

THREE LEAVES IN COLOUR
A Wander in the Footsteps of Virginia Maskell



A.V. Andersen

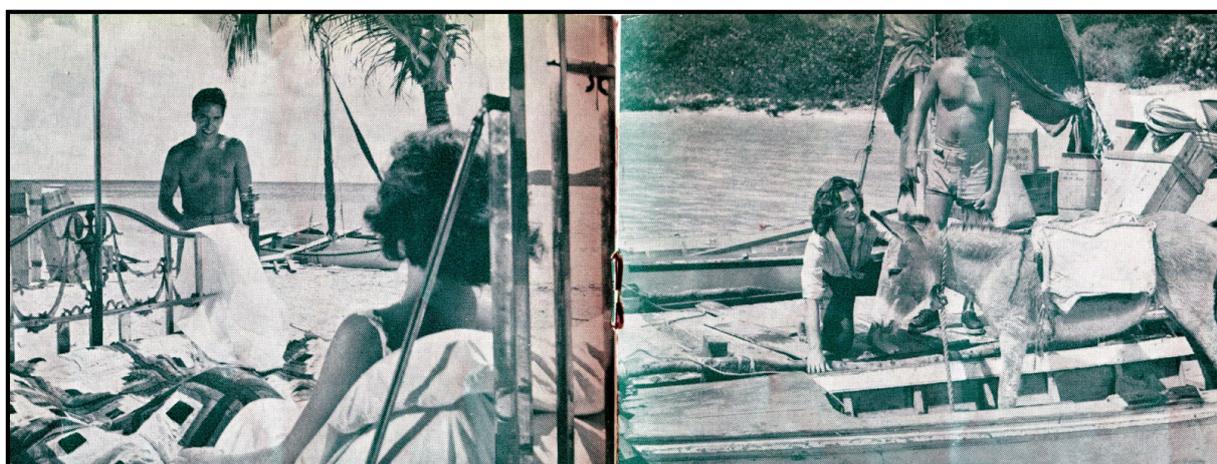
Three Colour Films by Virginia Maskell

A short introduction (second edition of her birthday dedication in 2024) by A.V. Andersen

On the occasion of her heavenly 90th birthday on the 27th of February, 2026, I would like to share with the inclined audience a small collection of memorabilia of my favourite British actress, the magnificent Virginia Maskell. It's a rare Danish trio of contemporary cinema programmes that flew to me once. Virginia made only three colour movies for the big screen between 1957 and 1967 (apart from her cameo as the *obscure lady* in *Arrival*, the first episode of Patrick McGoochan's legendary series *The Prisoner* (filmed in autumn '66, aired from end of '67); but this was a TV production).

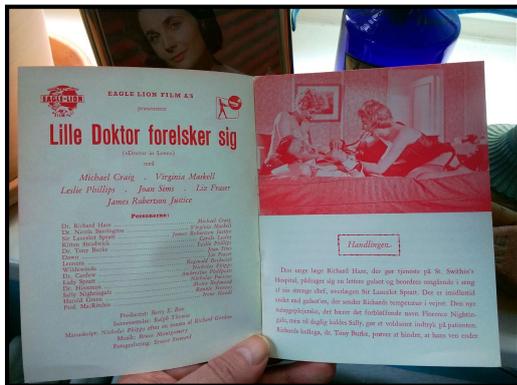


I *Virgin Island* (filmed in autumn 1957, released in autumn '58. Danish title: *Our little Dream Island*) is a soothing romance and partly the true story of an escapist couple who builds their *raft of love* on a tiny islet, entirely shot on location over *four glorious months*. Virginia plays *Tina*, a lively young lady, who asserts herself between two lads as strong as bears. Watch out! Real drama lurked beyond the blue horizon of the British Virgin Islands: Virginia's first main role could have almost been her swan song when she overturned her vessel, threatened to drown and collapsed on the beach; but she was saved by Jack and his bunch. She may have confused the sea with the pool where she had filmed the episode *Decoy* of the TV *Buccaneers* shortly before – as a *lost lady in a dinghy*. Oh, sinister destiny!

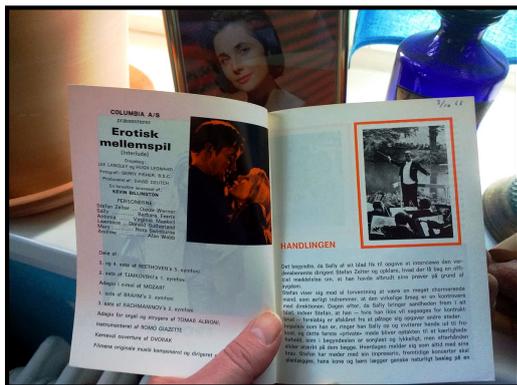


II *Doctor in Love* (both filmed and released in early 1960. Danish title: *The little Doctor falls in Love*) is an episode of the popular *Doctor* series. Albeit rather shallow, the plot gains unexpected depth through Virginia's appearance as *Nicola*, our both enchanting and conscientious lady doctor. She comforts a sick little boy and she will get her naughty darling, of course (I'm sorry for this spoiler).

Nevertheless, real drama lurked off the Pinewood gates: Her second colour movie could have almost been her last when she overturned her car on the icy alley in January '60. But she emerged from the wreckage with just a bad bump and carried on filming. In her private life, she remained discreet. Virginia largely withdrew from the Vanity Fair and often liked to submerge in her Devonshire retreat.



III Interlude (filmed in the *Summer of Love* of 1967, released mid '68. Danish title: *Erotic Interlude*) is the touching tragedy of *Antonia*, a mature heroine who struggles bravely against her vain husband's obsessive relation with a random void girl. The movie was mostly made at stunning sites in and off London, reminding of *BLOW-UP* for its swinging mood and driving scenes. But, but... Virginia wouldn't be granted to see her greatest performance due to her premature death. Real drama lurked behind her farm gates at the Chiltern Escarpment: In January '68, after an ominous phase of decay, she *drove to a beautiful spot in the country where she took her own life*. Nothing remained but legends.



I am half a German with Danish beech roots and one of Maskell's rare admirers off the Fairest Isle. She caught my attention some decades ago when I saw *Virgin Island* on Marina Cay, a tiny islet that had belonged to the author of the literary template and was used as a location in autumn '57. Beyond, I am pleased to say that some sequences were filmed in the bay of Charlotte Amalie, the former capital of the Danish West Indies until their purchase by the US over hundred years ago (oh my, what a loss!).

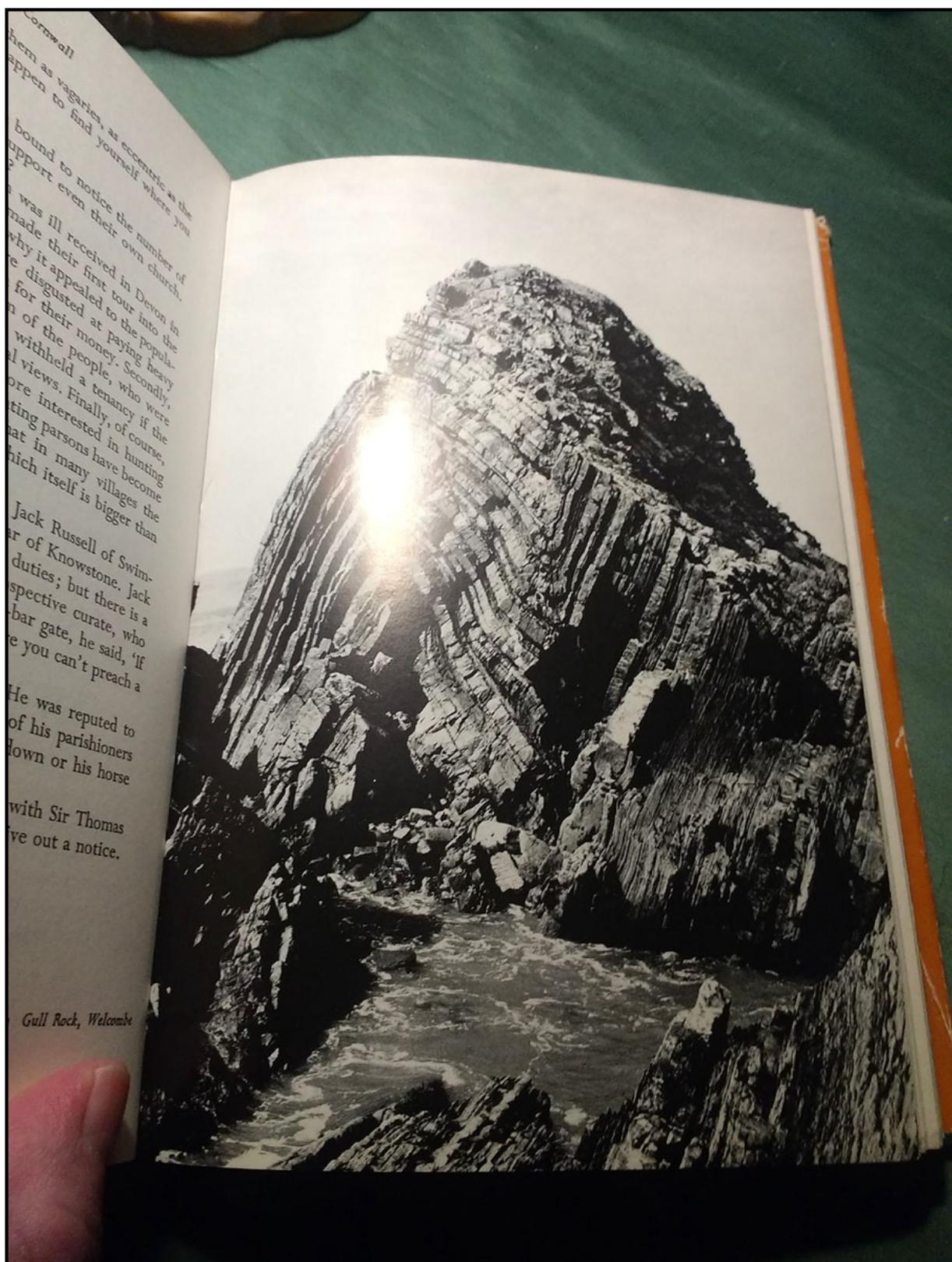
By the way, the first Danish colour movie was filmed in Copenhagen also in 1957: *Kispus*, an enchanting romance of cabal and love, starring Helle Virkner, my second favourite actress, whose exciting life story has (even though it lasted longer) quite some parallels to the rise and decline of Virginia Maskell.

And since both ladies were heavy smokers, I have strangely to ponder about whether they ever met for a cigarette at the Hotel d'Angleterre (I apologize for this whimsical cross-connection – but it won't be the last one, I promise you!). So let's continue and set off on a journey in the footsteps of our enigmatic protagonist.



Helle waits for Godot (screenshot from *Kispus*)

Prologue On the Wings of the Seagull



The Gull Rock, a sublime landmark, as photographed by Thommy and depicted in Pedro's book about Devon.



Once upon a time somewhere on the Westland Coast reef pirates were up to mischief and heeling vessels in a hopeless drift were doomed to find there shipwreck on the unpredictable tide banks. But regardless those legends from the past (that the local bard likes to tell), let's switch to the mid '60s and shed light on a snapshot that is probably too unimportant to find its way into the history tomes but at least significant enough to be visually immortalized on a travel book cover by this rather important writer.

The little sequence I'll tell now, even if not from one of Virginia's movies, is part of an unwritten (or unreleased) play that was shaped by life, I assure you. We are standing at the mouth of a mill brook that rushes down onto the rocky beach at our feet; the surf is roaring und a salty breeze comes from the sea. I perceive the scenery a bit like in slow motion on a blurred screen. But as I look through the haze, I become aware of an odd little group in the distance, looking like three tiny mice in a huge field of manifold threats, who are scrambling over the sloping formations of the knife-sharp rocks which spread far off the coast like petrified tentacles. The lonely bunch seems like floating over the ridges covered in spray, so that you could mistake them for an apparition, especially the figure in the midst; but I realize it's a slim lady with shoulder long chestnut hairs and a posture like a statue that looks *boyish from behind and feminine from the front* – the inclined viewer will now guess this is Ginny. Our protagonist moves between two chaps who are seemingly buddies albeit they couldn't be more unlike: To her left is a middle old guy looking like a little goblin, and to the right a long-shanked lad in her own age. A whimsical trio, I have to say (that reminds the Dane of *Fy og Bi*, but let's call them Pedro and Thommy) and I can't find out how they are related. However, they seem happy, if not exuberant, as hanging out together. Where the tide banks cease, they reach an anthropomorphic shaped rock (in fact, an outstanding geological fold) protruding from the abyss. The natives use to call it the *Sleeping Giant* or the *Reclining Lady* – I tend to the latter since she turns her neck away from us and bares her beautiful shoulder (that reminds me of an undressing scene in, umm... now I know: the film will be called *The Wild and the Willing*). The ominous three, accompanied by the chatter of a myriad of seagulls, now remain in awe at a natural pool that separates the rock from the main land; and if we were in the Caribbean we could well imagine Silver's treasure cave hidden at this place. After the goblin has recited unctuous odes and the youngling has taken some photos (which we will actually find later in one of the bard's books) the lady raises her voice that sounds like Zephyr's gentle breeze. Even though I can just catch scraps of her words under the roar of the sea, I believe to understand: „Once, when I will have passed away, being a woman of sixty-eight, this is the place, where my ashes shall be scattered.” And she looks hauntingly at both of her companions with her hypnotic eyes (which stare into their souls and into infinity at the same time) who can't hide their consternation (and neither can I as I am now focused on her like through a telescope, or a looking-glass).

