hill and can hardly get up the other. Come to think of it, that was probably the only joke Brian didn't tell all weekend! We dropped Peter-Fred off in Birmingham. He promised me faithfully to write, and I might write back even though he's poor and not OUR SORT. Then it was down hill all the way back to London, home, Hejaramara and ballet lessons.

But real ballerinas spend new year in studios practising, not in messy slate mines, so I felt a bit guilty!

