

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



A.V. Andersen

### III In Search of Lost Time



The fictional *Midsomer County* was the real setting of the *Life and Death of Virginia Maskell*.

As I was strolling through my home town and thinking about my forthcoming London trip in your footsteps, I suddenly found myself in front of a confectioner with English labelled wedding cakes and a basket with stuffed pets in the showcase – including a Chiltern panda who begged to be cuddled (I actually got 'im the next morning, but Pedro didn't look amused, whether simply due to his natural sad eyes or sunken in some more or less happy memories, who knows); but the highlight is – and you little rascal know, that I don't lie – it was the night of your 60th wedding anniversary.



Virginia's third and last colour film will be *INTERLUDE*, made in the oppressive summer of 1967, which would later be titled *The Summer of Love*. She will play her most dramatic role as the brave *Antonia*, a noble lady, destroyed by the meanness of her husband, during a life phase of restraints and distress, in which, as so often, fact and fiction merges. For her, it will become the summer of loss. But it will take a long time from the *Doctress in Love* to the good wife in decay – about seven years; and she will even disappear completely from the big screen for half a decade. Virginia will hurry (and sometime creep slowly) through lots of ups and downs. Her rapid rise about two sparkling years will soon reach a peak: In '61 and '62 there will be a double event with outstanding films and a dramatic change in her private life. But her heyday will be followed by a long decline and her vibrant times will feel as far away as light-years lost in space. To prove once again that nothing lasts forever.

The ominous reason of Virginia's five-years hiatus is the subject of many legends and has been since widely discussed in connection with embarrassing incidents during the filming of *Only Two Can Play*, as particularly stated in the controversial mockumentary *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* (oh my, that some wannabe biographers always like to spin such a sailor's yarn for the gullible audience!). It is claimed that due to Mad Pete's meanness, who *constantly carped about Virginia and wanted her removed from the film, her confidence was undermined, so that she made just one more film – Interlude – and she killed herself in 1968*. This cinematic causal chain is of course just as fantastic as the official claim of a *postnatal depression* to explain Virginias's free death, I promise you! The inclined audience will have understood by now that our heroine (driven by her initial forlornness as an abandoned child, lacking both motherly love and fatherly care for a life-short turmoil) would suffer from insatiable longing for both her innocent youth and her sublime time in Malcount Bay in an unbridgeable contradiction – and this is just a little part of her miseries which we have later to shed light on until the eyes will hurt of all of them involved, both of the villains and their gullible victim.

Her professional status as a reluctant actress, who was of course in the wrong business (not to call it in an endless series of wrong movies), has nothing to do, but absolutely nothing, with her fatal decay, which has been covered up for too long, for whatever and whose benefit (probably due to false discretion), even beyond her death – yeah, it was exactly this speechlessness that slowly poisoned her during her lifetime (in a fatal combination with Silver’s spicy pills against remembering and pronouncing of what she truly was and desperately longed for). And this is literally proven by Pedro’s confessions and the hints of some of her fellows, who would break their silence many decades later, even if they all wriggle around the truth like supple squids.

Well, let’s switch off this unpleasant spoiler show for a moment and go back to that time when there was still every opportunity to guide our protagonist onto the path of happiness. But sadly she always chose poorly, both on stage and behind the curtains – even more on her heyday when she stumbled into a couple of wrong castings, thanks to her own contradictions and her negligent consultants.



*Only Two Can Play* was filmed mid of ‘61 and premiered in early ‘62. It’s a *charming comedy* with Virginia playing a *long-suffering housewife* who struggles with her treacherous partner – a familiar stereotype in the course of her career –, convincingly portrayed by our pretty Pete. In fact, it’s just another of his early assembly line works in which he performs (respectively improvises) his usual slapstick pieces (such as his popular number of unrolling an endless towel dispenser) that we will later see (or look bored away from) dozen more times. Virginia’s female opponent is a totally talentless and xtremely vulgar, googly-eyed actress (whose name I’ve just forgotten) so that no sane viewer can understand why the heck any husband would cheat on his adorable wife with such a random woman (but for that the quirky script is to be blamed rather than Pete, to always remain objective). The only appearance of Miss Waterglass, that the male audience will possibly remember, is a fully naked back scene in which she shows her big butt (I’ll spare you a screenshot of this highlight; and you will guess my opinion about this embarrassing sequence in particular and nudity on screen in general). Virginia is the only ray of hope to avoid falling asleep in the cinema (respectively the telly chair; as I myself saw *Only* just a single time many decades later with less delight than any of her other works, including *Willing*, her following strip (sic!), which will be more annoying but also much more spicy concerning certain bare backs, once from our heroine; but lechers have to wait a while for this doubtful highlight).



What is surprising is, and it shall not be concealed, that when Mad Pete and Suffering Ginny only play two-gether once, their sequences look absolutely harmonious (on screen); and even their facial expressions seem to be something like synchronized – maybe both complement each other in their ability to improvise; but it may be also a lesson about always wearing masques and denying yourself in a business which not everyone would be inclined to. However, their interaction looks partly really adorable, even better when they share the ciggie, and best when she proudly presents Pedro’s silver ring as her golden gem on screen. *Oh, Happy is the Wife!*

In fact, given their (to put it mildly) complicated working relationship, the filming was certainly no pleasure for none of them involved. As it is many times told, there were infamous struggles on and off stage before during and after the filming. Particularly Mad Pete’s nightly phone call is stuff of legends but literally proven: He urged the bosses to replace our heroine with his Welsh mistress just after their first filming day; but they kept her (since they valued both her vocal talent and her gentleness).

Virginia kept calm and will later be acclaimed for her performance; but Jealous Pete will badmouth the film until his death, due to the fact that he had thrown out of anger his potential shares to their feet so that the bosses would profit from the bitchiness of our little Rumpelstiltskin. I would have liked to see him raging! That narcissist simply couldn't act beside a profound woman; and he would carry on making the harlequin on screen for whole a generation to become the *master of mediocrity* and, by the way, an(other) infamous eye-bruise behind the bright curtains. Welcome to the League of Gentlemen!

Regardless of what is often written (and even her own statements to the press that *Only* was one of her favourite films), we actually know that Virginia would have preferred to reject the role earlier. So let's make a little time-slip and a spatial jump to Wessex: Once upon in 1960 at a picnic during one of their road trips to Devon, she bitterly complained to her companion about the sad script and the way how she had been urged to take over the role. She told Pedro (in her own words, I'm sorry) she felt *like a whore* of the fat bosses who had allegedly prompted her behind her back (since they knew she could speak dialects) to play a Welsh housewife. But first of all, she expressed her dislike (explicit *disgust*) for the script which was (un)usual ridiculous – the only bright spot of this project would be to work with Shepperton's shooting star. Oh my, if only she had known! But she could have known since Mad Pete's manners were already feared because the once chubby radio Goon was just going megalomaniac after a rapid series of big box office hits.

When I first read their dialogue, I was intrigued by the synchronicity to a sequence in *BLOW-UP* (and it will not be the last cross-connection between her real life and that outstanding movie) with Pedro playing her sober adviser, just as *Thomas'* agent will do so half a decade later, when the two protagonists, sickened by their share in the deceptive circus and eager to get out of it, declared:

*I want to be free!* Then Pedro asked exactly like the agent as he pointed at a tramp: *Free like him?* How did she think she could feed herself? Well, that was a good question worth to ponder about (even more in a time when good girls had mostly learned nothing useful other than how to get married). And *free to do what?* At least she knew exactly what she wanted: just being a tomboy, alone in the nature, better in twos. But once again she listened to Pedro who advised her (just like at the *Doctor's* height when he had prevented her from dumping her profession by holding her hand a fortnight long), to carry on toiling in the hamster mill – less for her than his very own benefit as usual, since her nice gallant (who was constantly short of money) feared (and didn't hesitate to express it literally) he would otherwise have to support her. But far from it, since through her dogged work she was already wealthier than him after her own rapid series of quickly made Shepperton B-films which had been pretty successful (so that she also longed for more demanding stuff – and that reminds a bit of Pete).

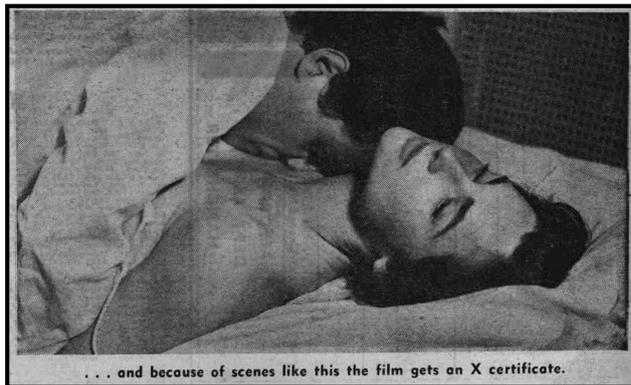


The bucolic sequence ended with a funny little bonfire, fanned by a handful of her baits – if I remember correctly, it was a proper bundle of some hundred pounds – to distance herself from her Shepperton slavery in particular and her aversion against the material world in general; but what a luck, some hours later she would be absolutely free in the beautiful surroundings of her beloved water mill with open hairs blowing in the west wind and lacking shoes and socks (what is literally and even visually documented) to get rid of all stress by riding her stallion over the cliffs, bareback of course.

After the filming she would emphasize to the press how pleased she was to get this role, eeeeven so eeeager to have rejected a long-lasting main role in any obscure cotemporary series (I could never find out which she could have meant, whether on telly or on the big screen. *The Avengers* were just at their beginning and lacked a female protagonist, just like *Danger Man*; or should she even have become *Miss M* in a certain agent movie which was currently being prepared?). Well, not even the gentlest angel can always be honest in a mad, mad world of pretence und appearance, if she wants to keep her place to preserve her shaky position on the slippery carpet of the Vanity Fair.

However, what we can certainly doubt is that Mad Pete's scheming would have disturbed Virginia sustainably – since she was so entangled in Mad Ron's Wars of the Roses that she would soon have to endure her own personal Bosworth.

Contrary to what is claimed in Peter's *Life and Death*, a certain Hugh (whom we will meet again in the course of *Interlude*) will later state: *The cause of her suicide went far deeper than Sellers' bitchiness*. Indeed, to establish any cross-connection from *Only Two Can Play* to Virginia's decay, or even to her temporary withdrawal from the big screen, is simply wrong. In fact, the shallow little strip doesn't play a major role in her biography at all. Rather, another movie will soon be made with her playing the opposite of the *charming housewife* that she portrayed to everyone's delight just half a year before – *as a whisky swinging nympho*. Oh dear, please don't! And *this* inglorious work, which would have an unpleasant impact on public perception, if not on her changing private life, will actually be her penultimate film and her sad farewell to the cinema before her five-year hiatus.

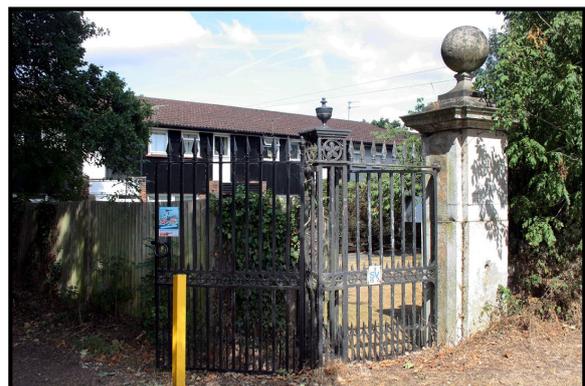


*The Wild and the Willing* will be filmed in early '62 and released in autumn. We'll have to bear our heroine as the wife of an elderly Sophisto who has more or less fun with a couple of green scoundrels in a fictive college town. This sad figure in contrast to her well-behaved image will be hardly to the taste of her inclined audience – including me, I have to admit. I heartily hate this B-movie and have to boo in their choir. Bitterly ironic, it will be her only main role and her name will appear at the top on the poster in large letters before all her

fellows – just once. Virginia's brief rise will come to a sudden end while all the male newcomers are looking forward to great careers: One will become the most iconic *Holmes*, the second the *Elephant Man*, the third the boldest *Blackbeard*; and Ian, the latter, a tough tomboy with eyes like a Panda, will be the chosen one to tickle her pretty little toes another time, just as Jack did five long years before.