And with her little hands held up as if to take them into her embrace, she adds: “*Promise me!*”

Both sound and sight are about to disappear in the tight spray of the mighty waves, which for a moment looks like dancing snow flakes in the frame of a still-life; this comforting impression drives away my little disturbance that briefly overcame me. Then another woman approaches the stage from the slope, middle aged, looking both gentle and stern almost like a Superior Canoness, and I love her down-to-earthness from the first view. I hear that her name is been called; and Mary calls after them: „Beware, these cliffs can be slippery! Mind the gaps, *or you will freeze to death* if you have carelessly stepped into one. *I have had enough chasing after the Grim Reaper. He will have to come after us himself now.* Don't let yourself get down. Come in and have a cup of tea!” It simmers in a tiny hut clinging to the cliffs with a wonderful view over the Lady and beyond the Celtic Sea. The eagle's nest invites for a soothing rest from the fierce forces of nature. And so they are sitting together (in the Sign of the Three, or the Four) in the warmth – but, woe, woe, a tempest is brewing...



My inclined audience, forgive your Bobby Lewis for the poor (who may have just devoured too many golden pills out of Silver's chest) for spinning sailor's yarn, just as the little epigone for borrowing some impressions of *Misters and Mistress Mouse* (or as it was called) by a certain Devonian writer we will hear more about later – and I even tend to carry on to do so, regardless whether some people on this side or on the other side of the Mendip Hills couldn't be amused.

The complete following story is hardly a fairy tale, rather a tragedy written by reality. And even if the audience will not believe it, I assure you: tis all nothing but the truth! And if I could discourage you with a funereal prospect: there will be no happy ending. A few negligent helmsmen will steer her heeling vessel through violent storms and their evil cooks will disturb the balance with deceptive dishes too heavy to hold upright. Therefore it has to capsize after bravely struggling against all adversities. One of those heroes would once confess his contribution to Virginia's wreckage (in his third biography in which he reveals their passionate love). But his work, called *OBSESSED*, will be banished by ominous forces, ostracized and consigned to oblivion, just like our heroine. If it were better known to the wider audience, there would be no space for legendary letter litter. And I will squeeze this tome until we will sink in a sea of sobs, I promise! So let's reopen her book of remembrance that has been closed for so long (respectively burned).



Her colleague Ken (who had become pretty popular through a certain comedy series) also felt driven to reflect Virginia's fate in a prominent place of his obscure *Diaries* – maybe with regard to his own self-denial in an adverse business of pretence and appearance. He knew much about always wearing masques and feigning a false facade to the palate of the public and the patriarchal powers that can't cope with deviants from what is said to be fair and foul and socially (and especially gender) appropriate.

In some dozens of thousands of pages of discreet self reflect he gave revealing insights into the deceptive circus of the Vanity Fair and proved to be (just like our Heartland bard who knew much about parables and allegories) the master of innuendo. Albeit I couldn't find out whether they have ever shared a professional engagement, I am tempted to assume that he guessed, or even knew – so as some of her fellows who will later break their silence, albeit all of them like to beat around the bush – more about the true causes of Virginia's decline, which were hidden behind the glittering curtain.

Ken lamented the loss of someone *with so much to give and appeared to have everything to live for*. Nay, I have to retort! Everything for what she was struggling was always just in vain, destined to fade. Virginia sat in abandoned cinemas with endless series of unpleasant movies repetitively unreeled; her tracks, always determined by others from childhood, led far away from the path of happiness; and she lacked reliable confidants for whole her short life that *was like a dream* (and largely a nightmare).

Wanderer searching for clues to the Life and Death of Virginia Maskell, forget all the nonsense that has been proclaimed from the day of her last trip and has spread like sticky tentacles over the decades! Her premature end had nothing to do, but absolutely nothing, with professional doubts or diffuse (sometimes called postnatal) depressions out of the blue. *The cause of her free death went far deeper!* Speechlessness was poisoning her slowly (in a fatal connection with Silver's spicy pills against remembering of who she really was and what she desperately longed for) so that she could not break the Gordian Knot of her *spiderweb of pain*. What is certain is that after our human Guinea Pig had suppressed her manifold miseries instead of to face them by gullibly swallowing *Ordeal's* prescriptions over an uncertain long period of time, the Lady vanished behind the bars of Britain's most notorious hospital for two mysterious months that don't exist in the annals. Locking up female misfits (who are just unconventional and those toffs close (or far) to them can't cope with it) in any institution, this is good old Victorian procedure. And just released from their madhouse, she will seek for salvation in free nature and be found reclining under a beech tree in a deep sleep from which she wouldn't awake. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*. Who wouldn't be inclined to suspect at least a little causality between these events? And to acclaim: "Yeah, that was again a great success of quackery!"

It is all the more strange that no one would ever question the incidents, but cover them under a shroud of legends that all those entangled in Virginia's decline can well live with so as not be ashamed to have let her down when she needed support the most – that only a tree trunk would be able to give her. There is nothing more humiliating than to deny a person their mental health and attach to them the predicate of being a lunatic, all the more reprehensible to conceal one's own negligence which has increased the turmoil. Given a scrap of a letter of *Love and Despair* that Virginia will finally write, the league of gentlemen will hurry to declare *her mind disturbed*. But disregarding this degrading verdict that sticks with her until today, I predict to the inclined readers without fear of burning my hand:

Our unrecognized heroine will express her point of view with full awareness, as clear in spirit as the sparkling water of a mill stream, when she begins her final road movie sequence *westward ho!*



Time has come to tell the truth to overcome fatally false discretion; and all the evil legends shall be swallowed by Calypso's Maelstrom! We have to shed light on how Virginia was blinded and her tongue ripped out just like Cecilia was robbed of her organ and thus the ability to articulate herself. Maybe we will find together on our winding and exhausting wander, while listening to the waves crashing on the cliffs and the lively clatter of a mill, some clues to revive her wonderful voice for which she was once famous, and to awaken her from her narcoleptic trance that has lasted ever since; so perhaps we'll finally remind WHAT HAPPENED when she was marooned on a dreadful rock in Hellsbury Vale – that is what it all boils down to.

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I Time of Innocence



Tina and Evan on location: Eurydice was the place where they built their raft of love under a protective tree.

Virginia's first colour movie was filmed entirely on location in the British Virgin Islands in autumn 1957 over *four glorious months*. *VIRGIN ISLAND* is the only film she ever made abroad and allegedly her personal favourite. It's a funny little strip for whole the family (and thus pretty prudish) with enchanting scenes in summer, sun and sand, that promise neither more nor less than *love and laughter*. Virginia played a young lady from Kensington who renounces the constraints of civilisation to live with her darling on a remote islet. When the film is released a year later, the audience will acclaim her performance that combines *appetite of life* and down-to-earthness; and the critics will consider her *the most refreshing and natural girl on the screen*. She will become immediately famous and a popular cover girl for a few years, even though rather reluctantly since she wanted *to become a big stage star*.

Our little known protagonist had worked until recently in a tiny coffee bar in Kensington since her job as a novice actress was not really profitable. She had played first some minor stage roles in theatres throughout the country and from 1957, since she was of legal age, small movie and TV parts (if she wasn't even forced to toil in technical services like archiving filmstrips). And we have seen her earlier this year in her second role on telly in the episode *The Decoy* of *The Buccaneers*. Her first appearance is pretty moody: a bunch of rough pirates discover her sculling on the ocean. *A lost lady in a dinghy!* She will later scare them half to death with a big pistol in a tiny hand in a moment of despair (and iron loyalty) to rescue her big love (as we will find it as one of her leitmotifs, both on and off screen). The pirate captain is played by her colleague Bob who would become famous with the second Bond film (and after his premature death, following a long decline, both physical and mental, his ashes will be scattered in the Celtic Sea; but please forgive a little digression without connection to our main plot).



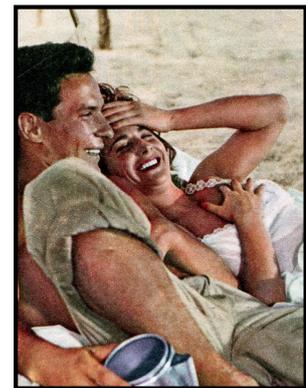
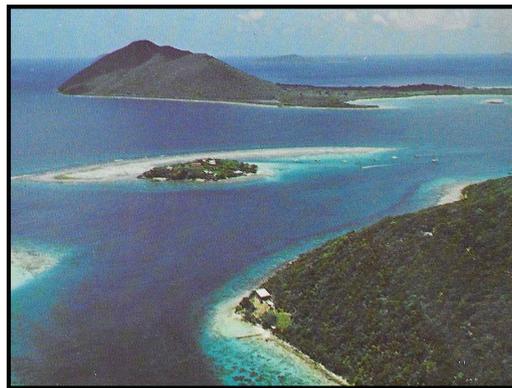
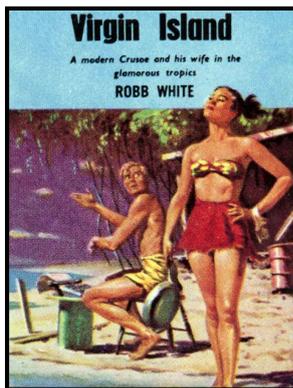
Soon after her pool party in a limited water tank upon the Thames Virginia went overseas to the British West Indies to scull and swim around in a rather large pond during whole the autumn of 1957. This very first appearance outside England would remain her one and only film role ever abroad – certainly not due to a lack of opportunities, because she herself will reject nine out of ten offers for a couple of good reasons. She liked to linger on her own green meadows, ride fiery horses and hang out

with those close to her; to live according to her needs rather than to be swallowed by the Vanity Fair. Ironically, she had got the lot – even though the bosses had probably watched her convincing part in the *Buccaneer's* tale – because she had chosen (what she considered) the less important role from a handful of film projects presented to her (as she herself will tell us). Because from the beginning of her questionable career she was neither eager to play on the big screen nor to be part of the glittering circus; rather, she was happy on small stages both in Soho and the countryside (albeit rewarded with less honour and least income, but sometimes with a proper riot). She wouldn't have guessed that this “minor” role would push her as a shooting star into paths which were not really to her taste and nature. However, she was acclaimed when *Virgin Island* premiered in autumn '58 (after a delay of almost one year due to obscure struggles during post-production) and everyone suddenly became aware of our reluctant protagonist. Given her convincing split between British convention and Creole naturalness, both critics and audience were enchanted. And the press predicted *a bright future for Virginia Maskell, who has talent, glamour and personality. She is the only English Rose who can play a love scene!* Ouch, that sounds like great expectations! And she hated that. She became instantly the epitome of Britishness far before Jenny, Helena and others; and if she had been a girl of the '80s, she would have certainly portrayed Austen damsels – if not mature ladies like Emma in the '90s (whose ability to express feelings that smoulder deep within and can erupt in the twinkling of an eye, seems similar to Virginia's nature). Playing sophisticated ladies, this will be her destiny, already as a young actress who ripened emotionally earlier than many of her colleagues. Until she herself would try to escape her annoying clichés (and thus almost destroy her entire career) by playing a *whisky swinging nympho* (even though looking beautiful and at the side of a natural born pirate) in her most notorious strip – ultimately fruitless in regard to her final film *Interlude*, when she will portray a *suffering good wife*; and although she will never be granted to watch her very last performance, it doesn't matter – she *lived* it from the bottom of her heart, like every of her roles even to the point of collapse (and beyond).



It is not a press invention that *Virgin Island* was her fondest film (as Virginia herself and later her companion stated), certainly given her real adventures rather than from a professional perspective – the movie was a pretty romance with a shallow plot. Boating, bathing, building, bedding through all nights and days, that is what we can expect from her blue (aka turquoise) lagoon (that refrains from daring scenes; and the inclined lecher has to be put off until '62 to see at least a piece of breast). Virginia could hardly prove her acting talents, since she was chosen, let us be honest, because of her outstanding appearance, both natural and noble, that fit perfectly with the portrayal of a British lady confronted with the wilderness and always looking beautiful in these opposing spheres.

She starred between two American actors as strong as bears who just became famous: Jack and Sid. Yummy! And given their appetite of life, she probably remembered her childhood adventures when she hung out with her older brothers as a close-knit group that called itself *The Tigers*, first in the African wilderness and later in Shepherd's Bush where they roamed through the backstreets and chatted in Cockney – she would have been then the ideal cast of *Eliza Doolittle* (certainly more qualified than a random twiggy girl who could not even sing but later got the lot; I just can't remember her name). But against the dramatic background of the contemporary circumstances (and an obscure family riot), her mother would abandon her shortly after the war. The siblings had been evacuated when the Blitz struck London to be abroad throughout the war time – and that's what we Huns have to be blamed for, admittedly. But later her mother preferred to live with a dashing officer of the British Occupation Army in Germany, and this was only the latter's decision – to call it balancing irony. (So I venture an early conclusion that everything is an endless cycle of cause and effect across time and space, and the karma is passed down through generations, whether of individuals or entire peoples.) However, just returned from Africa, our poor lil orphan was transported again, this time to the outback of East-Anglia to be brought up in a Catholic convent where she spent *more time on knees than on feet* (as her suffering mates use to tell in the annals). And this particular education was pretty effective, so she *wanted to become a nun or a nurse* during her youth, if not throughout her entire short life. But the Sisters advised her to attend an actor's school, given her captivating presence and her *elocution talent* (yeah, her angelic voice that everyone, whether boy or girl, fell instantly in love with, and so did I). That's how it began, her walk down the red carpet. Virginia's life path was determined by others who always thought they knew what was good for her and ignored her own needs and true nature.



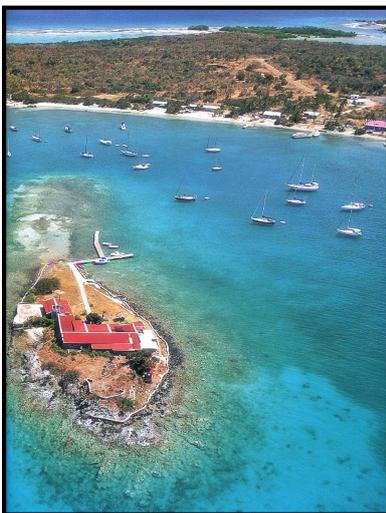
Virgin Island is the adaptation of a true story from two decades before. The plot is based on the memories of Rodie and Robb White, who had built their very own realm on the tiny islet of Marina Cay (where parts of the film were made in and around their abandoned cottage for a pretty authentic mood), even though just for a short *time that was like a dream*. And like them, our fictive escapists built there *raft of love* (aka a small hut around a large four-poster-bed) on an uninhabited Island.

