SHOOTING A MONKEY

This story is being written under considerable difficulty. I am sitting on a suitcase in the narrow aisle between the two bunks (double bunks) in the center of our launch. Before me is Bro. Mouw’s typewriter, on the bunk, and I have suspended from the upper bunk

on a coathanger

a kerosene lantern. So, if the typing is worse than usual, you will know the reason. The boat does not help me much either, for it shifts and rolls as our pilot gives the wheel a sudden turn to miss some floating log. It is now dark, and until the moon comes out, the going will be difficult. At about sundown this evening Dr. Talbot and I were sitting up on the prow of the boat, hoping once again that we could see some monkeys. The jungles of Borneo are filled with them, but you are not apt to see one except in the evening. We did not have long to wait, for suddenly, in a high tree, almost naked of leaves, we saw about seven of them, all sitting along the same branch --- a perfect target! Dr. Talbot and I called to Bro. Mouw, who was at the wheel, and soon we had turned the launch around and were slowly heading back toward them. Bro. Mow had turned the pilot wheel over to Bro. Buck, and was sitting in the open doorway in the side of the boat with his rifle ready. In the meantime, I had gone for my cameras and was ready to do some “shooting” of my own. I went back to the prow of the boat and trained myKodak 35 on the tree for the first still picture, and then ran the movie camera on the monkeys, as we approached. I started the shutter and it ran and ran, but nothing happened. When, finally, it ran down, we were almost past the monkeys again; so while I wound the movie camera, I called to Bro. Mouw and found that he had been watching the wrong tree! Well by that time he had his gun ready again, I had the movie camera “shooting” too, and in a matter of seconds a shot rang out in the jungle air (better, broke the stillness of the jungle air). If the movies turn out well, you won’t have any difficulty telling when the gun went off, for I jumped and with me the camera jumped, but I kept it on the monkey, and if the pictures are good, they should show him falling through the air into the jungle below. You will also see other monkeys scattering for their lives and flying through the air to the branches of the next tree. But, our target came down like a rock. Once more it was necessary to turn the boat around, and when we returned to the place opposite the tree, our faithful boy, Rambu, jumped off the boat, plunged into the water, and disappeared into the jungle. Soon we heard him give a yell of delight, and we knew he had found the monkey. It was then just a minute or so before he emerged from the jungle again, swimming with one hand and holding our prize with the other. Brother Mouw estimated the animal to weigh about 35 pounds. He is rather a common species of monkey in this part of the world, grey-brown in color, with a very cute face and a long tail. He had hair about an inch long. These past two days would have been exciting ones especially for Son --- hunting wild game in Borneo, and having the party you are with get a wild boar (hog) and a monkey. Well, after we were safe on our way again, Rambu took the monkey up on the roof of our launch, skinned it, cleaned it, cut it up, and a rather strange aroma informs me that there is one monkey in the soup kettle in our little “kitchen” at the rear of the boat! Dr. Talbot has been saying that he wants a taste of monkey, ever since we arrived in Borneo. Today is his 60th birthday, and I guess he will get his request.
as a birthday gift

Mr. & Mrs. Mouw and Mr. Buck have never tasted it, and you can be sure I have never had such a close relationship with any of my “relatives”. But, there’s no telling what may happen! I have already eaten things on this trip, in the native longhouses that I never thought I’d ever eat. I have eaten whole meals of the native food --- it was a case of doing that or going without. When one is out on a thirty-mile trip through the steaming jungle, wading through swamps and going over hill after hill of this rolling country, he will “eat what is set before him and ask no questions for conscience sake”! So, you can never tell, and it may be that I never will tell either the fate of this little brown monkey that was shot on Dr. Talbot’s birthday! At any rate, I can at least say that I know the meaning of the saying, “more fun than a barrel of monkeys”!

[Written in bottom margin of the letter]
P.S. – We are postponing the birthday dinner until tomorrow, and the menu will be fresh pineapple, papaya, & vegetables a la Monkey! Etc.