Different than during the filming of *Willing* when she will stay some weeks on location (let's hope in a room with a view to the Lincoln Cathedral next to Ian's one), Virginia was largely spared from sharing a lodging with Mad Pete (except during a promotion trip along the South Welsh Coast) so that they didn't have to scratch their eyes out. All her sequences in *Only Two Can Play* were made on the set of the Shepperton Studios southeast of London. And because the place is easy accessible from Waterloo in less than an hour, let's now take a short excursion to wander together in Virginia's footsteps...

There were always, whether in good or in bad times, countless campuses as the backstage of her life (frequently fading out reality); and Shepperton was certainly one of these counterworlds. The studios, very liked by all acting folks, were pleasantly situated like a rural estate on the grounds of Littleton Manor with a beautiful park upon the River Ash, a tranquil little waters that could be frequently enjoyed both on the big screen and TV, from *African Queen* (as if it were a wild jungle river) to many episodes of *Dangerman* – and indeed, we will meet Virginia and Pat against this background in 1964 (with the Ash brook pretending to be the Indian outback) in the episode *The Colonel's Daughter*.



Approaching the studio main entrance (which is long since closed), you were greeted by the parish church beside. A second driveway to the manor led along the Ash through a couple of white pillars crowned with stone globes (a familiar motive that we will later remember on a certain property in the Chilterns) which still exists. Thus we can reach the estate fragments by entering this gate.



It was here in summer '61 in the former gardens in front of the old ballroom and canteen (which were sadly demolished some years later to be now replaced by a faceless block, named *David Lean Building*, lacking its connection to the once beautiful bowling green that is today completely overgrown) where a certain promotion shooting for *Only Two Can Play* took place. It resulted in a highly expressive picture series with Virginia in exceptionally self-confident poses – strangely contrasting with her current role as a moderate housewife; but perhaps the photos were also



intended as a visual business card for her upcoming cast in *Willing* (and they seem even more appropriate in a busy phase full of changes when she was just beginning to put her life on her own feet after her path had mostly determined by others). Countless stars came together in and around that legendary place for dishes, chat and shootings; and even some indoor scenes of *The Third Man* had been filmed in the canteen – and you will guess how I would have liked to see Virginia as the ominous lady, who maintains iron loyalty to her beloved brute. What a dream role and radiant debut this would have been! Last but not least that cult film is worth mentioning since Trevor is co-starring who was Virginia's favourite fellow (and born in the same year as Pedro, by the way, but this is surely only a meaningless synchronicity). He was just filming *The Mutiny on the Bounty*, and even though he played the villain this time (what doesn't matter, since it's said that damsels always like the bad boys), given the South Sea locations, she was certainly reminded of her own blue lagoon. One decade later he will star as Tricky Dick in the most iconic version of *King Lewis*; and what kind of pageant could it be with her as Cosima at his side or even as Sisi instead of Romy's annoying performance. However, Virginia stated around those days when the *Bounty* premiered: *All my desires are to direct (sic?!) a film with the actor I admire the most: Trevor Howard*. But as we know, it would never happen.

And it's here the site of a ghostly apparition of a white lady or some odd sort of a *dotty young actress who had once thrown herself from the balcony* (probably caused by lovesickness for an ominous old fellow or blinded by the haze of her extensive cigarette consumption) that many colleagues testified to have seen. However, when I was waiting in awe on the field beneath the former ball house, where once your toes had touched the ground, you didn't grant me a similar appearance, oh what a pity!



But hanging around on our favourite green stage (that is now xtremely neglected to hardly imagine its former glory; and since there are only a few pictures left, I chose a movie still with James Robertson for comparison), I suddenly heard some familiar sounds wafting in the air – probably from a stereo of that working brigade just balancing on the building's roof – to have been immediately stimulated to one of my long-winded associations: We know that you could dance and that you almost won the *Doolittle*-price for singing in Cockney and cognito (preferably in the bed wards of elderly homes) but we don't know at all *if you LOVED music* (as *Antonia* would ask her antagonist one day).

Actually, you may have been familiar with ancient stuff since you had listened to holy anthems again and again when you slid on your knees in your convent chapel (and I have still the sounds in my ear from Chelmsford Cathedral where whole the gang used to celebrate Christmas under its splendid fan ceiling to the cheers of the choir and the roar of the organ). Let's also remember Pedro's favour for serious music and his aversion against popular sounds, as he literally emphasized. He refers among others to *The Beggar's Opera*, to John Gay (who came from Barnstaple near to Pedro's home) and, of course, to Bosom Ben (whose *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* was also my personal trigger to be intrigued by Purcell's works) – but your companion never mentioned whether you had any part in his so called intellectual circles (albeit you probably did, given his East Anglian Connection; and it is well known that Ben worked not too far from Wain Hall – but I threaten to lose ourselves in spatial connections). What we certainly know is your attraction for Calypso due to your Caribbean adventure (not to say your Creole nature) – to assume that you were rather fond to contemporary music.

Well, the Beatles were still at their beginning (they mostly hung out in my hometown in those days) and who would foresee the *British Invasion*? Some Hollywood stars may have brought their music with them to Shepperton – *Rhythm and Blues* and particularly *Doo Wop* (what it will be called some day, then on its late mannerist height, and sometimes adapting Caribbean sounds). And please don't mock me when I thought I heard *Blue Moon* on your imaginary stage, The Marcell's summer hit of '61 (but maybe I had just to think of a certain *Werewolf* whose locations I was also spotting around those days); and what was ringing in my ear was *Heart and Soul*, a peppy song of Jan and Dean that was simultaneously published (some guys, by the way, who would make *Dead Man's Curve* a few years later about a gruesome accident that one of them will barely survive – and it is perhaps the template for the Beatles song *A Day in the Life*). However, I would guess that a young lady could have preferred some of these fresh dishes to Pedro's elder palate. And while the sound fragments from the roof above were drowned out by a sudden breeze, I thought about *who was that guy who shared these songs which made you fall in love with him?*



1962 will be a sublime year that may be called Virginia's *Annus Mirabilis*. It will develop as ambivalently as her emotional amplitude. Her life will change in a breathless time lapse on both professional and private fields and no stone would be left unturned, not the smallest pebble. Virginia will be acclaimed on screen (and later booted); but first of all off stage, her years-long limbo will be ceased and silver will turn to gold. She will reach her mid life's zenith only to experience – the inclined reader may forgive a further spoiler – her immediate decline, and



almost nothing would remain but bitterness. And her darkest mood (between autumn '59 and her final fall of '67) she will soon express, as usual, in a certain poem as if she were conjuring up her bitter end that sounds so bitter cold that a lively carp could freeze into a fish finger, just by listening to it.

So let me quote Gryphius, that German Baroque poet, as he mourned, just as intensely as she did, the impermanence of all life's labour in my personal favourite poem: *Es ist alles eitel – It is all in vain!*

As we heard, the public knew little about Virginia's private life. *She was cocooned in shyness. A personal question frightened her more than a pistol shot.* And we know she had good reasons for this. The existence of her husband-in-sin may have been Britain's best kept secret (until a spotlight will be thrown on the Bonnie Prince's mischief) – apart from the fact that she had been officially accused for adultery in Pedro's long-running divorce proceedings sometime in the '50s, which were treated with discretion and had no public aftermath, oddly enough. Just her fondest pleasure of being in Devon whenever possible (*on the farm of a good friend*, as it was called) was frequently announced, whether emphasized by herself or by secret observers who liked to hint at her passion for wild stallions and running mares in Britain's untamed out(and even better bare)back – perhaps as a little innuendo.

Therefore she was (according to her transfigured image as a prevented nun) mostly considered as being a single – *Oh bringing on back the good times* before the evil net would put the finger deep in every wound, or worse, some wannabe biographer or two. And the cheesecake press used to ask about *when the adorable actress* – who was well remembered for her early role in *Happy is the Bride* and was called *the only English Rose who can play a love scene* after her Caribbean adventure – *would become a bride in real life?* And who wouldn't have loved to be the chosen one next to her at the altar!?! But look, the wait was soon over: 1962 started with a bang with the public proclamation of her engagement on the 15th of January. The news was absolutely unexpected both for the public and (albeit it sounds hard to believe) even some closest to her, who were baffled by one of her sudden decisions – but so what? She was the mistress of discretion, and of spontaneity (not for the first and sadly not the last time). Pedro in particular was shocked to find himself so suddenly dumped. Admittedly, I have not much pity with him. Rather, I would have liked to see him raging (given how ruthless he had opened the floodgates of the Dolphin Lagoon about two years before).



Her fiancé was decent, handsome, tall and the heir to a baronetcy. Wow! But the highlight was: he was her age! Given his profession and social position, there was a resemblance to the role of *Thomas*, the fashionable photographer and epitome of Swinging London, in *BLOW-UP* (a film, published half a decade later, that will be subtly linked with Virginia's life). Indeed, her future husband was also looking forward to a raising career to become quite famous for his *intimate portraits* of celebs throughout the country. And if Thommy was not only an interesting and talented toff, he was also a pretty good match as the eldest son of a respectable lineage coming from Cheshire now settled in Sussex at the rim of the South Downs – and, look, that common girl from Shepherd's Bush, who had served in a coffee bar off Palace Gate only half a decade before, would one day become a Gentry Lady within it. But for this she had to maroon her Urchin on Dead Men's Chest.

We can even share the event, thanks to a bewitching snapshot that allegedly dates from the morning after, to ponder about the story behind that unadorned look into her soul. It's indeed a certain sort of an intimate still-life to be inclined to assume that Thommy took the picture (sadly there will remain – or be taken – just a handful of equivalents, to ask for the reasons. Maybe she was reluctant to serve as a pinup-girl at home just as much as she hated being in the flashlight out there).

Virginia, lying on a big, big mattress (of that sort what I would call a *raft of love*) on the balcony under



the pitched roof of her Kensington studio house, looks at us with great melancholy (or simply hung-over after the party), with messy hair and no makeup, as if just awoken from the heat of the night in the cold of the day; and she presents her engagement ring – a vast sapphire bling set with diamonds that we will perceive many further times until our eyes hurt – subtly in the middle while juggling the ciggie as usual. Well, given the latter, let's remember a certain whimsical Bethany Sister: To be honest, I wouldn't like to burn my hand by serving as your ashtray.

As it was publicly announced, Virginia had met her fiancé in London about two years before, interestingly exactly after the Dolphin Lagoon had been flooded by a wave of tears and her leaky vessel was drifting in the roaring sea on a months-long Odyssey on the search for a mooring with relatives and friends to find herself again in different dwellings partly far away from Doyle's monster. Actually, she was also seen lodging with her father end of '59. His house was located in Storrington, right next to a cloister with a pastoral vineyard and the shrine of the Holy Virgin who was venerated as *Our Lady of England* – and we may assume that Virginia was attracted to this sacral site and happy to be here, even though her Dad, as well as her mother, had started a new family. My, this was a colourful patchwork surrounding our marooned heroine like the countryside pattern of Sussex.