It is worth anticipating that we will find these leitmotifs later frequently quoted – both by our Heartland writer who will soon *latch onto her life*, and by me, his little epigone – in Virginia's reality.

Tina, a well trained and mannered but also willful and lively Kensington girl who has just come of age, breaks away from paternalism to escape from civilisation together with *Evan*, an American archaeologist and capable writer (sounding familiar?) – and you will guess: Mother is not amused. They bravely struggle against adversities of both nature and culture, some of which are child's play, others more essential, and hang out with smugglers (to become more or less intentionally their *lighthouse keepers* (to keep in company – to anticipate a cheerful little song of the early '70s). But woe, woe! The authorities, stirred up by Mother who likes to snitch the little mischief of her offspring, don't really appreciate the unconventional life of two and a half Hippies in their sober waters so that our castaways are threatened with the premature loss of their little idyll (not really with serious effects, as the subtitle promises more *love and laughter* than actual (d)anger. I apologize for this little spoiler). On the climax there is even a little drama: *Tina* almost suffers an unassisted birth when she is bobbing *lost in a dinghy* (déjà-vu!) in the wide ocean in a lull. But through the courage of her darling who swims through shark infested reefs, she would be rescued – and the power of fate, merciful nature, has its share in blowing the vessel into the haven. Thus the appropriate exclamation is: *Evan, a breeze!*



And last but not least: *Tina holds the lucky baby*. Albeit enclosed with the strange moral (of her pretty husband, because or despite given the dangers they have just overcome together) to renounce their easy life on the outer rim: *Tis time to take over responsibility as an adult* will be the final punchline – seemingly required against the background of the established audience from London, Sussex or wherever else in their chubby cinema seats (or at the manor’s fireplace, if there had already been video recordings. I apologize for this anachronism – and another spoiler since we will soon learn that sitting in a rocking chair can be pretty dangerous!). And so *Tina* would become, instead of the first Hippie, a decent lady (hard to imagine, I have to say, and I have pity with her), much in contrast to what she had expressed empathetically to Mother in a heated scene hardly one hour before: she wants to be an *Urchin* (to stick with the words of the mentioned writer who will know it all about her true nature) rather than to bow to expectations and particularly what society considers to be male or female duties. And therefore, disregarding how bravely they have struggled for their dream, the couple would throw it away – that seems quite frustrating to me. But we have to remind that (not only) Robb and Rodie had experienced it exactly like that *from ecstasy to misery within 10 years* (or less). And as it is well known, reality and ideal are often far apart and at the bitter end all efforts are doomed to be in vain.



In Fact, during most of the time the crew and cast lived in the neighbouring bay close to Marina Cay like in a pre-Hippie colony that was pretty masculine so that every little convent chick would have chirped excitedly. But I promise, Virginia was firm in her faith and she proudly carried her cross around her noble swan neck until those days when she shall meet her Mephisto at stranger tides on the other side of the world in merry olde England. The film folks lodged in a brand-new yacht club (if not on its owner’s sail ship *Rubicon*) located on a tiny rock in the middle of the bay that was once the hideout of Black Sam Bellamy, a notorious Buccaneer. Maya and Waldo were real pioneers in Robb’s and Rodie’s footsteps but their development work on Beef Island at the east end of Tortola far exceeded their predecessor’s efforts for a handcrafted hermitage. They had created an ensemble of facilities for yachting on the shores of Trellis Bay, built their own house and even paved a runway in the dusty outback that was just opened in time for the

invasion of *Countryman Films*. It was their intention to establish a first holiday resort on the BVIs (which were then, much in contrast to the US Islands, still almost genuine). Ironically, the fragments of their project would later become a popular pub that will be named *The Last Resort*.

But it is well known that well-intentioned projects have unexpected effects. Therefore (the locals may forgive) you shouldn’t come back in modern times so as not to sob a fortnight about the loss of paradise, given the signs of human (aka tourist) sprawl. Both the poor bays are covered by ships so that you could be tempted to walk over the water. And especially the runway has a stunning afterlife: Apart from the fact that both islets of our former escapists are exactly in the flight line so that your ears would ring as if they were stirred up by the *Ride of the Valkyries*, what is worse is that the sprawling airport just threatens to swallow the bay and bury Bellamy Cay. But anyway, let’s not remain frustrated and go back to the times when the idyll was intact, at least scenically:

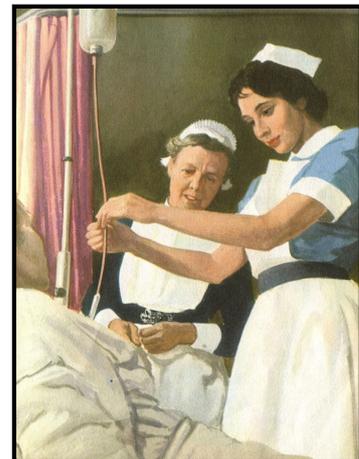
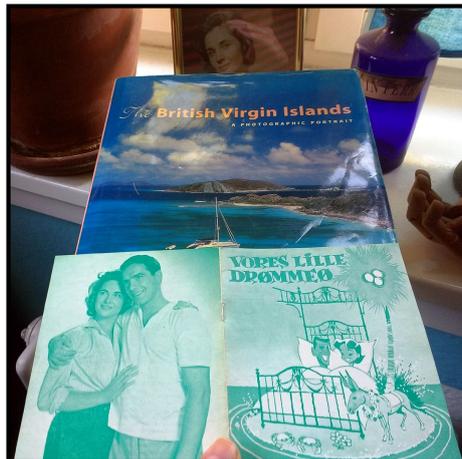
The powerful couple was intensely involved in the filming works by providing accommodation, catering and transport. But even their retrospective will not be unclouded in regard to a stressful time and a film crew (in contrast to the pleasant cast) that was more *demanding* than likeable (as we find similar hints in Virginia's statements) – and the turmoil would ultimately cause the landlady's collapse so that they will left an unfinished project in early '58. Look, it wasn't always just sunshine and roses in the blue lagoon, not even in those days.



And indeed, pure joy on screen may conceal that labour was lurking behind the cam pane (or pain). The film was made during a tricky season when heavy rain storms (if not even hurricanes) use to pour for weeks. They had to work from early dawn and cope with dangerous rides, whether in overloaded cars on tiny lanes along the rocky shores or in rocking boats. Predatory creatures were lurking on the reefs (and actually gnawed on members of the crew) and a myriad of sand bugs liked to tease the lightly dressed cast (as it is even mentioned on Guana beach by our protagonist couple just like improvised, given their actual scratches). In Addition, crew and actors struggled about the fading resources and the appropriate work performance. Given this amount of challenges, it is not surprising that our little freezing squid was often seen exhausted when the cam was switched off, with messy hairs, burning skin and her panda eyes half closed, sleeping on the van or lying under a beach tree. When filming began she started from the standstill and played *happily and gay* (but that's the principle of always smiling when we feel like crying – until one winter morning it will be too much to bear). And she might have already wondered, despite the beauty of nature and all the sparkling adventures, whether this was the right profession or whether should she put on the gown of an Ursula Sister in Road Town Hospital? But she accepted the challenges and fulfilled her duties. Of course she did! She was known as conscientious. And she was a tomboy full of lively energy and with iron will rather than a disillusioned, prematurely aged lady. And this is how she emphasized it in regard to her efforts:

What I want to prove is that I am an actress. If I were sacked tomorrow I would fight. I would prove to anyone – including myself – that I can act. And if I found I couldn't, that I was wasting my time, I would have to start a different road altogether. Perhaps I would go in a leper colony to Africa.

(Oh my, you should have done that! So as not to become a reluctant actress and two unhappy wives. But lacking strength to make necessary cuts, you would remain entangled in your spiderweb of pain.)



And this was surely not a superficial caprice but a wish from the bottom of her heart and driven by her convent motto *to care for others and to be cared for*. Indeed, she had already made concrete arrangements to go abroad (as she had just completed a course in first aid to serve as a nurse), whether in an African development station or fighting the fierce foe in the Hungarian uprising. Bold woman! Albeit perhaps not a nun (as faced with the conflict between spirituality and sensuality), she could really have become a nurse – a highly respected profession, since women could prove in those days to act responsibly in a patriarchal world (although to end up marrying the doctor, of course). Anyways, there were these inner explosives of a young lady, who had just been thrown out of her convent nest into real life and who was eager to prove (and find) herself by flying over the horizon and performing daring deeds beyond everyday convention, whether as an actress, a nurse, a nun (or as an ardent rider). Virginia was a wild bundle of emotions that was often torn – but not enough through professional doubts, it would be soon worn by Cabal and Love. When she flew like a seagull over the West Indies she was so unweighted. But then she would seek for cursed treasures on the Celtic Sea where modern reef pirates were up to mischief – and thus she would first lose her ease and later her wings to find herself again as a plucked and gutted chicken according to Mephisto's palate on *the Catalyst's* plate.

And neither was there only light and warmth under the sunny heaven of Virginia's Island as it may look like through our fogged lenses. Real drama lurked behind the horizon. Her little tomboy inside now confused the roaring waters of the Guana Sound with the limited pool upon the River Thames, where she had sculled across the smooth surface as *a lost lady in a dinghy* (looking just like Eurydice upon the River Styx) and her first movie on the big screen should have almost been her last one! Following the suspense of *Tina in distress*, Virginia set off all alone in a little rowing boat short before the sun set to be overwhelmed by furious waves (or perhaps by a sneaky attack of an ominous bubble. If you know, you know); and therefore she almost drowned in the cold abyss. But she managed to swim a mile and collapsed on the beach to lie there narcoleptically like a sea urchin just melting under a blue moon with its little spines stretched out into the heaven. (It is now the first time that we find our heroine in this whimsical condition and certainly not the last one about the coming stressful years.) But what a luck: natives had watched her Odyssey, launched a boat and raged to her rescue. And Jack himself revived her on the beach – Oh brave *Evan*, that's to be called a soothing *breeze!*

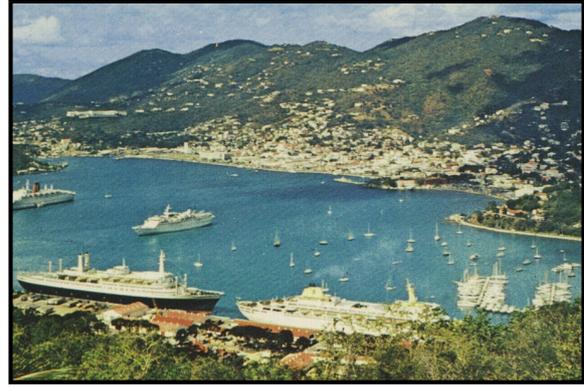
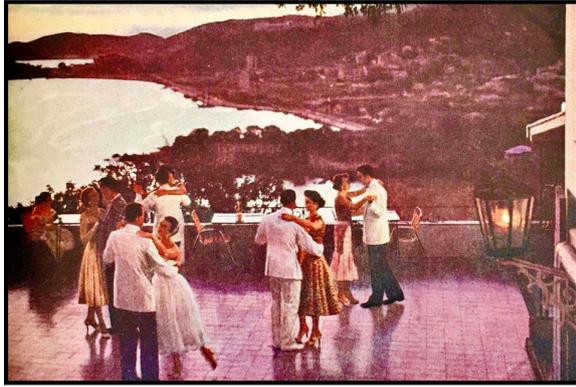
Please forgive me for finding a bizarre beauty in this sequence; and I even hear an ayre wafting in the ether by my favourite composer of a certain girl who was also stranded on foreign shores long ago:

*Full fathom five Virginia lies /
Of her bones are coralls made /
These are pearls that were'er eyes /
Nothing doth fade /
But doth suffer a sea-change /
Into something rich and strange.*



Opposite to her portrayal as a little too carefree person (not to call her *fey*, much to her displeasure, but perhaps there was a bit of truth in it), Virginia proved to be a tough young woman when she nursed professionally some members of the crew, who had been attacked by predatory creatures (or they had simply stepped on glass shards from a ballyhoo in a barrel house), given the fact that she was the only woman on the set – those were the times when female duties were both requested and respected – and because she was skilled in first aid in connection with her wish to become the Lady with the Lamp. These were *the two sides of Miss Maskell*.

However, Virginia's efforts in paradise lost, confronted with lots of adventures and a little danger, were definitely worth it. She would never forget those magnificent four months, which were certainly among the most exciting times of her adult life. And they will have a lasting impact.