Furthermore, we may assume that Mr. Maskell (a decent arts and craftsman and apparently also a devoted Catholic, given the assumption that he was keen to live in that town which was called the



*English Lourdes*, and given the fact that he would pass away on a pilgrimage through Italy two decades after his beloved daughter) and her future father-in-law (a council member in Petworth) knew each other, since both these respectable men lived in the same neighbourhood as representatives of the establishment. Therefore it's well probable that it was actually here where the couple had met, in the beautiful countryside of the Arun Valley (which, by the way is also threatened by flooding from time to time; we sadly can't escape it) with a magnificent view of the escarpment of the Downs where the sun

risers and sets in the haze behind the long horizon.

According to Pedro's confessions, we may even speculate that Thommy had the elder claim, dating back beyond the *Island* time when Virginia had already lived here for a while as she worked on the Worthing stage about half a year end of '56 with strenuous performances on every Advent eve. (When she got her first TV role in early '57, she moved to Earls Court, set off to the Caribbean and returned in December to get a certain role in Soho which would be pretty effective for the rest of her life; but we already know this story.) During the *Catalyst* rehearsals in early '58 on the backstage of the Arts a pretty jealous playwright (or, as some green lad will later call him, a *middle-old lecher* who was pretty keen on yummy freshflesh) secretly listened to a telephone call of his conquest-in-progress with a *befriended photographer* who I think was Thommy. I am sorry for my negligent speculation – there might have been many photographing dudes in an adorable actresses environment – but when Pedro met the ominous guy some days later, he described him as a handsome toff and yet his conversation so artificially mannered (sounding like the epitome of a certain class Pedro used to hang out with and live in their backlots just to remain their court jester) that he excluded that such a random youngling could ever be a competitor for a mature teacher of Byron's superhuman nature, even more considering that his beeping birdie nested on his shoulder and begged to be fondled. Oh vain *Abelard*, far failed! First of all she longed for enduring safety that you were not willing to give her – as we heard how one of your buddies would soon admonish you to finally confess to your passion: *You make a mistake. Virginia adores you. Marry her or she'll leave you!* And therefore Thommy got the lot.



Sadly, Pedro had let her wriggle for too long like a gasping carp. Yeah, that one from the edge of the pond that he had taken with him, eager to throw the stinky cadaver into her bed (if not her face, which was bruised anyway) as a *symbol of their relation* – but maybe he actually mocked her alumni status as an *Olde Fish* of Wain Hall, in memory of how proudly she had carried her cross and how eager he was to soil it. (He embezzles the deeper sense of his allegory and maybe I tend to over-interpret his funny verses.) At least he finally preferred to let the fish be crushed by a lorry. Did I state already that your odd companion was such a charming brute? However, tis one of his many doubtful tales, and we can't be even sure whether he isn't fibbing like Curzio M (my personal favourite writer; and we know that Pedro also admired Italian Modernism) – Remember the *boiled mermaid*?

What is certain is that not whole their environment was happy for our cheerful fiancés.

(But these are of course, and according to my pretty optimist worldview, the usual circumstances of wedding procedures – only the Christmas days are more effective for a proper uproar when whole the family comes together over a smouldering dish. You should better avoid this by staying on the other side of the ocean! – as it is well known to anyone who has ever considered this senseless risk.

And it's particularly the fondest friend with the most deceptive smile who would like to scratch out your eyes to become the bride instead of the bride (or the groom) – to ask why be so unreasonable? Since childish love finds its first low tide in the honeymoon and what remains is pure frustration; all passion will be expelled as soon as your tiny finger is squeezed into thumbscrews, that's the natural c(o)urse. So here's my advice for everlasting love: In front of the altar your answer should be NAY!

Indeed, just a few weeks after their surprising tidings we had to read an interesting newspaper comment of a certain ol' lady who seemed to look forward a little more sober to the upcoming event, if she did not even hint the cup should better pass them by:

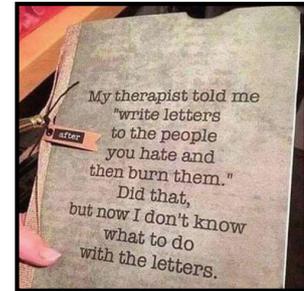
*"The couple is planning a quiet wedding in the country"* (Do they?) *Lady S said today.*

*"But we are not working out any dates until after Thommy's (younger) brother gets married."*

Strange, I have to say, and I would believe that was not the regular scheduling in Aristo casts.

But we know what nonsense those guys in the cheesecake press like to spread. Some articles claimed also (albeit I dare to doubt this) Virginia was the first actress ever to manage to marry into the ancient British Gentry – to ponder again about great expectations, whether from or to her, now also off stage. Well, if you are a descendant of an elder family you might be little inclined to welcome an actress in your decent lineage. Even more given the fact that our heroine was simultaneously seen more or less unclothed as filming daring scenes in the rough north in the course of her first and only main role in *The Wilde and the Willing* – perhaps Lady S became aware of that delicate present and (forgive my openness) moreover of naughty rumours of a certain "past". Confronted with such a little mischief of her future daughter-in-law, I am tempted to guess that she wasn't really amused about her elder son's choice. However, that was the sparkling atmosphere while the fiancés were waiting their time.

Last but not least, our pretty Pedro was also rather grumpy. So he liked to write in review some mocking lines which sound little enthusiastic with regard to the future life of a housewife in principle *off Uxbridge with one telly, two cars and three kids* – very different from the life of a bold Bohemian!



And first of all he asked about the whereabouts of his Silver Ring that she had allegedly worn until the last day before it was exchanged for her Blue Carbuncle in the course of an icy January night. At least the latter will stick to her finger over Five Long Years to be seen in almost every picture both in private and on screen as a sign of her greatest wish – permanence! – as she had once emphasized it through her cross (that had been torn from her neck on the occasion of a certain Essex bacchanal).

But let's announce happier facts: This time, the common bride will not have to hide herself discreetly in a tent at the estate's outer edge of one of Pedro's noble buddies!



She married on the 3rd of July, 1962, in the Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart in Petworth. It was a *fashionable country wedding, a quiet family affair* (not to call it unexpectedly secret; rather, it sounds suspiciously similar to Lady S' hesitant statements from end of January to ponder about who had planned the ceremony) and since *there was no ballyhoo*, the local press found hardly more remarkable facts than her beautiful clothing: Virginia was dressed in a bright retro gown and crowned with a cute beret under her veil, looking like the epitome of Maid Maryon as finally reunited with Sir Locksley after suffering years of grief and Arab wars.

Indeed, my prevented nun, you seemed so *radiantly happy* – to spontaneously touch my soul, although a handful snapshots certainly say nothing; as you were such a brilliant actress, well practiced in wearing masques to give the press your brightest smile – and absolutely credible shining from within as if a weight had fallen from your heart. We may now recognize the importance you attached to matrimony, because you were torn between your family fragments,

moved frequently with homesickness and were exhausted by your delicate partnership limbo, and thus now finally eager to find stability in life and an everlasting base. In fact, we will only see you this fulfilled once more: when you play *Perpetua*, the good convent spirit, in *The Pageant of Wain Hall*.

But, but... Although you looked so wonderful like the incarnation of the Madonna Immaculata, let me ask cheekily: Wasn't there a little stain on your gown (or is it only seen in my newspaper clipping)? Forgive your most sympathetic teller who would forgive you every vice like your charming Eve (except of a single cigarette, of course) for that impudently putting the finger in your wound which would never heal until your last day, but I dare to assume that your relatives could have urged you to some restraint concerning the wedding plan, given the humourless establishment and clerical blockheads in the Catholic outback, who might have been a little sceptical about their illustrious client. And albeit the secret ceremony may have harmonized with your idea of cozy country life and your natural shyness, as you were always careful to avoid publicity, it certainly contrasted with the public expectations just on your career's height and your audience's interest in cheesy gossip. And if you surely didn't have to meet any demands of those annoying folks (or any wannabe playwright), I see a little discrepancy (at least through my Panda eyes) to guess that whole that procedure was not as bright as pretended, due to some smouldering conflicts in and around you.

But above all – forgive another little time-slip – that half hidden act seems to be in a striking contradiction to that sparkling spectacle of Thommy's second marriage with Royal Pomp and Circumstances in Westminster Abbey almost exactly on your heavenly tenth wedding day.

Well, some people are just keen on a pompous partner by their side and you'll prefer to vanish silently from home to hug some trees; so what? *The world is a Vanity Fair*.

However, when I later learned these facts, I got a really gloomy mood and as depressed about as probably your restless soul which has been running up and down the Icknield Way ever since and pondering about the meaning of false Love and true Despair and the greatest menace of the Ancient Egyptians of being ostracized and driven into oblivion – an unjust fate you share.

After the sacral ceremony, a small bunch of guests came together for a feast at Downunder Lodge, your father's cottage nestling at the foot of a gentle wood tongue at Bury where he had recently moved next to the hills. And although I wasn't invited and couldn't ask Pedro for further details (who would never mention the date – think about why?!), I imagine an axis of torches on the green, pointing to the woods, just flickering happily, later fading in the twilight like Will-o'-the-Wisps. And suddenly I see a misty wave descending from the slope to cover the meadow completely under a white veil. And I listen to the murmur from the wilderness: "Woe, woe!" To wonder: Did you also have this sinister premonition on that eve to remember? Given your frrigid next poem, I would be inclined to say: Yes.



We have already heard about the second of her films in this contrasting year of tops and flops.

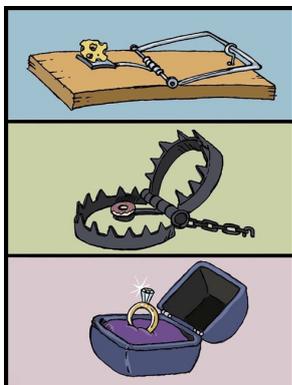
*The Wild and the Willing* was made in early '62 when the couple was waiting their time, filmed entirely on location in Lincoln, far away from London and Sussex – oh what a luck in the face of daring scenes – to wonder whether the groom was sitting behind the curtain like once her companion in *Doctor* times to hold her hand during the breaks or whether he spared himself this dubious pleasure, even more so when he looked at Ian, that charismatic young scoundrel who was the chosen one to hug our heroine in every impossible place (like in a student bar or even in a car on the campus parking) and – that was the highlight! – to fondle her feet (just on screen, of course) so that everyone, whether girl or boy, had to fall in love with him (like I myself when I first looked into his dark eyes not earlier than 50 years later in his role as terrific *Blackbeard*; and we know, that our heroine was attracted both by Panda eyes and reef pirates). The public was bewildered by such a naughty role so much in contrast

to her sensitive portrayals of well-bred women. And the press summed up the *double event* as follows: *They were ravished by her performance in Only Two Can Play. But they sneered at The Willing* – saved by Virginia’s appearance so that the film would not become a commercial catastrophe. It was absurd to look at a lady of unworldly beauty slurping whisky from the bottle in a swarm of drones – the script was just ridiculous! To ask if she didn’t have an agent who saved her from this miscast?



*The Willing* premiered in autumn just three months after her wedding – perhaps a bad timing. And at this point in her life, the contrast between privacy and work, aka fact and fiction, couldn’t be greater. Look, when she had played that simple housewife last year in summer, her intricate (even if highly discreet) concubinage was just coming to an end. And now, as she had renounced the rake of the rakes and finally swapped her long-lasting limbo with a conventional base, she appeared of all things as a femme fatale before everyone’s eyes – what a strange paradox! Well, few of us would be pleased to sit in the cinema and be served tasteless dishes, not true?! Even less if you are a decent husband next to your omnipresent wife and share her pretty boyish back (which would be a good reference to apply for a role in *BLOW-UP* since Vanessa’s poses will be very similar) with all your peers on screen – perhaps to be mocked and made to think about what it will be to live at the side of a film star. Indeed, we have now to bear more skin than in all her other films together and even from Miss Waterglass in *Only*, what an irony, not true?! And as Virginia gets dressed, she turns to us her – spoiler alert – beautiful shoulder (and a little bit more in a twinkling of an eye; but I will not snitch on her!).

But above all, what seems remarkable to me, she proudly presents her fondest gem whenever possible as if she were eager to emphasize her relationship status that she had longed for so long, by sharing her relief with whole the audience – or sending a private message to a certain person, maybe as a lesson about chances that had passed by. However, we may guess that her intimate allegory was an unwise idea and pretty counterproductive. The Sussex Connection was surely not amused to look at her engagement ring which is used as a prop in such permissive scenes and a questionable context. (We will see it six years later presented exactly like this in *Interlude* again, albeit in her diametrically different role as a good wife, so that we may consider a further cross-connection (perhaps something like a purgation; but I often tend to over-interpret). Unfortunately, Virginia will not be granted to watch those beautiful sequences, even less a perhaps desired reconciliation with her dearest.)



The *Willing* flop vanished out of the public just as quickly as she – for prudish folks abroad seemingly unconscionable, its US release would take further two years until we will be confronted with the sad strip again – and Virginia was initially contented with her cast in privacy, whether urged or willingly, who knows. But given her sudden change of mind, it looks to me as if she stumbled into her new life – to find herself perhaps in unexpected bonds and a less pleasant environment than she had imagined.

Lest we forget how she used to escape from the burden of filming about half a decade by *staying in the West Country in an 600 years old mill* to breathe freely like a Sea Gull circling the *Reclining Lady*. Now soon after her wedding Virginia gave a telling interview in which she expressed her regret concerning her prospects for the spatial future:

*We won't be going to Devon as often as we would like. Before I got married, I went on horseback rides every morning. Now, I can only go on these trips whenever I get the chance.*

She further stated: *When I decided to get engaged to Thommy, I never thought I would get a title* (indeed, she never would, but as it is well known there is always a successor lurking who is keen for vain honors, whether in a chamber play or in the grand opera); and Virginia emphasized that her husband *isn't just the sprout of an elderly family, but first of all he's an artist!*

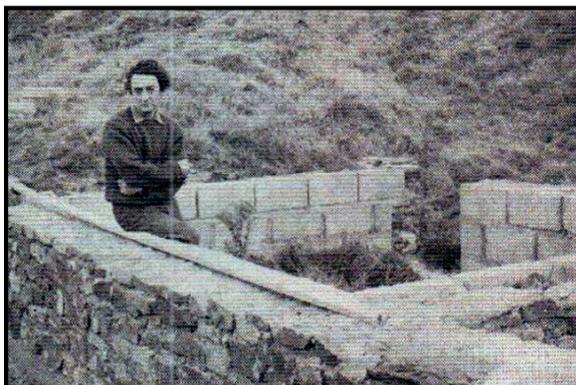
I am sorry, but I tend to assume she embellished her actual situation in which she had got herself. And instead of going to Heartland in bright autumn (that is, as we know from Pedro's tales, the most enchanting time) she set off for a trip to the continent to advertise Thommy's photographic works while seeking for herself for cinematic contacts in Greece and France (maybe eager to be cast for a more profound role of the Nouvelle Vague after her two pretty shallow works, as she will later hint in another interesting interview) – to come back without a single offer. Ouch! An artist she had. And perhaps she felt she would soon become nothing but a beautiful carbuncle.



Do you also see the discrepancy? Virginia had just been a rising actress on the way to the premier league, a free woman, well-to-do, living in her own little cottage that she was so proud of because it was paid *by her own hard work* – to suddenly swap her professional demands with household duties, and the expectations of the audience with the claims of relatives. Therefore, she probably had to continue to cut a good figure and always to smile – even more challenging off stage (to satisfy those who are close to us rather than meaningless strangers, as we basically know). Well, 'twas surely her decision to *retire* from the sparkling showbiz in which she always felt like a misfit, but for what price? To now become a fragile link in the chain of an elderly Cavalier family.

Virginia, as she was conditioned to always hide her feelings, could express herself just artificially, whether in letters or on stage, and by talking to the elements of sublime nature. In this regard, we have to wonder how to defuse the inner explosives of a receptive and impulsive tomboy so as not to ignite spontaneously when hanging by the stove in a room without a view, unemployed and despondent?

But look what a luck: Our heroine didn't even have to renounce from her Heartland, as she had recently complained about it, because the two couples used to share their free time together and kept on doing regularly trips from the east unto the west. Devon was calling like during her dreamtime! And that was all the more convenient since there was a highly active phase out there on location: Virginia had recently laid the foundation stone of Pedro's writing hut mid of '62, containing some personal gems (except of Silver's ring whose whereabouts no one ever heard of again), including an adorable of her maroon curls (a pretty romantic prop, by the way, as the ancestors liked to do in the face of their probable death from consumption or in childbirth). He will build the hut by hand, and the works will endure two further years until its completion mid of '64. The hideout is still there, clinging to the cliffs, as a sublime view point over the Celtic Sea – so that we want to rejoice: *Westward Ho!*



Whole the idea came from Virginia who might have been eager to improve her (aka Mary's) realm in Malcount Bay like *Tina* had done on Marina Cay (even though Pedro will never mention a cinematic connection). And perhaps she hoped like *Heloise* that *Abelard* would be inspired by the place when he wrote their dreamtime story with a view of the *Reclining Lady*, surrounded by seagulls in a bright haze against the endless horizon. Did she guess that she would never be granted to read his confessions with her own lively eyes, and that her restless soul would have to wait for his gift beyond death?

The eagle's nest is a pretty moody site, particularly when rain drops are banging on the panes like from pale knuckles of the ancient reef pirates who had found their watery grave on the unpredictable tides just at the foot a long time ago, as we know from Pedro's dark legends of Heartland's shores. And now it's time to summon the day when two cronies and a pirate bride will scramble over the slippery reefs, to stand in awe together under Gull Rock in the spray (that shapes the *Lady's* shoulder). The scene is even immortalized by a snapshot that will find its way into Pedro's travel book of Devon (published in 1966) to which Thommy will contribute a couple of intimate landscape impressions. Then Mary would call them from the cliffs to come in for a smouldering dinner in the Mill's kitchen. And there are more photographic documents of our strange quartet as staying together at Malcount Mouth (and albeit I would be eager to share here the forbidden fruits from a certain Exeter source that keeps Pedro's estate, I have sadly to renounce from it because some folks on both sides of the Mendip Hills couldn't be amused about my clueless lines), whether sunbathing on pebbles between the mighty boulders like *Tina* and *Evan* in Devil's Bay or at the Mill's foot as looking to the leftovers of a tiny garden, once constructed by Virginia and recently devastated by a bad winter flood (as it is mentioned in one of Pedro's *Solitudes*; and we learn about the incident through the local press when half the county, including Pedro's mother and sister, who lived in another mill nearby, was almost washed into the sea). And we may imagine whole the cast walking through the Leat to settle under a hornbeam for hours and hours – whether they were sitting there in twos, threes or fours, who will ever know?

Well, let me be honest, my perhaps a little confused readers: To watch these toffs hanging around seemingly befriended together seems a little strange to me. But perhaps this is what is called *noble understatement* – to disregard emotions smouldering under the pot lid, shake off doubts by better not mentioning them and waiting that they will eventually resolve themselves; or you take Silver's yummy drops against brooding. Tastes differ. But all of them involved, and if their hearts were bleeding and their eyes were burning, certainly agreed to always be discreet and keep their composure.

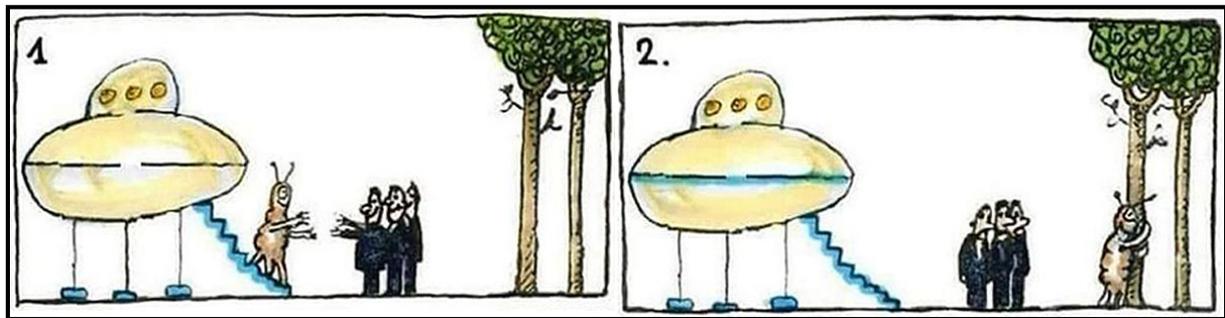


This is how we may imagine Ron Goblin and Adam Longshanks dancing around the apple tree (whose fruits were surely as sweet as honey highly desirable; and I would have instantly joined them!) – actually the righteous ground for a proper duel, at least in Jacobean times when men were tough guys and not little mice and knew how to cease the limbo early in the morning mist: Let's meet under a bold plane tree in a certain London Park! (Spoiler alert: But at the end the lady gets the bullet.)

But perhaps I have a too archaic image of Cabal and Love. So let's be sober: You don't have to be a prophet or psychologist to know that it needs a proper cut to untie the Gordian Knot, generally spoken. Yet who am I to give advices, since I myself know much about these mistakes, having lived my best years as a mistress – as wilfull as torn without a prospect of permanence. Isn't it soothing (rather, reasonable) to avoid relationship stress by being able to *lock* the companion *in the closet* at any time

(as mine always diagnosed, half funny, half annoyed)? To evade all responsibility and live just dreamtime to never become disillusioned as shackled by rings (which are nothing more than pieces of metal, a meaningless social legitimation) or about a tom(b)e of laws? To live not according to the norm but to human nature – which, of course, is neither monogamous nor determined by gender. But well, it's I who speaks so amorally, not you, a good girl of the '50s and a well-mannered lady.

And let's be honest, especially given our tidal range like in the Bristol Channell (some may call it delicate, others difficult and some even disturbed; but I don't bother about those emotionless Stoics who never face their own self-denial!): Weird creatures like us should better stay alone, for their own good and so as not to be a burden for those close to them – preferably in a hermit's grotto in the rocks high above the sea at the farthest land's end (by the way, my fondest dream since I was marooned in this depressing world) – than shivering at home as lacking any hold next to ignorant folks who pretend to act for our best. Actually, they just want to have peace from us and dito we from them, that's the everyday procedure between relatives – who wouldn't be badly experienced with this? Since everyone is struggling against the demands of the others from childhood onwards through (worse) partnership to (worst) becoming a parent; to be conditioned according to their ideal and neglected in our needs and nature. They shall rather have a yapper who lets itself be stroked and struck and is always grateful for their grace. We feel alone with them together (and vice-versa), like Aliens living on different planets.



What doesn't fit can never be made to fit. Given any clashes, *DISTANCE* is the one and only rational solution. Never try to join together what isn't meant to hold if the crippled construct isn't cursed to collapse and drag all of them involved (whether individuals or entire peoples) into the abyss.