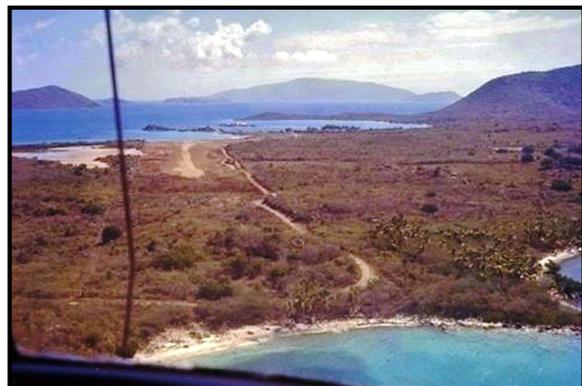
The filming began more conventional rather than adventurous on St. Thomas Island in the harbour bay of Charlotte Amalie, the former capital of the Danish West Indies before their purchase by the US (which anticipated the greedy Huns) in 1917. It was already a tourist hotspot here long before the BVIs would be discovered which were still sleeping beauties much less developed and populated then. But after Fidel conquers a certain island somewhere in the west only two years later, masses of tourists will instead spread across the entire archipelagos. Charlotte Amalie was a roaring city with a well-developed airport and a swinging downtown where plenty of steel bands performed Calypso and a couple of grand hotels were just opened (while on Tortola a handful of backpack hostels hardly promised much comfort). It's worth mentioning *Bluebeard's Castle* (centuries ago actually one of many pirate nests; and we will meet soon the Buccaneers again), then a picturesque hotel on a hill overlooking the harbour, where I assume the film folks might have lodged for a short while (even though there is hardly information about the filming period here) to imagine them dancing to Creole tunes in the sun down. As for my bold assumptions, I may be a little influenced by the beautiful view over the old town and onto the Danish fort at its foot; since it was here where a far ancestor of mine was even once the governor and, by the way, his family hold some thousand slaves on their sugar plantations. Well, that's surely nothing to be proud of, but one of his brothers, Earnest, was the very Dane who abolished the slave trade (some decades before the Britons followed), disregarding the decline of the family fortune and even the state treasure (whose keeper he was, sadly enough, and some nasty folks could be tempted to call him a loser). By the way, my lost love lived in the town in Northern Germany (that was also Danish for thousand years until the ugly Fritzes occupied our peaceful meadows) where their estate was located about seven generations. My inclined readers, I am sorry for a personal digression that is not really related with Virginia's life; but it was in Ahrensburg where I became aware of the overseas connections and set off to a trip to the Virgin Islands – and therefore my wandering led me along winding paths also on the tracks of our late protagonist. I was lucky to learn about her story first on a little rock beyond the east end of Tortola where the local distillery ran a cozy bodaga with a fine lil exhibition about a certain movie from decades ago that was still well remembered; and they even sold videos (later DVDs) of our *Virgin Island*. Because I haven't since returned to Marina Cay, I don't know if the bar survived when Hurricane *Irma* blew a loud horn, sounded the Trumpet and beat the drums (in 2017, exactly 100 years after the mentioned purchase to be inclined to see a little omen in it; by the way, *Irma* is the name of a Danish chain of stores) so that the islet was totally devastated and not a single building, including the White's house, survived without losing its roofs, if it wasn't even torn from the roots – let's just hope that once the place will return to its former glory. However, lest we forget that once the Danes owned three blacks pearls before they were sold off cheaply to the US. Oh my, that was a bad deal, not recommended for imitation (regardless of how such islands are coloured, whether black, white or green)!

But let's linger briefly in Charlotte Amalie. It's here where the cruise ship scenes were made (since in fact, no large ship continued to the BVIs at that time) and parts of the sailing scenes (cut together with the bay of Road Town and the Drake Sound so that we could lose the overview); all other sequences were made entirely in the BVIs. *Tina* arrives on the *Kungsholm* (a Norwegian cruise ship that actually headed for the town about some decades) as a *good little working girl*, but given the beauty of nature and the attraction of a nice and handsome guy, she refrains from her social demands, embodied in her lovely mother who has recently admonished her daughter to abstain from her darling so that we have been urged to watch her write him a farewell (in a cabin of the *Kungsholm* and even on its letterhead).



Sinister, I have to say, as if dark clouds were summoned to waft about a decade and rain down one day over the English countryside thousands of miles away. But in 1957, our young protagonist, still driven by curiosity and appetite of life, manages to free herself from paternalism with a daring jump into the bay (and I believe it's actual Virginia since we know she was a highly sportive person and a pretty good swimmer) to get married to her darling (in the governor's house of Road Town) in the next hour while her gown is still wet, and set off on the same eve (woe, woe, this can be risky!) to their dream island on a bobbing boat with a four-poster-bed as heavy luggage, but loosened from all their burdens (so far a brief summary of the following events that would occur in a breathtaking time-lapse).

And it's probably here in the bay where we first meet Maya and Waldo on their yacht called *Rubicon*. As we heard above, they provided transport and accommodation on the BVIs about the next months; but if I remember correctly, they have even a cameo in the sequence when a posh young sailoress leaves the yacht (it's a bit of a strange scene that looks rather like a formal meeting of the crew, maybe at the start or end of filming, to be cut into the plot; but this is pure speculation) to enter Jack's dinghy with the maroon sails (incidentally, Virginia's favourite colour for clothing and vehicles, perhaps referring to the colour of her former convent uniform or simply because it's appropriate for her Creole complexion). And you could call it the moment when she first *crossed the Rubicon* – but beware: next time (when she sets off for a drive too late to reach her destination and darkness falls) it could be the Styx (with two black coins covering her eyes)!



Finally arrived in British waters, the real adventure began, on a dusty sand track that could hardly be called runway, where some dozen lads of crew and cast and a single lady landed with their heavy luggage at the gate to nowhere; and their arrival was something like its inauguration.

Since Beef Island lacked a bridge (that would not be built until the end of the '60s), they had to take a tiny ferry to the east end of Tortola in the early dawn. Then followed a long and pretty daring drive on curvy gravel roads so that we can imagine our heroine huddled on the van (maybe it was a Morris), with her eyes closed and her backbone hurting (as it is actually told in a handful of articles).

That's how we approach Road Town. The settlement, then hardly to call capital, was a little idyll with a few hundred inhabitants and rather more than a single long street winding along gentle slopes; but there was no lack of vitality. And thus we soon meet the local steel band that contributes parts of the soundtrack (conducted by Sid in fiction, in a good mood as always). In fact, Virginia fell immediately in love with Calypso music and Creole culture. And once returned to London, she would happily find a currently developing Caribbean community in her favourite quarter off Notting Hall Gate.

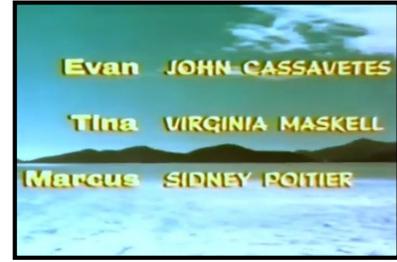
The film team received every support from the local authorities (to assume the movie was also intended to advertise the remote archipelago; and indeed, that was quite successful something like the initial ignition for the tourist development) so that they even filmed in and off the governor's house (who resided there until the independence in 1967). And we are experiencing a pageant of the natives (reminding of a crowd of ragamuffins roaming through Shepherd's Bush Market) who pull the huge four-poster-bed of the newly married couple through the main street to the pier, like a *raft of love* on its way to be launched, while Wagner's wedding march is sounding (ironically, since the latter, also known as *Tricky Dick*, was a naughty scoundrel who not really appreciated marriage unless he could benefit from it) in a whimsical version, interpreted by the mentioned band (that should perhaps stick with decent Calypso). But against all cheerfulness, I can't conceal rather a bad vibe when I have to watch this lively sequence, given Virginia's future on screen. Since we will meet her again almost a decade later in the role of an *obscure lady* following a hearse, forlorn with not a single soul and missing happy tunes, through a lonely lane descending down to the shores of a similar Welsh Village nestling at its slopes. (But I tend to see these threads of destiny at every corner of our winding path.)



Many scenes were made at the pier (a place that fortunately still looks almost unchanged), including the moody moments of a little dinghy bobbing in the ocean in a nightly lull – but I found it rather disillusioning to realize that it was firmly moored in the middle of the town and missing any threat. Since it is here where we suffer with *Tina* as she tries in distress to raise the heavy anchor with her little fists banging on the frames (or the pains) while her wedding ring shines through the darkness. Even though her own brave efforts are in vain, she is finally blown into the haven by a friendly breeze, the boldness of her darling and his native buddies. This is a happy release albeit their idyll won't last long because our couple has suddenly matured and has realized (or they have been persuaded by their relatives) that it would be better to return to security of culture than fight for survival in the outback. But it doesn't matter, since *Marcus* and his fiancée are ready to take over the baton (respectively the brand-new cottage as an appropriate burrow due to the fact that they are also having a baby). These natives are seemingly tougher to stand a life in nature than a posh couple from downtown – so far for another of many late colonial morals which are just acceptable given the contemporary background. But let's not lose in a daring (or boring) discourse about sense or dissense of any shallow comedy.



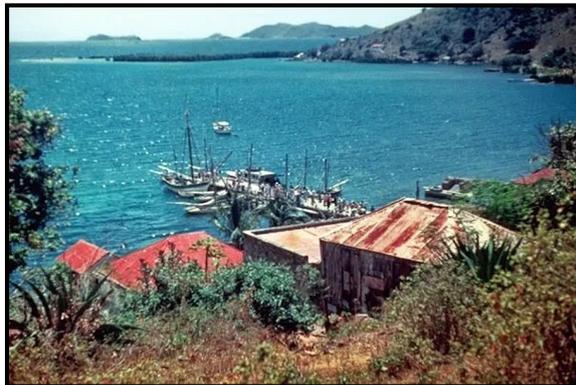
And as we heard above, it was neither here where the *Kungsholm* arrived nor where *Tina* jumped into freedom – this actually happened in the bay of Charlotte Amalie. (I apologize for sometimes leaving out the location spotter, who gets quite annoyed about such naughty discrepancies in film editing).



In fact, there is another stunning viewpoint high above the bay from where the iconic title sequence was filmed. A little reef (called the Careening Hole) lies at our feet with glittering waves on its shores and the panorama includes whole the Drake Channell from the east unto the west with plenty of islands great and small of both the British and US archipelagos at the horizon. And a fanfare is sounding to lead into a Calypso serenade: *Virgin Island!* It's a great overture of a wonderful journey. The camera position is in Fort Burt at the southern cape of the bay (incidentally, the site of an adorable hotel where I will lodge many decades later and feel against the scenery like I were part of the big game). But oh my, you wouldn't recognize the reef today that sadly vanished (like many, many more) under a big cover of concrete of one of countless wharfs for luxury shipping. Masses of houses cling to the green slopes, roaring highways meander along the coastline and a myriad vessels cover the bay, particularly (now actually as we were spared it back then) a fleet of stinky cruise ships (the natives may forgive but I am even tempted to believe they could have similar feelings) for the total loss of paradise. Some of those carbuncles (sadly also other much beloved places, as we will find it especially on Eurydice whose iconic beaches sank into the abyss) were swallowed by the vengeful *Irma* in 2017. She gave the chance for change and correction of the failures. But look what followed: a new peak of building measures on every single island (just to mention the mound of Beef that is currently threatened to be entirely concreted for a monstrous resort). Oh bringing on back the good times before human hubris began to overwhelm virgin nature (yet some people call this "progress of civilisation"). Nothing remains what we considered as complete, that's the c(o)urse of all things.

Lecherous men latch onto your live like elephants in a china shop and they make your bubbles burst.

And given that the place above is the background of the credits, where Virginia's name scrolls across the screen for the first time in large letters (between two lads who were just about to become world stars while her career was slowly fading), I have to annoy you with another prospect: exact a decade later we will see it vanishing for ever just like this – and that is the time span in which the rise and the decline of Virginia Maskell would unfold before our eyes *from ecstasy to misery within ten years*.



But let us linger in those days when the idyll was still unspoiled and the sublime panorama unfolded in all its genuine glory. Always in focus straight ahead an exposed rock ascends from the waves: It's Stevenson's real *Treasure Island*, a place of sinister legends for shivers down your spine. *Blackbeard's* gems are said to be buried here and it's the very place for sure where his marooned men ate each other up. And for this reason it is called Dead Men's Chest – *Yo, ho, ho and a bottle of rum*, as our couple will soon sing when Jack carries Ginny on his shoulders through sparkling shark infested waters from their boat to Guana beach (yeah, this is the right way how a gent should treat a lady!). And next to the rock is the haunted site where the ghosts of the Rhone tickle the toes of careless divers. The ill-fated vessel sank 90 years earlier in October '67. Sounding familiar? Sadly, it will, in another dark autumn when our protagonist struggles in restraints exactly a century after the incidents.

The Rhone fought bravely against all adversities of a wild hurricane with her frightened passengers who were tied to their bunks by the crew to avoid to be thrown around by the rolling waves (which was allegedly the usual procedure at that time to prevent them from “hurting themselves”). They all drowned and so did the mice while whole the crew survived. What a tragedy and how avoidable!

I was, maybe like our heroine, intrigued and I intensely felt for those victims as if we had lived it.

And let’s remember Bob (or was he called Ron? I am in danger of losing track of the supporting cast) who would dive to her remains in 1977 to reveal her secrets in the film *The Deep*. Did Ol’ Bob think about his pretty *Decoy*, who had once approached his pirate nest when he was a *Buccaneer*? To soon become a star here on the Islands? And how she sailed through the Channell exactly two decades ago? To imagine her spectre sculling around the rock in a little dinghy with maroon sails, doomed to appear like the *Flying Dutchess* one single day every ten years on a misty winter eve. And it is rumoured that at the same time on the other side of the ocean upon the coast of Northwest Devon every single water wheel uses to cease its clatter for about ten hours. But forgive my pointless yarn that I like to spin from time to time and let’s return to reality: In fact, as we know, it wouldn’t end well for Bob either; even if it’s certainly just an urban legend he would have been crushed between the jaws of a big shark.

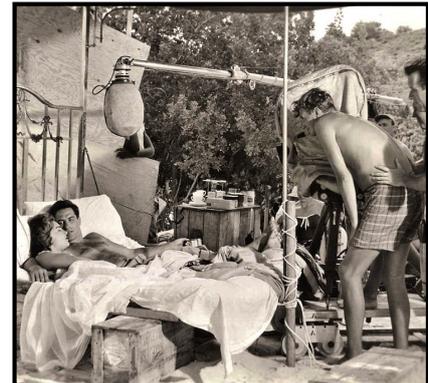


Along the Island shores half a dozen stunning beaches invited *Tina* and *Evan* to have never ending fun (or as it looks like), such as The Baths on Gorda and the White Bay of Guana Island, all of them located within a radius more or less far from their actual haven in Trellis Bay and the *Rubicon*'s mooring. But the most remote island was chosen as the main location in the beautiful lagoon of the North Sound: Eurydice was the place where they built their *raft of love* under a protective tree (that would be later climbed for a philosophic discourse) before they continued their efforts on Marina Cay by digging a fictional pit and refurbishing the original cottage. It took an hour-long water ride to reach that epitome of a Southsea dream since the outer rim of Gorda was absolutely uninhabited – in our days a noble resort, called *Bitter End*, spreads along the shores with an armada of luxurious ships so that you can move between the islets on dry feet. But Eurydice too was completely devastated by *Irma* who washed away whole the wide beach and dragged their *Sweetheart Tree* into the abyss after it had survived almost the entire cast – to see in it another proof of the transience of all worldly things.



Particularly here on Eurydice’s beach Jack and Ginny played so carelessly like children in the sandpit. Their performance looks so undaunted as if it were real life and they had always ignored the crowd of the crew staring at them. Let’s just mention the scene as we see them singing and dancing in the rain (this time not from a hurricane – and there were plenty of them during that autumn of filming – but from a fire engine that poured icy showers over them for hours and hours to make them feel like in the

British winter rather than in the tropics; and we guess that they were shivering like frozen fish fingers (well, perhaps a good practise for upcoming events). But maybe they were warmed inside by living out emotions almost to the point of collapse – and we feel this spontaneity. Jack even looks surprised when he is suddenly confronted with Virginia’s vivacity as she raises her little hands to the sky in exuberant rejoice as if she wanted to take all of nature into her embrace; or to prove her capability of improvising (and maybe they learned together something about *method acting* long before it would become a fixed term). And given this (what I consider) improvisation, I have to add briefly another preview: I remember just a single moment of similar spontaneity in her role as a good wife who is cheated on by her husband exactly 10 years later. Virginia turns over in the bed in an act of desperate love (respectively fear of loss) and seems to raid Oskar, her all too sober partner, with an outburst of explosives from the bottom of her heart. But she will have matured so much by *Cabal and Love* and *Love and Despair*, that her light-hearted times may then feel light-years away to her.



Naturalness could have been the leitmotif of the production. But there were, of course, annoying duties behind the carefree facade: Goggle-eyed crowds besieged the cast (as we can find it rather disillusioning in many stills) certainly not for the benefit of spontaneity. In addition, our heroine had to advertise superfluous stuff like lips sticks and nail polish (or *Virginia Cigarettes*; the latter made a little sense since she might have smoked them; and she would actually praise the stinky sticks in the Arts Theatre’s lounge in the c(o)urse of her cast in *The Catalyst*). Later she is urged to be proudly portrayed as a radiant cover girl, who is so much different from both her role as *Tina* and her tomboy. In fact, Virginia preferred a pet to a bling, liked *casual clothes* and was frequently seen *barefoot* strolling along Kensington High (long before Paul’s successor would copy it for his legendary crossing of Abbey Road). Therefore the press mocked her a little and asked for her favourite clothing – and she retorted: *None!* And when she met her Dad in his London office around the days of the *Island* premiere, he was so ashamed of her Hippie dress – maybe it was something like *shabby chick* as Helena would later pretend to have invented it – that he asked her *to take the rear exit* (as she will tell herself), ouch! Our protagonist may have looked beautiful when she was fashionable dressed, but that wasn’t her. It was just an art figure drawn by others who ignored her inner Urchin. Well, that’s the fate of an actress to always wear masques and please others; but it’s even sadder if you have to hide your true nature also off stage, given the expectations of your established environment.

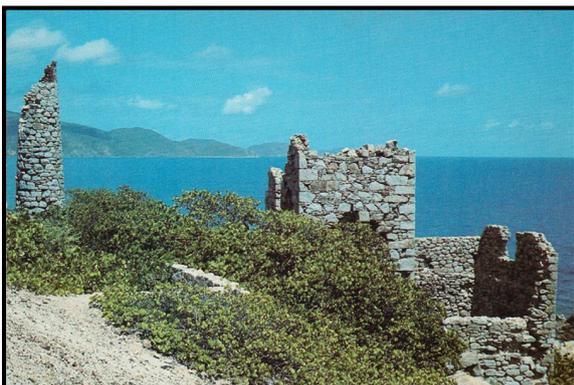


The most spectacular (and today most overcrowded) beaches are The Baths, a honeymoon dream with rough boulders rolling on the shores and a magnificent view to the horizon of almost all the Islands along the Drake Channell. Here we see *Tina* rather bored by their know-it-all-guide spinning Stevenson yarn (ouch, he is back!) and her omnipresent mother; and therefore she prefers to roam around (fantastically lonely) and accidentally meets a guy who is just toiling in a daringly deep sand pit at the edge of Devil's Bay. But instead of seeking for a golden chest (of Captain Kidd's treasures) *Evan* is keen on ancient toys of native kids. How cute is this! Even more with a good reason: *Children are the future and the proof that a culture has lived!* Given such warm words from a man, you will guess that *Tina* falls instantly in love with him (and by the way, he is a handsome, dark, tall lad). When they are caught by Mother more in a hole than holy she is not amused: *What are you doing? Digging!* Indeed, love and laughter, and a little bit lust. Soon after this sophisticated dialogue *Tina* will escape into nature and a self-determined life together with her whimsical darling. They bravely renounce the constraints of civilization (and their parent's expectations) to build their *raft of love* on an uninhabited island. Oh my brave Urchin, that is what *I* would call a good girl!



Let's switch from fiction to fact and linger briefly on Virgin Gorda. When I was on location many decades later, I set off from Devil's Bay and passed along the southern cape to find a sublime scenery in contrast to the serene lagoon: Steep slopes descend into the abyss, waves are gnawing on the cliffs and the endless ocean promises no comfort; an ancient copper mine towers above all. Given this resemblance of the British Westland coast upon the Celtic Sea, I had to rub my eyes and I was tempted to assume that our heroine (if she had taken the same path) could have remembered similarly as she approached her future Heartland in the early spring of 1958.

On the opposite side a paradise bay is hidden behind the northern cape with a tourist village founded in the mid '60s. Even though luxurious, *Big Ten* was intended as a *barefoot resort* that renounced formal constraints (so Virginia would certainly have liked it, but as we know, she had lodged more simply in 1957). The village included some local styled cottages and a zigzag-shaped reception with a cozy restaurant under a pyramidal roof, where, of course, a steel band was playing from dusk to dawn. The Modernist architecture reminds a bit of the Commonwealth Institute that was completed in Holland Park in 1962 and contained an exhibition of the British overseas territories, including a stand (called the *Caribbean Eye*) referring to the Virgins Islands (and even to Virginia pinned on a poster). The Royals also honoured *Big Ten* in the course of their visit to the BVIs in 1966. Even if I can hardly imagine them frolicking barefoot on the beach (or rocking on a raft of love) like you and I with their noble toes tickled by sand bugs and their foreheads fondled by palm leaves. However, it could be an appropriate place to enjoy a hot Advent eve far away from England's icy brreeze.



It's time to meet Maya and Waldo again. After Robb and Rodie had long since abandoned Marina Cay, their successors were currently developing a bold project just a stone's throw away when the film folks invaded. They had already built a slipway and a wharf, a couple of guest cottages and their little dream house along the shores of Trellis Bay and last but not least (as we have approached above our temporary habitat from the air) a brand-new runway (which would much later sadly contribute to the destruction of the idyll); but the biggest measure was a yacht club on Bellamy Cay, a tiny rock nestling in the middle of the semicircular bay with shallow turquoise water and plenty of sailing ships (including the *Rubicon*) anchoring around it. This was the enchanted place where cast and crew were accommodated and it would be (more or less) their secure haven for a couple of exciting months.



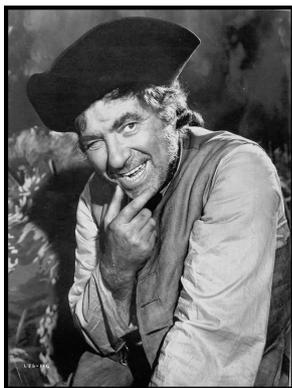
The flat ensemble of two and a half wings was built in concrete and covered with stone (partly like the White's house as we see it been refurbished on screen by our bravely toiling protagonists) and reminds a bit of a colonial clinic (if not even of a cloister in the Mediterranean) – that was perhaps appropriate for a soothing rest after the hard shooting to hang out in the wooden pergola (if not exhausted, numb in the bed) while sipping a yummy cocktail, aptly named *Painkiller*, that has since been served by a well-renowned distillery (which would much later purchase Marina Cay and release a new film edition of our *Virgin Island*) throughout the archipelago. Or you calmed down by taking a round along the coastline (even though rather a short walk to be frequently repeated if you want to get in trance) that was fortified like a castle (to even resist a hurricane). Then you listened to the murmur of the crew until night fell while fairy lights were shaking in a gentle breeze and shining through the haze like from a pirate barrel house. On the next morning you were woken up by gently rippling waves licking on your window sill. And since you may have had a room under a turret in the southern annex with a view to the rear side of the Mound of Beef from where the rising sun shone into your cell, you could have been eager to climb the gentle slope to see what lies behind – if we didn't already know it, because it is the place of some iconic sailing scenes with a quite attractive sailoress against the sublime scenery of a pyramidal cape (that is called The Bluff) protruding from the Drake Channel.



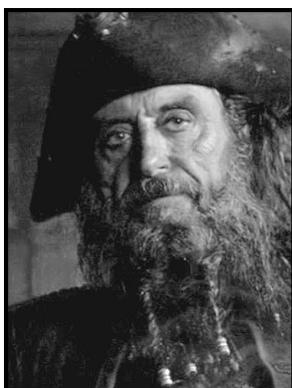
Trellis Bay is not only a place of bold nature, but also a hoard of legends that exceeds the efforts of some modern escapists. Myth and magic are wafting in the lagoon and fact and fiction merge. And in this regard it is worth recalling *The Buccaneers* and how we saw our heroine just some months before sculling in a tiny pool upon the Thames as *a lost lady in a dinghy*. Now we find her living (and even almost drowning when she leaves her snugly islet, rocks around in the roaring Sound somewhere off Count Cape and gets caught in a dangerous drift westward) in their actual realm.



Since in ancient times Black Sam Bellamy was up to mischief on the shores of Trellis Bay. He was indeed a Buccaneer, an officer in *Blackbeard's* fleet, who later acted on his own's account (or as it might be called in pirate English). And since he and his horde were beefeaters – if happily not cannibals like *Blackbeard's* marooned men who struggled about the fading resources a couple of islands away (that would later be called *Dead Men's Chest*) – it is said that Beef got its name and the little islet in the bay that of their mighty captain. Let's briefly stick with him and dare a quite depressive preview of his short but stunning life: Black Sam was called the *Prince of Pirates* (due to his claim to be independent of anybody's grace) whose true goal was to return to his lost love (with all of his gems, of course) – but he would drown in a storm just a mile from her, so that she could only morn over his corpse and get insane about it. Oh, what a tragedy – which sounds pretty familiar: *Abelard and Heloise* of the sea (even if in reversed roles)! And we will have to learn about a smouldering relationship similar to this in merry olde England after the *Catalyst's* riot.



And once we have returned to the English shores, we will also find true tales of reef pirates and pirate inns on Devon's most remote coast where, ironically, Disney had filmed just some years ago his popular adaptation of *Treasure Island* with the most iconic *Silver*. Oh, strange threads of destiny that will lead our protagonist from Bellamy Cay to Malcount Bay some thousand miles afar over the ocean, just as *Captain Amyas* had struggled in a leaky ark with the unpredictable forces both of nature and human unkind. But let us linger in Trellis Bay. It is said that in ancient days there was also an obscure inhabitant who hosted a voodoo bacchanal and his evil cook (whose name is not handed down, but highly possibly he was the model for Stevenson's *Long John*) served a spicy dish (of his silver chest full of poisoned ingredients) so that more dozens of his guests *died very badly* to be cremated somewhere on the shore. Yeah, that's just a brief overview of some sinister incidents lurking at the outer rim of our haven (and I promise, all this is nothing but the truth!) to be tempted to assume (if we were too receptive minds and believed in such ominous things) there is a curse on that bay and a Creole soul might take it from the Wide Sargasso Sea back to England's sober meadows.



And let me finally add a little synchronicity: Many decades later, I saw a magnificent *Blackbeard* (in a second-rate spectacle whose name I have forgotten, but it was also from Disney). And as I looked into his deep, dark eyes, which twinkled both so terrific and terrifying, it was like a Blitz from the past. At first I couldn't imagine the reason since I had never seen any of his films – until I found out (about the closing credits) that this tough guy was the mature Ian! Who had played a naughty scoundrel at the side of a certain young lady in *The Wild and the Willing*. And thus confronted I had to ponder about what proper guys Virginia was blessed with on screen. Oh *Happy is the Pirate Bride!* But regarding her private choice – spoiler alert – well, that's pretty pathetic. She will rather choose poorly and sadly soon be gifted with a couple of panda eyes, darker than *Blackbeard's*.

However, it is tempting to assume that these exciting circumstances could have incited our heroine to careless actions and to wander in the footsteps (aka bob in the waves) of one of her roles, whether to experience *Tina's* misfortune in real or to re-enact *The Buccaneers* in search of Bob or whoever. Thus one eve she run away, for ominous reasons that we can only guess – maybe she was driven by cabin fever, given the fact of how she and her mates were cramped together on their tiny rock (even though

she was used to assimilate, whether in her tiny dwellings or dormitory wards). She boarded her small dinghy for a trip into freedom, perhaps to reach one of the most beautiful curved bays located just westbound (today you would soon strand on the runway extension at the lost cape where once Maya's cottage lay) – and it wouldn't be the worst place to be laid in earth (respectively sand).

Or she was attracted by how the sun was sinking down in unreal colours at the side of the pyramid-shaped silhouette of Guana Island like behind the Theban Peak upon the River Nile. Where perhaps a place was hidden where no one else has ever set their feet on and *Silver's* treasure cave was waiting to be discovered. But what would we find if we reached that magic place behind the rainbow? Nothing but the leftovers of civilisation: a crushed cola can and an empty pack of cigarettes! And therefore we would have to realize disillusioned that there is no desirable reality beyond the dream. But maybe she was simply so undaunted and curious that she hadn't thought of anything. However, I would assume that there were many good reasons for her daring trip (and not a single one to call her *fey*).