But sadly our orphaned sheep had never learned to be alone on her path of life, as she had always lived in the flock led by false shepherds, to become addicted to relationships and absolutely dependent on other's advices (to not even know how to dress without their help, whether in a fluffy nightgown, a stately gown or in a wing shirt, and sadly in this chronology). So that at the end, there would be no more than glorious ten hours in whole her life in which she would be only with herself and could breathe freely, oh what a paradox. A time of healing Solitude as summoned by Lavater – to calm down from their clamour and find peace from their claims. *Happy is the Bride of the Cold Genius!*

I would even go further. Basically, every partnership is doomed to break. Our species isn't determined to stay together, and every matter of the heart is just a temporary (respectively *hormonal*) disturbance to fade soon away after a deceptive and vain summit. Nothing will remain of it than disillusion if not even perpetual aversion, that's the natural course. Look at tiny creatures who devour their partner after making love. They choose wisely! Humans are simply not mutual, but some moralizers don't want to see it. Especially the genders do not match at all. They should stay among themselves, renounce from competition and communicate through bars or books, that's my recommendation for a carefree life – and look, there would be only Love, not Cabal in the world. The primal conflict would be overcome: The senseless battle of the sexes.

Actually, as everybody knows who is keen on letters, you shall never meet a trusted friend in person if you don't want to lose all illusions (it's the same misery as watching a sad movie adaptation of your fondest book that has been under your pillow for so long). It's so much less stressful to embrace whole the world in the distance than a pressing hug in the night of one or three too close to us.

And, indeed, that's the way how our two protagonists confirmed their companionship by continuing to write countless letters like *Abelard and Heloise* (in the sum of one per week, if I calculate correctly).



And she repeatedly asked Pedro to write all about their dreamtime from at least early '64 – to wonder about her obscure intentions that seemingly disregard (un)foreseeable effects. Virginia was certainly eager to relieve the inner tension of both unmet needs and her unresolved past to break through the barrier of prescribed speechlessness that was slowly poisoning her. If she didn't even hope, given her lack of consequence in making own decisions, to summon a scandal but freedom of them all involved with their eyes wide shut. Oh bitter irony! Our heroine had desperately struggled for a conventional relationship over half a decade – to not know how to get out of her social ties in which she had entangled herself like in a spiderweb of pain. Now at the latest she was the narcoleptic puppet in the game of others. The Seagull had let her wings clipped.

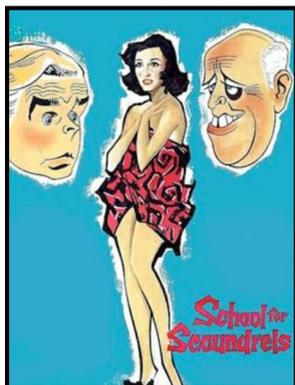
Let's speak about the London backdrop during this phase of her life in time lapse. A *Kensington studio* is mentioned for the time between at least '61 and '63 in a couple of rare and little visualized home stories (given her fear to invite the greedy audience into her more or less protective walls – and look how unashamed I act in the same way even 60 years later!). Admittedly, it's the only dwelling that I couldn't verify – You let me crack a hard nut with it!

To approach her little realm we have first to recall the initial situation: Virginia's expulsion from the Dolphin Lagoon end of '59. Afterwards she had to move around between some relatives and friends until she settled down in her own house somewhere in the west sometime in 1960. And concurrently, she commuted (not to call it oscillated) between hers and Pedro's residence until at least mid of '61. As we have already learned, the latter was in Carmel Court and we witnessed here the pathetic performance of another supporting character in a mysterious relationship with our protagonists: the cameo of the Greene Man who might have been more or less effective for the plot development.

*Virginia's house* is only mentioned once by Pedro. Leslie is the guy who will give us some insights from his memory many decades later at an unknown time after the *Doctor* filming; but we never find out if he describes one and the same place. In his biography he calls it first a *Chelsea house off Kings Road* (to later verbally relocate it, strangely enough), including that *indoor dovecote* with the birdies eating from her hand – who wouldn't be inclined to do it like them, even if you are a big bird? – but he also noticed less pleasant things (as told in his comment on a recent *Doctor* edition): When he *went to her house on a day she had in the centre of London* (sic!), he *gathered she was in an awkward position. She was very unhappy. She had a problem in her private life.* I would boldly interpret that she was just besieged by the Olde and the Young Pretender – but this is pure speculation.

Regarding the spatial clues, he may have confused Cromwell (were she had lived nearby in the Scarsdale Ward for a couple of years, by Pedro wrongly attributed to Earls Court) with Kings Road – but Leslie may also be joking since both toffs were not so different: the first was legitimized by the people's clamour, the second by the parson's drivel; and both of them were as superfluous as a goiter. What is almost certain is that Leslie knew her former companion at least by sight, since Pedro had fondled her on the *Doctor's* backstage a fortnight long – to assume that he guessed what was going on during his visit to her home. My, twas a striking couple, that adorable girl and *the middle-old lecher!* But even more he would have been quite bewildered to find her in an embarrassing situation with an ominous third person whose name he never revealed.

And like Hugh, who contradicts the importance of professional doubts for her domestic miseries, he

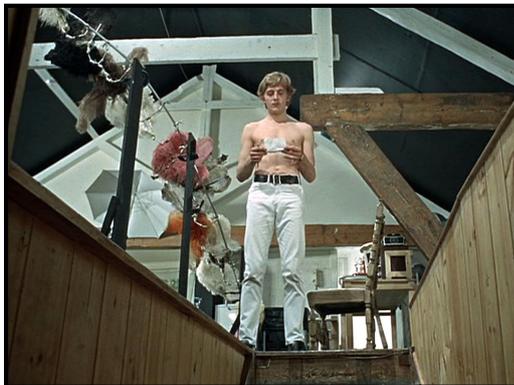


emphasizes: *It was after Sellers' film. I don't think it had anything to do with the films. It was her private life. I don't think she could cope with this.* Wherever he was and whoever he saw, Leslie drew the right conclusions and pronounced them more clearly like no other (strangely including Pedro who preferred to beat around the bush) through the causal connection from her relationship status to her fatal drive half a decade later, by saying: *Virginia had got herself into a complicated ménage-à-trois with a writer and another mystery person which led to a drive to a beautiful spot in the country where she took her own life.*

She should have better become a contented convent caretaker than the overloaded landlady of obscure scoundrels, whether with dark, light or blackened eyes, who failed (or did not even want) to agree on their claim.

And now comes the cameo of the little location spotter: I think I have walked up and down through every mews in search of the lost lodge to find a handful suitable places in Mid and South Kensington over the decades. One of my favourites was the Adam and Eve Mews off Kensington High with a couple of tiny one-storey cottages with gable roofs. But Virginia could have even taken over Lavinia's semi-detached houses which looked very similar (albeit unlikely since Pedro would have lived right next to door in the meantime) – anyway, the latter were most likely the model for her selection.

Let's take a little leap of time into the '60s when young folks, artists and celebs, began to refurbish Victorian dwellings which had survived the Blitz, then a pretty cheap pleasure. And we find this mews revival immortalized in *BLOW-UP* through the iconic photographer's studio: Thomas' private living space looks very similar to hers; and it's even located in her favourite quarter off Holland Park Gate. So we can assume that later, given his lodging on screen, she would reflect on her own circumstances – which had already passed her by, as Virginia would have changed Downtown for the outback then. And, by the way, it's also my personal dwelling dream, but because I am not one of those oligarchic invaders who displace the natives, I can't afford, like the vast majority, two or three million pounds for even a tiny cottage nowadays. I am sorry for another digression which may be anachronistic and not political correct. But with regard to the Swinging Sixties I would like to state, maybe representative for many Nostalgics: *Bringing on back the good times* before a sharp breeze came from the east!



Given a handful of spatial clues, I am now pretty sure that Virginia returned to the Scarsdale Ward to settle in a cottage cluster, nestling in a street block that completely excludes the roaring town, much according to her need of privacy (and all the more pleasant at the foot of an Orthodox Church with its chimes cheerfully sounding). I couldn't find a contemporary outside view, but I learned about a couple of halls which opened into a small courtyard (that's why I had to discard the Adam and Eve Mews which is just a dead end). The interior consists of one large open space (or possibly two; we seem to see several stairs so we may assume that two semi-detached houses were joined) under a pitched roof with skylights (probably to the north). We find a thick mattress (that we have just shared in the morning after her engagement night) on the mezzanine and a small window in the back gable. Even though all the clues fit perfectly in a certain site of tiny arts and crafts studios, I'll not reveal its name in order not to embarrass myself and not to lure the herd to trample in her supposed footsteps like elephants in her castle – the local spotter will have recognized the little idyll anyway. However, I was enchanted when I first stood there on a hot summer day like on an island of tranquility and imagined Virginia going through the violet door (or perhaps it was maroon at that time) for many happy returns.

The first article that mentions her studio dates back to late '61 (as it refers to the upcoming release of *Only Two Can Play*). It is strangely called *Two Sides of Miss Maskell* and gives us unusually intimate insights into her privacy during an exuberant appearance, both visually and verbally, like never before and again. Therefore I would interpret it as a key sequence of her transformation (respectively the one we should perceive) in her deceptive heyday. Virginia seems to be eager to counteract the annoying judgement of being a *fey person* far from her metier, if not even to convey a more personal message.

The article contains an outstanding picture I like to share with the inclined audience courtesy of Rod. (Once I was keen on a mixed lot of stunning stuff, including this photo, to become quite annoyed when an ominous person robbed it from under my nose – to get to know the latter later as the admin of a certain Tube page dedicated to our heroine and as the secret conservator of her visual testimony – so thanks to this rascal I can share some of his gems with you from time to time.)



We are granted to watch Virginia as posing on the balcony of her mezzanine in a quite lascivious pose like we will hardly see her a second time (at least not at home but soon on screen, unfortunately). She is lightly dressed in a fluttering bathrobe and shows her extroverted side – or a masque, as she looks actually rather anxiously to the photographer (who seems to be trustworthy enough to be invited by her). But above all, the article is entertaining as it portrays our heroine exalted if not even naughty: *She roars with laughter* (yeah, that street urchin again – and we know it can sound pretty dirty. Remember the *Doctor*?!) and jokes with the chap: *I can be charming but I can also be a bitch!* We will never hear again such statements which contradict her moderate manners. Then she emphasizes, as she is upset about the F-word: *What ever you do, don't call me FEY!* As if she wants to prove her current high spirits and to get rid of those old clichés that stick to her (from first the *English Rose* through the cultivated lady to recently the good wife), keen to change her image to an independent woman who can convince in every role, and even if only as a *whisky-swinging nympho*. But beyond these professional intentions, there are certainly more private plots behind the scene. It sounds to me like her very last (or first) attempt to clarify her claim, when she presents herself as the landlady by shouting loudly to an ominous person: *Shut up and come in, Darling!* Who was just

sneaking around outside the door like a little mouse afraid of the cat and timidly squeaking after her – A big contrast to once that little sparrow in Mephisto's hand, not true?! Obviously she has undergone a big development, driven by suffering and waiting for Godot. Even though we will never find out who the guy is who is hiding from the press, there may be clues: We should remember who used to creep secretly through the Dolphin galleries exactly like this. But furthermore, what is worth pondering about is the strangely abrupt end of that article with a reference to her Devon (p)leisure:

*Miss Maskell rides an Arab stallion bareback, but she can't be really fey with a laugh like that.*

What did Kenneth say about innuendo? In this regard, I am pretty sure who is the guy on guard.