Virginia might have also been keen for a spontaneous visit to her colleague, the mysterious Maureen (a red-haired Irish beauty who had become famous in Hollywood), who lodged allegedly around those days in a hermitage on Beef's little mound (even though she was never seen here). Sounding familiar? It will, because someday Virginia will also retreat to the countryside far away from the public, whether due to her natural shyness or other obscure reasons (some of which we are going to illuminate, but others will remain her secret until doomsday). And by the way, it is also unknown whether these uncommon women ever met; but what we know for sure is that Virginia was fond of the Greene Island (which is not surprising in relation to her religious affiliation and her need for tranquillity).



And no matter what drove her, I really enjoy reading her heroic tale (and garnishing a bit) that she will tell in her basement dwelling in autumn '58 to intrigue the press lad and whole the audience:

“Even though, my dear fellow, that *there is nothing half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats*” (well, that's my fitting intro, added from another reading), “I shouldn't conceal my very first shipwreck *which was nearly my swan-song. In a light-weight rowing boat* – I believe it was also maroon coloured just like *Evan's* sails – *I set off to reach another bay* since I had been stirred up by lots of naughty fellas in our tiny camp. *But darkness was falling before I was half way there.*”

(Virginia couldn't see the sea for all the isles. And it wouldn't be her last trip in the twilight.)

“When I passed the cape, I suddenly found myself in a much stronger stream with sharp waves looking like a carpet pattern of zigzags, and I realized – while thinking of Bob spontaneously, for what obscure reason ever – that I'm gonna need a bigger boat. *Because of sharks and coral reefs no one ventured out after dark and I thought I had breathed my last. A huge wave overturned my boat and left me struggling in the water* (and wriggling like a little wet squid, admittedly). *Fortunately a native had been watching from one of those Islands* (I would now assume it was our dear landlady who looked into the sunset from her cottage on the cape) *and a boat containing Jack and other of the film cast were soon racing to pick me up.* (Those were the times when some people cared about me and, by the way, that is what I would call a rescue's ballyhoo!) *I had managed to swim* (and I am a pretty good

swimmer since I had been hardened in our icy school pool, I assure you!) *to the beach but collapsed on the sand*. Oh my, it was a moment of redemption when I felt Jack's breath in my bittercold breast! If I remember correctly it was under a mighty beach tree where I lay on its roots; and I saw through my trembling lids palm fronds silently rustling in a gentle breeze before I lost the consciousness and my foot prints would fade away in the sand of the bay. I'll certainly never forget this bizarre date."



Let's spin more yarn, against the original backdrop and based on facts hidden behind the horizon. Since Maya was the only female resident in whole the bay, Virginia may have been brought into her cottage on Count Cape to recover for a while; and she found, this was the height, a big, big vessel with 50 cigarettes at the edge of her bed. And we can imagine that two lonely ladies among rough guys had much stuff to talk for a handful ciggies (until the little chamber was so hazy as they remember London not after '52) about female secrets and their sad state to live in a men's world that uses to ignore the efforts of brave women on manifold fields. Therefore I would like to put some words of a little conversation into their mouths – and this is how our heroine could have continued the story:

"After Jack had revived me, I fell in a deep sleep like into a narcoleptic trance (a condition, by the way, which is pretty familiar to me) to be awakened by one of these wonderful sunrises behind the big mound if not the most radiant I've ever seen; and I felt that fragile like a nudibranch without its sheltering shell – or how a newborn may feel (if we could remember the moment of our first breath) so strange and almost disembodied that I hardly remembered whether I was a tough girl or a tiny boy. I slept the better the less there were any quacks who could experiment on me and the canteen's staff was not that practised in making poisoned dishes (unlike that evil cook, *Long John*) for my questionable benefit, oh what a luck. And even if the mates were pretty worried (and a little bit annoyed about the delay of the filming), they spared with rebukes and let me alone to simply sleep over the crisis. This is always soothing, rather than demanding duties and that you stand up straight, regardless of your condition (or worse, to lie restrained like the victims of the Rhone fully to the mercy of fierce folks). Admittedly, we have to stop the work for some days. But what the heck? Do you remember those dud(e)s I had to take care of when a sea urchin had stuck the one's toe and a moray eel had gnawed on the other's? Hark them scream – even though tis just a scratch!" "Indeed," replied Maya, "men are such pathetic creatures! They should give birth to realize that *pain belongs to women*."

"Even though I was certainly too careless, my recent experience is still a lesson for me. Maybe some higher power admonishes us to never be vain; or some little nasty goblins sit on our necks and like to tease us. Since it's a fact, when you think that all is fine, as just paddling happily on the smooth sea, a dreadful storm will come over you and your little ark will struggle in the waves or even been cut in two halves by a sudden struck of lightning, that's the principle of drifting through life whose meaning I have (not just now) understood as a (more or less long lasting) *Prelude to the Death*.

It's always the Grim Reaper who precedes us only steps ahead on our unpredictable path.

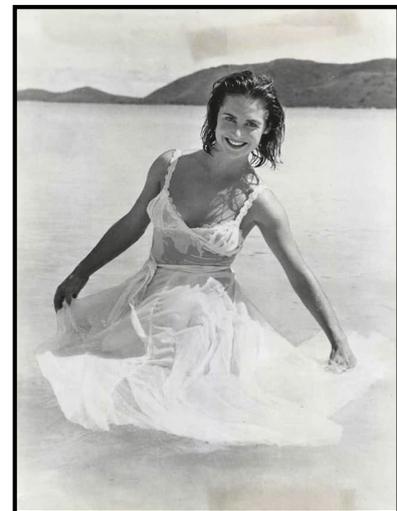
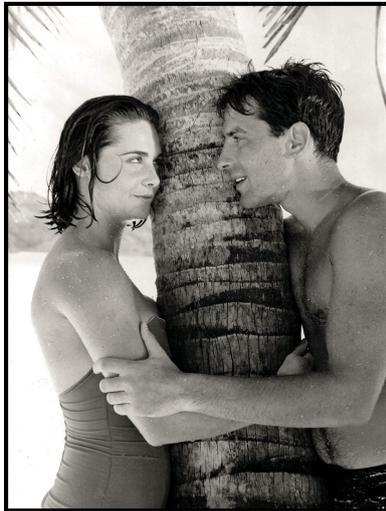
But I'll renounce from all too pensive mood. Rather, let me reveal the true reason of my little mishap: Since those naughty guys had consumed every single ciggie and I was so eager (not to say hysterical) to stock up for the night at the beach bar, I had to cross over to the main land before darkness fell. And it was a pretty shock when I just found that empty package on the counter, I assure you, so I got so agitated that I overturned my dinghy." Maya retorted by pointing at her properly filled vessel:

"So that's to be called a happy ending of Childe Ginny's Pilgrimage." Oh, how they giggled!

And because our charming narrator was just so in the flow, she continued teasingly:

"Let's speak about more serious themes: Men! What a gang of urchins is there cramped together on our tiny rock! And isn't it said that *All Men are Islands*? Maybe they are, but some women are too!

That sympathetic bunch (ignoring their selfishness in regard to ciggie consumption) would have been the fondest dream of our convent flock, I promise you! And I remember a bathing day in Maldon in the early '50s when we found us suddenly besieged by a horde of Vikings who were invading from the bay (in fact, just some Essex rockers with their big machines stuck in the mud). They cheered for us and we were inclined to do the same – if we weren't such shy little chicks and the black hens so bloody attentive, given certain temptations.” And she wasn't yet finished with her little revelations.



“Filming can be pleasant and sometimes funny with the partners but there are these distressful duties beyond. It's hard to stand upright for hours and hours like in stocks and pillory for just a couple of promotion stills and all the more annoying to advertise pointless stuff that is so superfluous like a goiter here in the outback. I would surely never hide my face under thick make-up, disfigure my lips with obtrusive red, and, that's the pointless height, paint my nails just to break them while digging a building pit – ridiculous! Thus I am already tired of being a film actress, even worse, of becoming a pin-up girl or an advertisement icon. Oh my, please let me be spared this!” (Unfortunately you won't.)

“But first of all I assure you that it's surely not helpful to make a movie entirely in swimwear in regard to a certain awkward aspect. I'll tell you a mystery: I tend to look like a hairy caterpillar (by physical nature, not by culture) – which might neither be beneficial for an actress's career nor particularly popular on the partner market (even though the tastes differ; and indeed, I remember the joyful reading of a little novella by a certain German author (named Keller or so, and I am fond to these Huns) in which *Maid Netty* is cuddled by her fiancé despite, or because, of her fluffy arms, strangely then to the amusement of my classmates. I rather thought: *Oh happy is the bride* who has such a lovely groom!). So let me confess what is really annoying here in the blue lagoon: that I have to shave my shanks every single morning. Even though tis worth it, to hang out lightly dressed under palm trees rather than squeezed into robes (albeit nibbled by sand bugs), and romp around barefoot – even more pleasant with my toes tickling the cam pane. Yeah, that's pure joy of life, if not the path to happiness.”



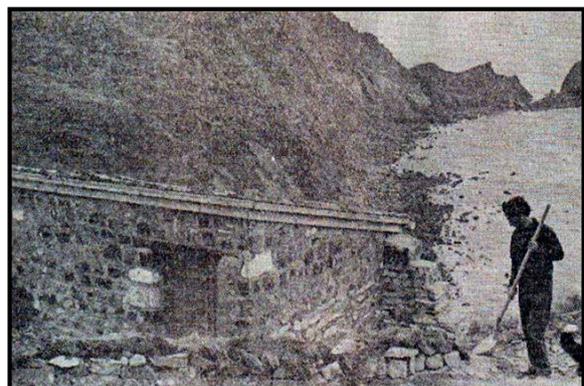
Given her sincere naturalness, Maya replied: “Brava, my dear Ginny! Be just yourself, not their invention. Don't bother about what others think, even less men. In the view of our efforts they should carry us on shoulders. But on the contrary: men give little and demand much! We women must be like squids with eight or sixteen limbs (regardless of whether smooth or fluffy) to cope with our multiple challenges and especially their expectations.”

Despite this truth, Virginia continued in rapture: “But there are these tree long lads, Sid and Jack, and me in the middle. I adore their strength – masculinity! Indeed, they are bewitching with their dark eyes and bodies like trunks as if just created to be hugged. I could lose myself if I were not so well brought up and neither they such gentlemen. And how familiar it feels to hang out with them together, just like with my brothers when we conquered the wilderness in Africa or moody lanes in Shepherd’s Bush so long ago – Sid’s character is even called like one of them: Marcus is a tough guy and we have always been a proper team (albeit we were parted for a while when Mother banished me to Essex) so that I would like to accompany him to the outer rim of the Commonwealth where he wants to build a block hut in the Rockies just by his own hands. (Sounding familiar?) And it is generally known that siblings are closer companions than a handful of random toffs, who might one day latch onto your life.

But back to Marina Cay. The nasty crew makes us toil in the heat of the hottest dog days and we look like real castaways, sweating, messy and torn. Yet we do something meaningful by refurbishing that abandoned cottage. Indeed, we hardly play a role; it is rather re-enactment so that Ron and Rodie can be proud of us. And I am overwhelmed by so much human power, now and then. They were real pioneers when they built their own lil habitat on a tiny islet against all envy and disdain of those around them who hold high the banner of civilisation and soberness. Those two blessed had a big goal, they lived their fondest dream ... much like you are doing, my dear Maya!” The latter retorted: “Indeed, Ginny, DO what you want! To act according to your nature is the only path to happiness. What’s more pointless than hanging in the clouds and playing life instead of living?” “Umm...” Virginia frowned her forehead, raised her eyebrows expressively and she rolled a bit her eyes. Well, ignorant people are everywhere who don’t appreciate the arts; but it hurts if they are right.



Nevertheless, once returned to England, our heroine would follow in their footsteps for a couple of bold years. Who could have foreseen that essential impact of a funny little movie on Virginia’s brave efforts to create her realm in her Heartland hangout? In Malcount Bay she will retreat from all annoying duties on the sublime shores of the Celtic Sea for *a time like in a dream*. She will furnish a farmhouse in Meat (preferably without a risky rocking chair), refurbish a water mill according to her wishes, lay out a little rocky garden, pave a path along the brook to approach a mighty hornbeam and even plant a grove beside (prosaically called *Virginia Wood*); but most of her works would be flushed away by furious floodings (not summoned by *Irma*, but perhaps by *Mary*) and not a single seedling would sprout due to the hard climate. In retrospect, it will be not more than odds and sods (or sob), even worse a waste of passion since *she* will besiege the legitimate queen. Her purple patch will not be enduring and reach its bitter end when she is abandoned by her dubious companion like hundred and one ill-fated predecessors. Just a tiny eagle’s nest high above the sea, which Virginia will inspire Pedro to build, would finally tell of their passionate love. She will lay down the foundation stone with her own hands and even bury her death curl in it so that it would one day become her canopic jar.



That is all that will remain of her glorious years living out her inner Urchin, full of appetite of life. Later the Lady will move to a Parsonage in the bone-dry inland off Hellsbury Vale, but it will not be the place for fancy ideas. Thus we can imagine that a marooned (if not even boiled) mermaid would wither away in the drought of a habitat that is hardly suitable for reef pirates or light house keepers.

Virginia, too, got suddenly pensive and she immersed herself in a retrospect on her childhood: “Oh my brethren! We were a light-hearted trio; born and bred in Holland Park Court in one of these decent Edwardian dwelling blocks – a comfortable place to be. Those were short happy times before the Huns urged us into stranger tides. Many years went by; but once I strolled along the street again and I remembered a long corridor leading from the living room (with a pretty bay-window) to the rear side where the bedrooms are located (with a view of Campden Hill and a tennis green just beneath). For unknown reasons I see the hallway walls painted in bright orange colours or shining in the evening sun – Look, I was so young, and rooms are often blurred in my fragments of memories. What is certain is that this is the place where Mum was brought to bed while Dad trembled behind the door.



Directly opposite our entrance is a bold bricked building, looking continental, if not Germanic, and I remember her waving at me from a staircase leading to the ground floor with a gloomy basement window below locked up with bars (like a scary view into a grizzly gaol at her feet). Many years later I got to know it is a catholic primary school – maybe the very place I should have attended; but I would never do so. Since things got a sudden change around those days when the Blitz struck over us.