A year later at the end of '62 – her world had totally changed and also her appearance as a young wife – we catch another glimpse of her little realm. Virginia welcomes the visitor in casual clothes sprinkled with pain t stains – as she is just painting the railing of her mezzanine – to sit down shyly on the top of the steep stairs. Now we see the roof windows well lit, a painted frieze (or made of tiles) at the rear wall and a big poster on the left, probably according to her taste (I couldn't find out who the artist was due to my ignorance of modern art, admittedly). And let me quote some lines of the chosen press chap who seemed to be a little baffled that she was personally working on the decoration of her own house: *As I knocked on the door of one of the halls that opened into a small courtyard, I felt like I was visiting a painter rather than a movie star. After changing the interior design according to her wishes, she is doing the paint job herself.* That reminds another time so much of *Tina's* efforts on Marina Cay. It's enchanting to see how

passionately she cares for her very first own residence, hard-earned by her actor fees. She emphasizes repeatedly how proud she is of it; and she is obviously happy to live in Downtown (or in Kensington's heart) just at the beginning of the Swing – to rack one's brains about why she would replace her cozy little haven only three years later with the burden of a much too large manor at the border to nowhere.

The third article is from December '62 just before the Big Frrreeze will rob her breath for a couple of depressive months. It gives some revealing insights concerning her professional self-perception after the *Willing* misery. And it's the very article that refers to her house as a *Kensington studio*.



The attached picture is also adorable: Virginia, sitting on a striped sofa, looks at us with her hypnotical left eye. So far, so good, but the verbal nuances sound dubious to be inclined to establish a connection to her recent return from abroad without any offers. This time, the press chap seems more annoying than trustworthy: To his more or less suggestive question *Where are the parts?* she replies *It's improving slightly* – what did not correspond to the facts because she just *suddenly retired* – and then bitterly complains: *Why don't they make a film about a (true) woman?* She seems to be eager (regardless of, or causal to, her recent withdrawal) to play a more profound role, obviously bored of all those female stereotypes which she was forced to mime for so long and annoyed with that image that was imposed on her, furthermore after she just ran into a knife when she tried to counteract the clichés with her most infamous part. The article doesn't deal with her legitimate doubts but briefly counters (sounding pretty presumptuous to me) *this Virginia Maskell blasts in a very big horn when she gets bored*. Ouch! After half a decade having been *the critics darling* (although often ironically labelled as *a girl with an own opinion*, given her extraordinary views on film and fame), she is now considered

difficult and arrogant, oh my! The sad article ends as she is staring into the looking glass *with a disdainful face*. She seems to be rather discontented with the circumstances – and with herself.

Indeed, I could hardly find another home story until '65. Maybe due to such experiences, she was done with those suggestive folks who were penetrating her privacy at the wrong time and putting the finger on the sore spot. From now on she withdrew from the publicity more or less consistently – whether urged by her relatives who may have not been amused about her public image, or by her very own decision, happily freed from those old burdens that she never wanted to carry, who knows? However, at the end of this ambivalent year which had started that radiantly, almost everything seemed to have gone wrong. Virginia had landed roughly from her cozy balcony onto the ground of reality.



Certainly a professional flop, probably a family clash and possibly now a very last story from inside her home thanks to the bitchy press – that's the trinity of this depressing autumn to remember. To make matters worse, a brutish winter came at Christmas to go down in British history, still in the collective remembrance – and especially hers, as it continued the fall and took her further away from her sparkling springtime. And given her discontented mirror view, let me apply a press release to her: *Virginia's Big Freeze started on Boxing Day 1962 and it lasted until March 1963*.

What is certain is that she will reach her emotional low point in *February '63* – that is the strange title of her most sinister poem; or let us call it the epitome of all despair. Her *Annus Mirabilis* was over.

Obviously she fell into melancholy while listlessly eating the leftovers of big parties in the course of the double event (with Rupert chewing on a bone as he snuggled up to her feet); and she may have reflected on past adventures versus future challenges – but as we know, her life was well practiced with in-between-states – and her sudden decision of the 15th of January not to everyone's palate.

We should better stay alone given our black thoughts, so as not to bother those people close to us and vice-versa. Even more so when we are immersed in Christ-mess reflections of many unmerry parties (like that of 1958 when her pretty darling had let her smoulder at the oven). And let's think of Virginia's preview to her 27th birthday on the 27th of February, as she will be surrounded by all folks and urged to wear her happiest masque albeit she would rather cry – if you are the loneliest person among the ignorant crowd, you just want to get out of there and find comfort in nature. I would guess you didn't look forward to this date. Rather you exclaimed: *Let us join the club of 27!* Wise woman!

And *Logan's Run* comes in my mind, one of my favourite films of the 1970s (albeit starring your successor, considered as the *English Rose*, the adorable Jenny. I imagine you would like it anyway):

What about *Renewal* – didn't you anticipate that too? It's a wise choice to prevent yourself from becoming old and ugly (just to remember the ill-fated inmates of the geriatric ward for whom you sang). Hey! Who wants to live for ever and cross the border of 30? Surely not a young lady confronted with the impermanence of beauty, fame and love from which nothing will remain than disillusion!



Now that we have probed the general weather situation, we may imagine you as laying wrapped in blankets on your saggy mattress (with messy hairs and eye bags like in your unadorned image) and staring northbound through the roof lights, seeking for a sunray – but there will be none for about 4 months; even worse the slopes are covered with fat snow that threatens to break the panes and sink your heeling raft. An ice-cold draft is brrreezing down and your chimney burns all winter with you beside, shaking like a little cold sparrow flapping its ruffled wings, to immerse yourself in poems as occupational therapy while chain smoking increases the mental miasma – hopefully you have stocked up on a large amount of packs but we may fear that there is a shortage of supplies because the paths are snowbound, sleighs are driven and people are skiing through the streets so that the pubs and shops won't be open for weeks, oh my! So that you are keen for a ciggie and your stomachs growls after the Christmas goose has been devoured down to its last bone – lest we forget the sad truth of your inedible dishes (and they say that a wife that cooks badly is the biggest nuisance to every husband, by the way). As a little escape from the boredom you may leave the violet door and wander up and down with Rupert romping around through the tiny gallery that connects the studio units and catch a cloudy view into the court with a single tree lonesome in the middle (today here is bare pavement since it will later pass away) – a cozy scenery reminding of a cloister (what else? And there are always trees around you! As it is known, the dearest companions of lonely people, apart from little mutts). And perhaps you think about, now at the latest, how it would be to swap your raft of love stuck in the pack ice with a warm cot in a convent cell. You feel like marooned in Antarctica with just your roof protruding from the icy desert like the top of Scott's tent – and we guess that it cracked when his frozen limbs were torn off by the roots.

As looking into the haze with your mood according to the circumstances, you scratch a pen on a scrap of paper to prevent your fingers from freezing (and if it's bold to claim, Orpheus will respond you in his poem called *Winter* with phrases similar to yours after Eurydice will have crossed the Styx).

So let me quote some keywords from *February* '63 which are linked to your current perspective:

*Grief / Trailing the streets like a broken flower / Tears on a cheek /*

*Brittle and blind, and nothing grows / Or breathes / The trees shiver.*



But far beyond this moody snapshot, there lies a premonition in your lines (another thread of destiny as through whole your life) which can hardly be disputed – even though lesser noticed as ranking behind *Rockhall* (aka *April*), your best reflected poem. The latter will be once considered as summoning your fatal wander by the inclined audience (thanks to the *Agenda* millennium edition *A Tribute to Mephisto* that will reunite his and your poetry after decades of oblivion not before 2002). But in fact, *April* drives away the winter as walking through Easterly green; and it's happily related to your first impression of Pedro's grove in the enchanted Mill Leat: *I came in silence to your woods / Warm, damp wood, green smelling, dark.* In contrast to this redeeming nature, *February* draws an image of the bitter cold ground that sounds so ultra-violent that it's almost too painful to read:

*The earth lies, scuffed and cold / Wooden head, cracked bitter hands /*

*And slippery streaming feet wander / In a hopeless drift against the wind.*

And in this way we have to sleep-walk together into a certain January eve. To think about whether you foresee through your hypnotical third eye a place somewhere lost in time that you don't even know yet? Or would this poem one day serve as your model for self-fulfilling prophecy? Or as a projection surface that others would like to adopt to spin their yarn around that incident? Anyway, whether it's an current insight into your mood or a distant prediction, you end the poem with the iconic lines:

*This is winter, and this I am.*

Indeed, almost exactly five years later you would become one with the Cold Genius. If...

You always came from the warmth abroad, from Africa and the Caribbean. Who wouldn't be bewildered that you would one day lose yourself in the cold of British Winter? A season you detest! There is something strange about the metamorphosis of the Mermaid into the White Woman.



But this time, the Big Freeze was followed by New Hope. As we know her changing between misery and ecstasy within the twinkling of an eye, our half frozen fish finger soon awoke from hibernation. And the young couple, having been locked up in their tiny igloo for so long, received happy tidings when the first rays of spring drove away the cold. For unto them a son was given in Advent '63 in a well renowned Hammersmith clinic and the birth was announced appropriately in established London newspapers (quite discreetly not illustrated) to imagine the scene like *Tina* holding *the lucky baby*. Therefore we may assume (albeit missing private facts about the next two years) that she will be pretty busy with caring for the family and running the household. Nevertheless, she dared to start over (even if seemingly done with the big screen after the *Willing* clash) with frequent cameos in radio and television plays – let's just mention a small selection:

Mid of '64 *The White Rat* was filmed, an episode of *Gideon's Way*, then a popular crime series that is lesser known today. When the show began with our heroine greeting us with the vodka glass in her one hand and the ciggie in the other, I had to call out: No please, not again a gang bride! (Remember expectations of the goofy fans?) But her role develops into one of her most dramatic performances: She maintains her iron loyalty to an old and ugly villain to yet betray him to the authorities at the end. Despite it, we guess she will never cope with it; she simply can't solve from her passionate feelings. And I could finally applaud from my couch: Brava, oh my faithful soul – *There can be only one!* When I first saw the *Rat* many decades later (thanks to the Virginia Maskell Tube Channells which preserve that rare old stuff) I was intrigued again by Virginia's versatility from the bottom of her heart to express an emotional bandwidth from malice to deepest despair. And when she is finally dragged away while sobbing as if *a waterfall of tears would meet the sea*, I imagined our *little wet sparrow* like this being transported from Dolphin Yard to the asylum on Highgate, sadly by fact (an even more intense experience since I racked my brains about her fate just while reading Pedro's confessions).



Around those days she worked with Pat McGoohan for the first time in an episode of *Danger Man*. It's a familiar portrayal of a damsell in distress. *The Colonel's Daughter* is pretty misled by and so dependent on her villainous father that she even tries to shoot the righteous avenger (who is played by Pat) with a big pistol in her little fist – to be reminded of her second telly role as a bold young lady who threatened Bob like this. Or, by the way, how we can imagine Virginia on an unnamed set when she was strolling around with a loaded gun of Pedro's late uncle – since Pedro was a pacifist, he didn't had a weapon, at least not a metal one – and allegedly scaring the crew almost to death by juggling the revolver instead of a ciggie (if we are inclined to believe another of his surreal narrations) – to ponder again about the meaning of being *fey* and/or frustrated (and whether a fruit knife wouldn't be enough to peel the worm out of the apple; or look at Eve who didn't even need a tool to permanently frighten whole the men-kind, especially its parts in cassocks, but just a proper bite).

Interestingly, *Danger Man* (aka *Secret Agent Drake*), not *The Avengers*, was the most popular series and Pat the best paid telly actor at that time. And as we will later learn, her guest role also had a major impact on our plot. Two years later, Pat will cast Virginia again in both her best remembered role and his most iconic work, the series *The Prisoner* (even if only in another cameo for a rather short-lived comeback). She will play a reluctant *Decoy* in the pilot episode *Arrival* – sounding familiar?



Although Virginia's participation in *The Avengers* would be an intriguing idea, I can't really imagine that she would have enjoyed beeping in *Auntie*'s golden bird cage or fighting with quirky villains as dressed in bizarre leather costumes, even less wearing a daring collar in the infamous episode *A Touch of Brimstone* with Peter Wyngarde's bewitching performance as a modern Dashwood. But how I would have liked to see the latter playing with her together! Since I believe his appearance could be what her big brother might have looked like, rather, something like her male reflection: Creole, expressive, burning from the depth (and even more familiar as juggling the ciggies more elegantly than anyone else).

Nevertheless, it's worth considering whether she should actually be cast, since she herself hinted her rejection of a long-term role in an obscure series without mentioning its name (at least just for her top in *Only* instead of for the *Willing* flop), so that we may be inclined she referred to the early season of a popular telly crime. And albeit I am also one of Honor's fans, I would have really liked to see Virginia as *Cathy Gale*. This tough and compassionate lady is my favourite female *Avenger* and, what is often overlooked, it's actually she who raised a certain *Steed* – who was previously an uncouth guy – to become a gentleman. Given Virginia's image as a sophisticated lady (until destruction in *Willing*), she might have even been intended to play *Miss M*, a sober secretary who longed for love of a real man in an endless limbo of the longest-running agent soap on the big screen (but well, tis just speculation).



Unfortunately, even the self-confident Honor, who had acted on equal terms with her male companion, let herself be seduced into a minor role of the first *B-Movie* (I spare to mention the embarrassing name of her spineless character which should be well known to every lecher). She played a Sapphic who is converted by a random stallion in the twinkling of an eye (respectively in the course of a brutal raid) – this is symptomatic of how one suppresses one's true nature in the face of ignorant forces. The actor will soon repeat the procedure on poor *Marnie* in one of the most disturbing movie scenes when he shows his traumatized wife that her place is always under the man. I can't watch this misogynistic rubbish without getting sick! Those were the times of cinema dominated by rakes who lurked both behind the curtains and applauded in the audience (and they still do it against all announcements of a paradigm change, even blowing bigger Trumpets than ever – paradoxically, since mostly these duds have the smallest flutes).

However, let me spin a little yarn of some lighter cross-connections: Did you ever realize that Virginia was actually the first Bond girl long before a certain unknown Ursula would take over the baton? Indeed, a certain *Tina Bond* enjoyed summer, sun and sand in the Caribbean in 1957 much like Ursula in 1962 when the latter rose from the waves with a funny little Calypso song (dubbed) on her lips that is actually based on the origin of *Come back to the Virgin Islands*. Did Virginia sit in the audience and thought about her *glorious four months* abroad? She might have longed for being on location. And as we heard, around those days another south sea dream was aired, the *Bounty*, with the colleague she admired. Interestingly, the local Saint of Tortola is named Ursula – but given pure physical presence and her total lack of talent, the other girl was just determined to become a pin-up girl. So I am inclined to believe Virginia couldn't really warm to that role which only fitted for a bouncing cleavage.

And let me add another synchronicity: We saw a certain Ian Fleming play a minor role (I am not kidding; if you know, you know) when he lured *Tina* to a remote isle, named Death Chest, Cross Key or something like this. It was here where the doctor contributed to *Tina's* misfortune. When she was happily active and painting boldly on a ladder, he prescribed rest for the heavily pregnant (aka patient; as we know this merges for men) – what was pretty counterproductive because she fell out of her rocking chair to get into even greater trouble. For me, this is another plea for only following your gut feeling rather than advice of a society that is geared towards absolute security (aka belly surveillance). The real risk lies in never facing challenges but suppressing energies; in enforced calmness instead of stress release. But sorry, I tend to see secret threads of destiny where nothing exists than my fey ideas.

Well, let's short stick with *Bond*. Since he, like our heroine, was alienated by the shallow surface of their business and he was also a devoted Catholic, Pat had rejected the role of the protagonist (aka the epitome of chauvinists, in fiction), and this is not a legend. Good man! But that shouldn't bother the inclined audience since Sean (the spearhead of toxic maleness, in fact), would soon perfectly melt with the agent's sympathetic character.



What is nearly unknown is that our heroine had played with Sean in a forgotten episode of the *Armchair Theatre* (in which she had performed a handful of times) years before he would become the world-infamous agent. It was called *The Boy with the Meat-Axe*. Ouch! Thanks to a hint and a very rare pic of my letter friend Rod, we can even see her scared in the corner as she looks at the brutes who are involved in a proper brawl, apparently agitated by their testosterone disturbance – well, should these brazen bulls let off steam on each other better than on the lady, not true?!

Lest we forget that Sean liked to express in public (and used to handle like this) that it would be appropriate to slap a woman's face from time to time to show her the righteous place in his sick universe; and he was then with these views in good company (hello Pete, just to greet one of many peers!). Our heroine in distress was also experienced with male supremacy – and, we can't neglect this disturbing fact in our causal chain that leads to her decay – as one of those faithful souls who fulfill the cliché (which she was so eager to avoid on screen) of submitting to their fate. *She too* strolled around proudly presenting her bruised eye as a proof of male affection (oh my!) to be compensated for grief and pain with an unsolid ring (or two). She should better have listened to Mary's words of warning given the nature of men, to cut off old curls in time (or whatever else *Ol'Abelard* was missing in his mature years and certainly deserved). But Virginia couldn't escape from her roots. As a sprout of a dysfunctional family and urged to grow up in an orphanage for good girls, she became addicted to relations due to her homesickness. And therefore she would never reach the 1970s when women freed themselves from male slavery. Bitterly ironical, much in contrast to some of her bold roles of independent women, she remained in the '50s as the embodiment of an obedient lady until her doom.

But let's fly away from always the same misery that lurks in Cavalier's closets onto the radiant stage and mention the legendary *Son et Lumière Tower Show* of 1963. Virginia appeared as Anne Boleyn,



who resists the cruelty of her husband with witty lightness: *"I'm glad I've a trim little neck" she says with a high giggle. "I have heard the executioner is very good"* (so he can't be a quack, not true?!). *Henry is heard from afar: "Cut off her head!"* Sadly I couldn't find a photo of the gig; but we may imagine her proudly presenting her swan neck with great delight, ready to be gnawed on it. Yummy (I apologize for my little Malcount inside)! And I remember her playing a similar role in one of many plays on the stage of her school in the early '50s. Virginia was clothed in a Tudor gown (that may have been the model for her pretty wedding dress – a bizarre idea and a gloomy prediction, by the way). Indeed, on a wandering through the glorious history of Wain Hall, it is

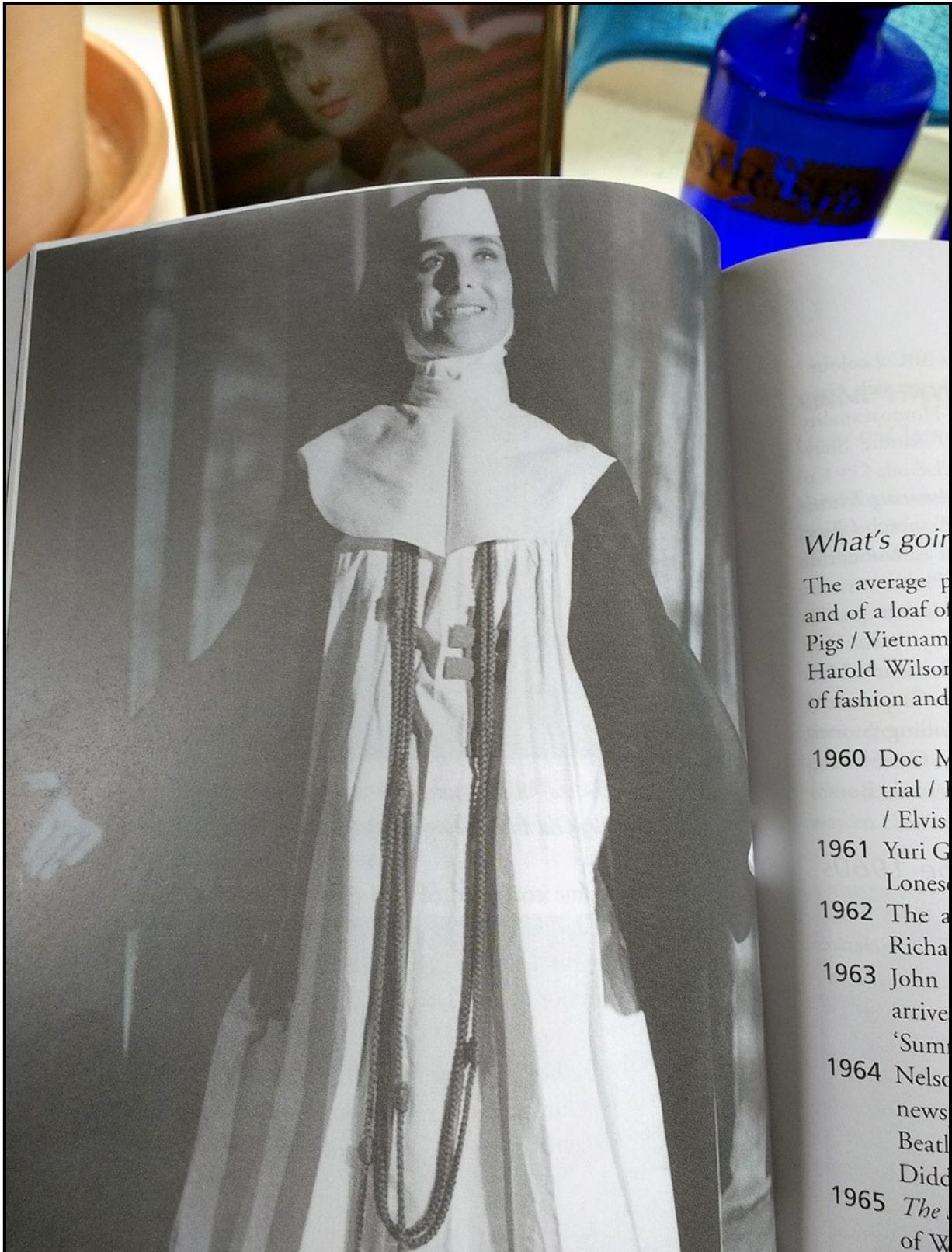
worth mentioning that her convent was actually a short-term residence of the Boleyn clan to be taken over later by Mad King Henry who was up to mischief here with one or six of his ill-fated wives.

As we heard above, the climax of 1964 was another comeback to Virginia's beloved convent. Her acclaimed appearance in the *Pageant of Wain Hall* as *Perpetua, the good spirit of the house*, was possibly the last unclouded moment of her professional life, if not even her most fulfilling experience. I wasn't in the audience to watch the play in rapture; so let me quote some lines from the *Fishy Tales*: *The amazing drama with Virginia Maskell seemed to take up every minute.*

*Wain Hall had always a strong theatrical tradition and the '60s saw the revival of this powerful influence. The Pageant in 1964 celebrated the granting of the manor (a thousand years ago).*

*The backdrops, costumes and scenery were of the highest standard and there was even an incidental music by an East-Anglian composer, connected with Ben (and therefore we may assume also with Pedro – remember Mother Superior as the latter's fondest fan? We can't get rid of him, not even here).*

You looked radiantly happy as if you were glowing from within when you stood on the stage in the pose of a Canoness with your arms outstretched as if you wanted to take us into your embrace.