I have had a dream a hundred times of a woman, very sad, if not despaired, standing in an L-shaped section of a dwelling in an upper floor, with a toddler at her hand shaking fearfully, and another one (which is my perspective) looking with eyes wide shut at the disturbing scene. It’s a small chamber (maybe a kitchen or a storeroom) next to a door leading to a staircase behind and with a window beside in the edge of a court. A raging brute is ascending the stairs to bang with his fists on the pane (or the pain) and enter the room; albeit the dream breaks suddenly (oh what a luck!), I fear something effective has happened; and I feel a deep loss from that very moment – hardly to stand whenever to face (but always tempting to swallow a pill to remember or not to remember the awkward sequence). Twas in autumn ‘39 following a summer of the century (but as we know, there wouldn’t be many roses left). Afterward was darkness during a long seafare (maybe I was seasick whole the time and lay numbed in my cot like the passengers of the Rhone) until I got my consciousness back to catch a first glimpse of a sublime cape protruding from the abyss. I wavered whether it was wonderful or scary. Africa was calling! *It was so hot* – like here. But that’s a tale for another eve and a big lot of ciggies.

Just like *Tina*, I was a girl from Kensington. But returned to England in 1945 we found ourselves in my grandma’s dwelling somewhere in Shepherd’s Bush a mile or so off Holland Park Gate in a long lane of uniform terraces, less likeable and rather boring, albeit around the corner a stunning street market lurks along the railway embankment for a little bit delight (if you know, you know). Just Dad was missing. My mother and he would never meet again or speak a single word with each other about their entire lives, for whatever ominous reasons, we could never find out; they kept it to themselves. (Those were the times of distant relations between parents and kids, since all of them entangled never spoke about their feelings; and it’s still largely the same today. People don’t learn from their failures and, worse and well (or sadly) known, they use to pass the baton on to the seventh generation.)”

Maya wondered where this lively young girl got her pessimistic attitudes from, but maybe she was an Olde Soul, prematurely experienced by strokes of fate from lives so long ago and yet so close.

“But at least my brothers were still there. We hung around as a sworn little bunch like before in the African outback, and we called ourselves *The Tigers*, maybe a bit too showy for just a trio of harmless ragamuffins. Yet we were pretty naughty brats, I promise you, as we disrupted some filming folks (can’t remember the title but it was probably a B-rated kitchen sink) in our street by shouting and mocking them, if not throwing foul (or fair) eggs – oh my, if they had guessed my future profession, they wouldn’t have misled me (LOL)... but ouch, I better shouldn’t have done that! A couple of days later, just yet having happily tigered with whole the gang through downtown, I suddenly found myself on a grizzly convent court somewhere lost in Essex space, dumped like heavy luggage, to awake in an oppressive ward with a dozen metal cots standing in a long row (like us in unfitting uniforms), feeling like in a (not even golden) bird cage. And I would not see a single lad about more than half a decade while growing up because I was only surrounded by decent old Canonesses and cackling little geese.



“I don’t want to be here!” I screamed, but no one harked. And since I was so heartlessly marooned as if struck by lightning, I’ve never called that woman Mum again. At least a couple of pleasant nuns cared about me lovingly so that I didn’t die prematurely of dehydration in a sea of sobs, as it was rumoured about countless unfortunate predecessors who had been laid in earth on the Canonesses cemetery (perhaps just a dark legend based on ancient epidemics) – it’s the most soothing place whole on earth, by the way, embedded in a little grove and sheltered by a red-bricked wall. I was often accompanied by a pretty black cat that meowed at me from the edge of that wall. It was, like me, a tomboy and someone (maybe Ron or Rod) would call him *Pumpkin*. I loved to sit there sunken in readings for hours and hours (later with a secret ciggie from time to time, and so we gave each-other smoke signs from the Wilderness). It was the first place where I didn’t feel uninvited. And I wished to stay forever.”

“Indeed, my poor lil orphan” Maya emphasized “kids and parents belong together, not in a grizzly gaol. No loving mum, if not commanded by her husband or besieged by her mother-in-law or menaced with fierce quackery on their mean behest, would willingly hand over her puppies into stranger claws, dump them in any institution where receptive souls are conditioned and aligned in the pack and the gender order, whether geese are prepared for roasting or weasels are made fit for fight, that’s the principle of patriarchy (and particularly of the conquest of paradise. Look how blessed the natives had been, naked and natural, before they were forced into straighter shirts of “civilisation” to the taste of bigoted missionaries and for the greed of tradesmen). And women are the modern slaves throughout any cultures! Once thrown out of the convent’s gate to the lechers who lurk outside with their baits glittering in Silver’s chest (actually just pieces of metal), we find us suddenly shackled and have to fulfill manifold duties about the sad remains of our lives; and we are not even thanked for our labour.”



“Maya, that’s so true. Given the ignorance of women’s efforts and that we are always portrayed just as damsells in distress, let me add an annoying aspect concerning *Tina’s* mishap on the ocean: Look how the wicked crew let us toil on the hill, days and weeks long digging like the slaves, bravely all together regardless our sexes. But as for the cause of my sudden early labour, what do you think those pretty writers should have considered appropriate for a tough young lady?”

Let her be thrown from an Arab stallion like Maria Malibran, or to be found lying in a sleeping robe at the foot of a staircase like Amy due to the grudge of Bess (a beautiful image, by the way), or be struck by lightning like Captain Amyas on his final drive *westward ho!* Or at least, even if less picturesque, be gnawed on by a greedy lobster. There are so many sublime ways to get into trouble. To be hit by a stray bullet of one of two agitated toffs in the course of a proper duel due to a *delicate ménage-à-trois* would be, of course, the noblest farewell of a woke lady – but nay! What did this film plot do to me? When I was doing harmless knitting, I fell out of the rocking chair (as designed by my Dad) like sitting by the fireplace of a Gentry manor somewhere in the Chilterns. It's so ridiculous, not to say disdainful, and even more booring! Such a weird idea can have been bred only in a male brain."

"In fact, it's not a Chiltern chair but an antique piece originating from Danish craftsmanship" your silent listener had just to throw in. Oh, these know-it-alls can distract from the most thrilling storyline! But Maya knew also some more appropriate comments in regard to the whimsical plot:

"It's a sad fact that men can't cope with female secrets, even less when we are having a baby. In civilisation there is a culture of sedating women throughout pregnancy by deceptive quacks so that husbands have not to bother about their bellies. In fact, the real risk lies in never facing challenges but suppressing energies; in enforced calmness instead of stress release. And therefore it gets even worse when *Tina* falls out of her rocking chair (but oh what a luck, tis just fiction, right?!).



And as for the strange punchline that it's time to leave the blue lagoon and return to civilisation after *Tina* has been brought to bed: As soon as the offspring is there, men get paranoid! They tend to take possession of the little ones after they haven't made any contribution to their well-being over nine long months except a drop of honey (that's why particularly the parsons are that eager to talk about moral because they know that they are good for nothing)." Oh my naughty rascals, I hear your dirty laughter! "Why the heck are they so keen on convention and let their puppies been raised up on the cold carpets of any clockwork institutes? Because they have bowed for thousand generations to the frozen ideas of old wise men, piled up like pack ice waiting to be melted by female warmth. Let them romp around on a sunny strand, so that they will accept the challenges of nature but renounce oppressive competition. Let them remain rough boulders in rolling waves instead of hewing them into blocks of uniform walls. Follow Rousseaulais' advice to live only according to your nature – and everything will be fine!"

That's what I would call wisely spoken. And since we are already agitated, let's continue cheekily. Given the whimsical plot, I would like to put some more complaints in the mouths of our heroines:

"But let us neither neglect that obnoxious woman who *Tina* has to call *Mother*. She ignores my love with icy disdain and later likes to undermine my little luck; and she almost causes, negligently or even willingly, the loss of our lagoon. That annoying know-it-all knows as usual what is good for me according to her ideas about living in civilisation. *I want to decide for myself!* I have to emphasize, but to assure her immediately that once we are *back in London*, *I will become a good little working girl*. And hark how she retorts with an arrogant posh tone: *Calm down. No reason to be aggressive about it!* (On the contrary: there are countless righteous reasons to get upset, given parent's ignorance for their offspring's needs and nature, generally speaking!) Furthermore, she doesn't even bat an eyelid and avoids a proper quarrel which would be good to release pent-up energies from a silent conflict that have smouldered for so long so that we would have liked to scratch our eyes out (well, not such an unusual relation of a mother and her daughter, right?!). Since *Mother* herself had been brought up with the premise of never being emotional, she became proudly the epitome of soberness – but these are the artificial manners of the upper classes; and as you know I play a girl from Kensington with a recently divorced mother lamenting the decline of her own life; and thus she is full of jealousy of young luck in general and my darling in particular, who is just about to tear me away from her (to his) dominance.

In fact, I only remember one other woman who I found less sympathetic. Once on an early stage tour somewhere in the icy north there was a certain person sitting in the audience who caught my attention because of her similarly high-teased hair and a cutting voice that threatens to tear your ears like a tirade of Callas, I assure you! She looked like the embodiment of a frigid lady (even if I later learned that she was just a grocer's daughter). And because the show wasn't to her taste, she rudely demanded her money back. I would have rairly liked to biff her one!

But forgive my little digression; back to the plot: At the bitter end of that awkward dialogue I have even to force myself to say *Sorry Mother!* even though I am an adult, and, that's the height, to write in Despair a last letter to my Love (to later free myself with a daring jump into the ocean, oh what a luck; but the ending will be clouded by my husband's soberness who will urge me to renounce natural life). I could get sick from self-denial (and I think you will feel it when you watch my little lesson on method acting; at least it was worth it). In fact, I hate it when anyone owes someone else apologies for honest feelings, even more to hide your mood to those close (respectively far) to us. And if I should ever meet a lad (if not better join a pleasant convent of sympathetic sisters), I will regard this, I promise you! In a partnership there is no right or wrong, even less social convention, just nature's call from the bottom of your heart. We have to relieve pressure from the steamer before it explodes!"

Maya smiled at the lively green girl and hoped that she would maintain her undauntedness, never submit to any further false advice and renounce self-denial throughout her life. Oh great expectations!



"But there are some sadder sorrows than to rage about a random role that is not rairly related with me. I am waiting for my return to merry (or misty) Ol'England, as you might guess, with little enthusiasm. As I approached the fairest isles, I felt as raised as a sea gull; and now I feel as burdened as an ol' worn dove with tame wings, as if I aged prematurely in just one autumn, far over thirty. During countless lonely nights in my cell cot on Bellamy Cay, exhausted by the daily shooting strains, I listen to a moaning breeze in the damp, sticky air (or to the repetitive sound of a ventilator), to the clinking of the mast shrouds (that reminds of the shackles from the *chain dance* in *The Beggar's Opera*) and to the croaking of the birds (like dried-up mates with goiters). And I have to rack my brains about this limbo of life, being here as an actress in a weird little bubble at the end of the world with the dubious prospect of returning as a home- and hopeless vagrant without roots and aim. In anticipation of a dark basement in Scarsdale Terrace, with no sweetheart at home, no children's giggles, and the family scattered across the country like a patchwork quilt worn out by too many steps. And given the fact that I haven't learned anything useful except of to make a good impression and speak gently, if I should ever be silenced, I will have nothing left but to depend on everyone and not be needed by anyone. When my income dries up, I'll have to beg for second-rate employment, like sorting film scraps in Worthing or serving Moloko Plus off Palace Gate again; or crawl back to my Dad in the Arun Vale – he is a furniture designer and knows a lot about being dumped like heavy luggage. That's a pretty prospect of my future life, huh?! This vita, superficial, senseless, lacks any hold and haven since I left my cozy convent so many years ago, where I was so heavenly happy. And if I didn't become a Canoness and join their African medical station (thanks to the nuns for praising me away to the drama school and into a profession that disgusts me), shouldn't I take advantage of my second chance here and put on the noble robe of Saint Ursula of Tortola? To fulfill my destiny at Road Town Hospital (since I am well trained in caring for others) in the eternal summer that defies human cold.

Wasn't I so strong in faith and resisted manifold temptations for so long – for what? It was all in vain! I have now *so little to give and nothing worth living for* – except to amuse the ungrateful audience."

And so they sat there in silence for hours and hours, feverishly brooding until the last ciggie faded in the dawn. And even though Maya had bravely listened (to the whimsical lines which I dared to place in both their mouths), she herself looked so exhausted, with eyes like a panda's and thin like a twig blowing in the wind, as if weighed down by manifold sorrows. And indeed, shortly after the stress of filming, since she was torn between catering, managing the estate and caring for the kids, she would suffer a severe breakdown, be flown to an English hospital and never return to their lagoon. Thus her lifelong dream remained an unfinished project after a decade of brave efforts. I feel so much pity for her and I would like to sob a fortnight so that whole the haunted bay could be filled with salty tears. But Waldo would not let her down. He will hold her pale paws for countless days and nights (and certainly not dump her in an asylum's abyss), so that they live together for many further decades. Oh, there are those blessed who lifelong share their burdens! And look: she will even write down, in biblical age, her memories of her actual adventure with our *Island* filming on a prominent place.



Lest we forget Eurydice. That lonely island in the sparkling Sound at the northern edge of Gorda where the bold young couple built their *raft of love* with only a bed under the stars sheltered by a mighty tree – what a beautiful idea and what a complete nonsense, since we had soon to renounce the temporary dream time and bow to soberness (as the final punchline suggests it as a happy ending). What remained of *Love and Laughter* was nothing other than *Love's Labour's Lost*.

And although we like to watch *Tina* and *Evan* climbing together a tree whose crown served as a canopy and now becomes the stage for a dialogue, it seems like a strange place to discuss philosophy. But not every script is perfect, whether of a second-rated romance or of a first-class real life tragedy. In fact, our heroine was fond of trees from an early age – she loved to *feel their strong deep bodies, stern and thick, in-reaching and rooted in the earth* (as she will it soon express in her poem *April*) – and we know about the essential importance that Virginia attached to roots throughout her short life. Most of the time she missed them painfully, but one day, ironically, she would treasure them as a mossy pillow, with soft flakes dancing wittily around her and *Leaves of Silence* fondling her forehead.

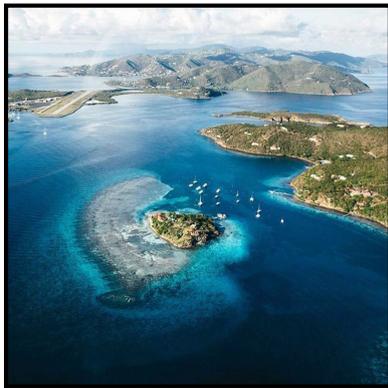
But let's go back to the roots of our virgin island, where *Tina* exclaimed from the tree:
We can do anything, Evan, anything, what we really want, if we accept the challenge!

Nay, I have to say, that's just a pathetic illusion! Whatever we do and try to achieve must lead us to the path of bitterness. And in every fancy idea there is only the prospect of the Last Resort. I foresee that in a few years all naturalness will be displaced by civilisation, and tranquillity by void excitement, so that everything what we had struggled for will be devastated (whether by human inability or even the unpredictable power of nature). Every seedling is doomed to wither. That's the c(o)urse of all things. Nothing lasts forever in the earthly vale of tears. And paradise remains just in our memories. We must fall into oblivion like unknown old women who die alone in their care home beds (unfortunately not only in poetry) or we will even be ostracized by those whom we believed to be our confidants. And so we are compelled to wander restlessly in search of lost beloveds who will not even remember (albeit they might feel subtle vibrations) that we once shared our lives. And at some point, when we drive around on winding roads, marooned in space and time, we may be granted to cross our paths, random or determined, and close the arc of life that was left behind as an abandoned project.



But woe, woe! Just think of Orpheus' lesson. He bravely followed Eurydice's tracks, even crossed the Styx (or the Rubicon, or both) to revive the deceased through the sound of his lyre. But while his music played, she had to remain silent (an ordeal, of course, she couldn't cope with). That is a depressing way to wander speechless side by side through the bitter cold, like aliens, not true? And thus on the contrary, their well-intentioned efforts just awakened the Cold Genius who finally destroyed the doomed relationship. Orpheus, just like us, had to realize that *looking back is dangerous*. Beware of immersing into the depths of the past! Never return to the place of former happiness if you don't want to find it completely changed. It would be an absurd attempt to ignite that

little glowing torch of deceptive illusions and to release the heavy anchor that clings to the bottom of the dark abyss (be it of a life in the lull or companions in chains), a vain hope for a saving breeze that will blow the heeling vessel into the haven. In fiction, *Tina* may have succeeded as she waited in distress for *Evan's* return to be reunited with her darling. But in fact, everything is destined to decay, as everyone will learn the hard way at the Bitter End. Virginia would realize this too, here at the latest.



Many decades passed by. I was thirty-one when I came back to the Virgin Islands at the dawn of the new millennium in search of lost time (first and foremost of my Danish ancestors, as I wrote above), but my wander led me also in Virginia's footsteps on a certain islet a stone's throw from Trellis Bay. I set off at the pier where Maya's cottage stood (to be just swallowed by the airport extension), drove past Bellamy Cay (with the fragments of the yacht club, then a well frequented barrel house founded in the '70s, called *The Last Resort*, until *Irma* would sweep it away) to approach Marina Cay where *Tina* had toiled like Rodie before in a dusty building pit and later on a heavenly blue roof (to think about that she could still be there, if she had renounced from relaxing in a rocking chair), located in the

wild Sound like a drifting raft. A couple of steep cliffs that diverge like lobster claws towards the Drake Channell, embrace the islet (or threaten it) so that you have a sublime panorama from here in the centre: The horizon is limited by an armada of islands (which are called Round Rock, Steep Holm or something like this) that look like phantom ships (with maybe the *Rubicon* between) just crossing the Styx. Virgin Gorda lies sinister with her multi-jagged profile. On one cape there are The Baths with their wittily scattered boulders (easy to imagine that there could still be pits of treasure seekers in Devil's Bay). A rather ugly little duckling of a town shouldn't be neglected either, that greets us from the Vale, and a mighty Mound arises as the backbone of the whole. By the way, it is said that early sailors once imagined Gorda from afar as a pregnant lady just reclining with the boulders as her toes and the mound as her belly – and therefore they called her *Gorda* (which means *the chubby one*; I am sorry). On the other cape a little wooded hill marks the place where *Big Ten* is hidden behind in its sandy bay with perhaps some lonely traces of bare feet leading to a beach tree in a little grove; and they may just be washed away by the tide to slowly blur like the tyre tracks of True Paul.

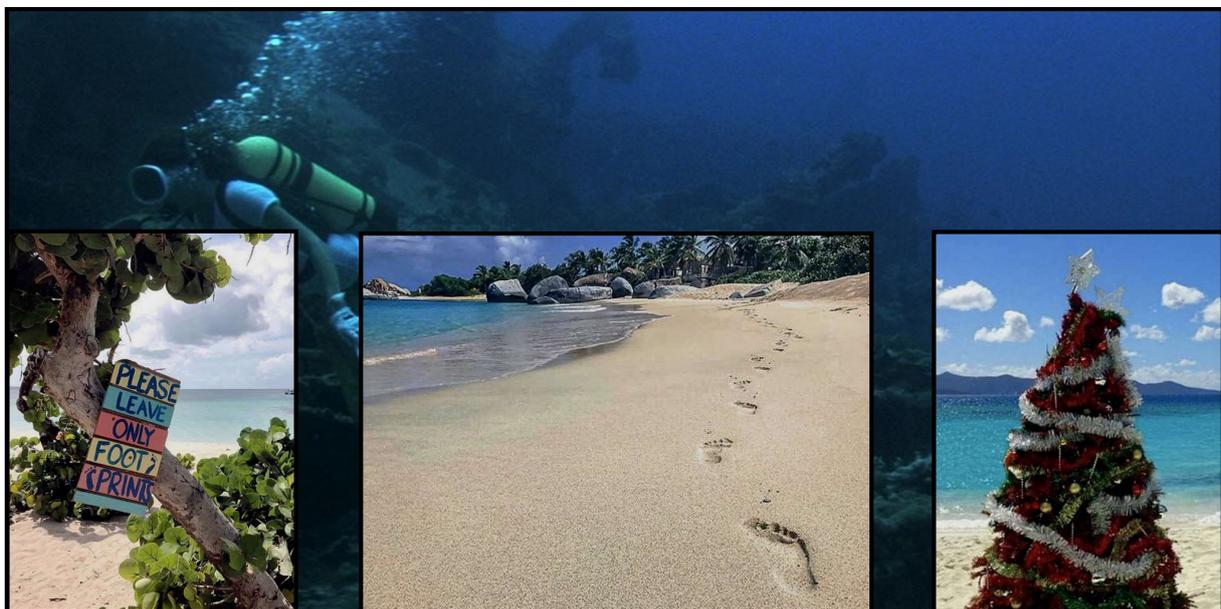


The focus on the right side is the Cape of Beef that *Tina* and *Evan* circumnavigated. And even if Virginia looks always inspired in nature (especially when she steers her dinghy with the maroon sails), I have rather a bad vibe in regard to her misfortune (in particular when it comes to overturning vessels) to assume that in fact she may not have been so eager to be tickled on the toes by Neptune's trident again. Sometimes the appearance doesn't match one's mood (which admittedly is not a great wisdom); and by the way, the pyramidal cape that protrudes from the abyss is called *The Bluff*, ironically, right?! But I am in danger of losing myself in nonsense. However, when I was bobbing there myself in a little boat (and unlike her I am not really a mermaid), I felt a phantom menace of threatening doom, given the steep cliffs above and the Deep below (probably because I had just heard about the sinking of the Rhone, whose wreck lies forlorn and rotting only a mile away and seven hundred feet).



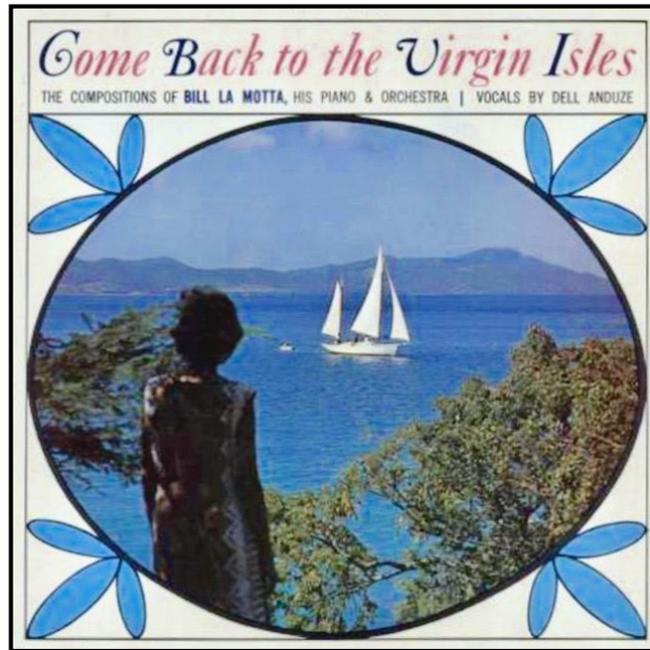
And yet they say that *nothing doth fade but will suffer a sea change to something rich and strange...*

What a comforting thought but, just like all ideals, only an illusion. Once we will have passed away, we are doomed to fall (or be thrown) into oblivion – and maybe we will be driven on a restless journey in search of lost time and truth. Nothing remains from our vessel than ashes in the wind and no one will remember *who crossed the Styx last night*, unless you were perhaps a *Pope*, a *Princess* or a *Poet*. This is a good time to remember Shelley's shipwreck which occurred off a cape in the Mediterranean (as if Harriet his wife, who had drowned herself *five long years* before due to his neglect, had summoned it up). But what the heck? His body was washed up on the beach and he got a bloody gay bonfire there on location! And while his buddies danced in rapture like mischievous elves, they poured oils into the blaze from multicoloured jars (which they may have taken out of Silver's chest) so that the flames shone like a rainbow over the horizon. Oh, that's what I would call a farewell ballyhoo! And when I was so lost in thought, you might guess that I was suddenly tempted to sink my fondest gem in the rolling sea so that it may rest *full fathom five* and shall never be touched by any other hand.



Since we learned that Virginia was fond of *Calypso*, I would like to close the chapter with a cheerful little song just released in '57 and perhaps more according to her taste than Purcell's touching ayre or Orpheus' lament – even more in relation to the fact that a decade after her adventure she would return to the Caribbean for a sentimental farewell in the course of her ominous Advent trip in December '67:

*Come back to the Virgin Isles / she calls through the air.
Come back to the Virgin Isles / her heart is still there.*



Oh, there are those blessed who lifelong share their burdens!

I Photo credits for the expositions and the first chapter

in this order: page by page, from top to bottom, from left to right.

All screenshots were taken from own DVDs respectively videos (unless otherwise stated).

Most of the press clippings were purchased from *The British Newspaper Archive* or private sellers in digital or analogue form (unless otherwise stated).

- 0 Frontispiece: AVA at home
- 1 AVA collection (three original cinema programmes, programme excerpt)
- 2 AVA collection (programme excerpts), screenshot (DVD *Kispus*, Danish colour film, 1957)
- 3 AVA at home (travel book *Devon and Cornwall*, 1966)
- 4 screenshot (*Fy og Bi* aka *Pat and Patachon*, a Danish film duo of the 1920s), net find
- 5 net find (Ken Williams)
- 6 net find (Santa Cecilia). Tables of contents: screenshots
- 7 AVA photomontage on loc, screenshots (courtesy of *VM Tube Channels* by Rod)
- 8 promotion still courtesy of Rod
- 9 AVA collection (book cover *Our Virgin Island*), historical image (ebay lot), AVA collection (film still in the *Picturegoer*)
- 10 screenshot, promo pic (AVA collection), AVA collection (book *The BVIs – A Photographic Portrait*)
- 11 promotion stills courtesy of Rod, net find, AVA at home, AVA collection (*Ladybird* book *The Nurse*)
- 12 netfind
- 13 old post cards (Charlotte Amalie) via FB page *Vintage Virgin Islands*
- 14 screenshots, historical image (via net blog *World Airport Codes*)
- 15 screenshots
- 16 screenshots, historical images (via *issuu.com* > tag Virgin Islands)
- 17 net find (sinking of the Rhone, contemporary Danish painting), screenshot (*The Deep*), AVA photomontage on loc, screenshot
- 18 AVA collection (two excerpts from the *Picturegoer* Magazine from Sept '58), promotion still courtesy of Rod, AVA photomontage on loc
- 19 screenshots, old post cards (ebay lots)
- 20 historical images (via Instagram page *Last Resort*), screenshots
- 21 netfinds, screenshot (*The Deep*), screenshot (*Blackbeard* 2011), screenshot (*Long John Silver* 1950)
- 22 net find (via Instagram page *Last Resort*)
- 23 screenshots
- 24 promotion stills courtesy of Rod, AVA collection (advertisement in the *Picturegoer*), screenshots
- 25 screenshots, historical image (White House) from the FB presence of *Marina Cay BVI*, historical image (Ron's Writing Hut) from the Westland press via FB group *Welcombe Chatter*
- 26 net finds (London home birth, 1948 / ragamuffins on Shepherd's Bush street market, early '50s)
- 27 net find (symbolic photo of a similar cemetery), screenshots
- 28 screenshots
- 29 screenshots
- 30 screenshots
- 31 net find (pub sign somewhere in England), net finds (B&B on the BVIs)
- 32 screenshot, screenshot from the movie *Gothic*, screenshot (*The Deep*), net finds (B&B on the BVIs)
- 33 CD retro cover (*Come back to the Virgin Isles*), AVA collection (promotion still)
- 34 screenshot

Second revised version (February 2026)



Back to the roots: <http://www.archivaria.de/andersen/novel.html>