And you are well remembered by all the *Old Fishes* until today, last but not least for being *Perpetua* – what means *permanence* (the greatest happiness ever that you never found in the limbo of your life). Given your ostracism, that seems for me forgiving. Most of your works are almost forgotten, your public performances, your personal poems and, above all, your private life that is treated with absurd discretion. You were even denied a plaque in the world outside where you were always just a stranger.

As if someone aimed to erase your name and make you vanish wherever and with whom you *lived* – as you had predicted in *Hospital*: Will anyone remember the unknown woman who died alone in bed? In loving memory your name remains at least in your convent like nowhere else – it’s the righteous place to be for your immortal soul, perhaps the one and only haven where you felt (not un)invited.

Therefore I assume that you could have spent the night here when the show was over and reclined in a private room – the times of awkward dormitories came just to an end and the mighty old bays, where you had blinked into the first rays of sunlight shining through stained glass, would be soon abandoned – of the brand-new red-bricked annex that both contrasts and melts with the bold old wing; and they embrace together a modernist version of a monastery court. You may have felt here totally recovered for the very first time since you had left your desperately beloved convent over a decade before to be thrown out into a challenging world of manifold threats and weasels lurking behind trunks in a forest that you can’t see for the trees. It was like coming home and you would have liked to stay for ever.

But given intense impressions, we may guess you couldn’t sleep and set off for a tour around the nightly campus to wander all alone through the cloister galleries. And we imagine a slim figure in a flattering gown (like Pedro had frequently found you in trance, more or less narcoleptic) so that some girls on search for a ciggie, who just cross your path, could one day be inspired for another *Fishy Tale* of a strange apparition even decades later (albeit admittedly I haven’t find the passage yet).

At first you enter the hall through the stage door just beside your lodging, a place of many happy memories, as your juvenile plays were praised by mates and staff; and therefore you could perhaps forget for a deceptive moment that your brothers, dad and mum were missing and all the ragamuffins from your lane, until the emptiness would soon return on pillows soaked with tears in the ice-cold bed. And now again the auditorium is full of absence after the last applause has ceased.

For whatever reason your teachers praised you away so that you never became a Canoness, we can only guess. Perhaps you lacked the strength in belief and were attracted to worldly temptations; certainly, a tomboy would rather like to walk on a hot pavement than to knee on a cold chapell floor. But maybe right now, you hope for an opportunity to leave both the circus and your closest’s closets to become finally part of the staff – as a drama teacher (the best and prettiest they could ever engage; another missed chance, sadly enough) or even join their medical station in Africa as you wished in your unbridled youth. You were eager to embrace all the less fortunate in the world and your energy pulsed from the depths of your heart. But albeit you had even completed a course in first aid and the ticket in the pocket to support the righteous cause behind the Iron Curtain, you flew westward from the east wind to the Islands in the Sun. And look where you are now, returned to the roots, marooned on a cloister isle in a sea of sobs, threatened by ominous bubbles rising from the abyss.



In the midst of the night, you might be driven to consult your emmerited Mother, given diverse doubts of your existence, lacking your adequate community in which *everyone takes care of each other and is taken care of*. What remained of your childhood illusions and her great expectations? A cameo in a nun costume! Missing your natural habitat, you feel like a gasping carp in a drying pond rather than a lively fish in a sparkling stream. And Mephisto’s recent hesitance to write a little retrospect (*if more whole than holy*) is certainly not helpful to tear you out of your social bandages in which you have wrapped yourself like an Egypt mummy that is buried alive. But you trust in Mother’s wisdom and compassion, even more in good memory of her blessing of your delicate relation five short years ago.



On your way to the cell ward you pass by a Madonna who is shaped after the model of a lively young girl. Are the nuns a little jealous for being faced here day by day with unworldly beauty and worldly life? More likely, they are delighted, given an enchanting smile that would never leave the hall like a comforting light beam from the world beyond the bars. When we enter her chamber, I'll spare myself the usual haze of ciggies since I assume Mother is an ascetic, but you may like to share an apple or three. And when you open your heart to your fondest confidant, I play a little mouse to secretly listen; and what I think to pick up from the murmuring is this:

"I had only two men in whole my life; the first by nature, the second by convention. But I can't stand to be alone with them together." And you beg for her advice: "Oh Mother, what shall I do?"

I am not sure if I understand her correctly; but it sounds like (since she is a wise old lady):

"My Daughter, you have to choose one or none!" Or is it rather:

"Submit to the place that the Looord has assigned you!" (since she is just a humourless nun)?

I don't hear your silent reply but I guess that you think about the first and prefer to do the latter.



Following this serious talk you might be eager to get out of here and respire freely in the convent's beautiful surroundings; and a starry moonlit night with the cicadas chirping is certainly helpful to calm down (just like a wandering through dancing snow flakes to cool a heated mind).

We pass a sheltering cedar and the red gate that leads from the forecourt to the endless avenue. The latter lies in a blooming meadow of wild flowers like swimming in a yellow sea. You were running up and down here thousand and one times – more or less willingly, since as we have learned, it's the place of chicken chase on every single morning. Well, I would have rebelled (and indeed, I did; those teachers should never touch me! And you will guess that I was always the last one on the sports bank). Never submit to their physical conditioning that is only intended to numb the free will and harden the body to the benefit of gender order: Boys and girls shall become warriors both on their places that the Looord has assigned them, whether on the battle field or in childbed, so simple, so fatal. And therefore I like to quote the Grumbler with the Cigar: *No sports!*

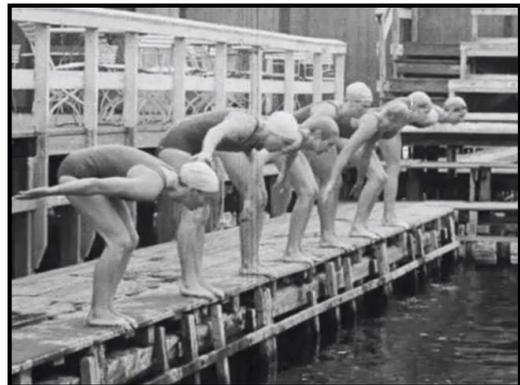
And he adds while winking at us: "Did you ever realize that when you light a cigar, its maiden voyage will also be its last?" Well, if this is what they ponder about, they seem to be a bit bored there above. Besides, that's not really a great wisdom, even less if we follow the path of asceticism and renounce from smoking in time. But so what? We can't agree on every single field. This is you, such a sportive young lady, and you have always been keen to come out of yourself, by hook or by crook.



As you roam around the ornamented farm, you indulge in many happy memories. How you were brought up with all the creatures great and small. And do you still remember the ciggies passing from hand to hand when the chicks rested in a heap of hay? Until a humourless nun flagellated you through the avenue (well, this sequence is admittedly my naughty contribution; to be honest, I believe that the nuns were mostly lovable and even may have taken a forbidden puff from time to time with you together.

Rather, I am tempted to assume that your convent was a funny little Thelema, as it is hinted by Mother's admiration for bizarre literature).

Certainly you will remember the housekeeper's Baskerville Dogs that every mate (apart from you, of course, such a brave young girl and so fond to animals) was scared of – and this it not my invention but frequently told by themselves. And in the face of these hell hounds, let me add how I imagine Mephisto's exit from the former stage how it's missing in his tales (like Pedro embezzled *Abelard's* black eyes and those green ones of his opponent too; at least he would mention your bruises some years later; but this will be another and a sadder story): After his infamous performance, having just driven half the convent in rapture and challenged the strength in belief of both the Canonesses and their protégées, he would rather have been chased over the wall with a decent bite in his butt than begged for autographs (if the master of the words has not numbed us all with literary Laudanum).



Back from the trip you are now attracted by a certain place at the edge of the campus behind a little grove that is called the *Wilderness*: Here lies a hidden graveyard where the Canonesses rest in peace, but also some ill-fated orphans who passed away over the times, abandoned by their relatives. And you will certainly remind touching incidents of the prematurely deceased who never returned to their homes, due to pneumonia – and I assure, this isn't a tale by Poe or Brontë, but told by suffering mates – or to exhaustion by sobbing into their pillows (well, this would be my contribution). But you might ominously smile and like to here recline, since you never had – and if it sounds so paradox that a young receptive soul could ever feel protected rather than falling in deadly despair in view of being locked behind walls – another haven or any loving soul than at this very place lost in Essex space. And beware on your path through the nightly grove not to stumble into the pool with ice-cold water from the abyss! Where generations of good girls used to get a cold (as they like to tell us themselves – if they still can and are not lying in earth on the Canonesses graveyard, more or less causally), given the fact that they were forced to swim here regardless the climate (maybe to be hardened for their determined duties as soon as they will be thrown to the weasels in the outerworld – but so what? Thanks to these Spartan methods, you survived your *Island* mishap, at least that).

When I followed your tracks as usual on location, I wished to touch the tiles that your noble toes had tickled, but the pool was sadly demolished long ago and replaced by a modern swimming hall (and even heated, that is the height! Well, that's called progress). And I would have also liked to cross the wilderness again with you together to see what lies beyond. But what a pity, I couldn't enter the graveyard since the gate was closed; perhaps due to a recent incident, as a strange invader had just cut



down an oak tree that was planted in 1964 on occasion of the granting anniversary; or simply because you liked to stay alone at your fondest place. But I caught a glimpse of a Tell Tale Cat on the northern wall pathetically meowing – perhaps it was Pumpkin's spectre who mourned the big loss and waited for your return. Then, walking along the cloister walls, I became aware of myriads of autographs, engraved by hundred generations of locked-up mates (just as the ancient prisoners in dreadful dungeons used to remind the posterity that they even existed and as Queen Jane did in the Beauchamp Tower while waiting for her execution by order of the throne usurper). So I was driven by irrational zeal to search for your name among a thousand and one – to find just a certain *Livvy*.

And suddenly I felt your presence...

Wasn't there another play when you were barely 16 years? You starred as *Miss Livvy* aka *Phoebe* in a farce by Barrie in summer '51, called *Quality Street*. Admittedly, I have never heard of it, but it was pretty popular then. Therefore, regarding some aspects of the plot, I limit myself to another quotation: *Phoebe* (now working as a teacher in her old convent) *has never accepted any other suitor* (than her first big love) *and has allowed herself to become an "Old Maid" who longs for her lost youth; the return of her former fiancé only deepens her melancholy. "I am tired of being Lady-like" she declares. And therefore she creates the fictional character of Miss Livvy, a more energetic, flirtatious and naughty version of her younger self.*



Our cute chubby heroine, dressed in beautiful Regency gowns, looks radiantly healthy as if she were completely contented with her life (and well fed, by the way, thanks to the sumptuous monastery cuisine) long before she would become a twiggy Lady. And she grants us with an adorable smile that no sane man or woman could resist without praising the lightness of existence. In a later scene we'll find *Phoebe* after her last ball, weary by hiding her true self and always wearing masques, surrounded by annoying pretenders; and one of them states: "*Now you have to recline, Miss Livvy!*" And that shall be funny? Rather, it sounds to me a little bit disturbing (if not prophetically). And given this discrepancy, let me tell you my attitude to social comedies: I heartily hate this absurd stuff! What's more meaningless than playing life? It's nothing but false pleasure for repressed members of the upper classes, who don't live according to their needs, come out off their skin and free their animal within. They prefer artificial manners to honesty; and they slap their thighs with joy as sitting in the audience and watching bizarre plots about what they don't allow themselves off stage (or at least not their wives) in the place they were assigned from their first breath; they mourn their missed chances at gloomy home and rock in their chairs until they fall over and out (that's the only adventurous risk of their everyday boredom and may even lead to premature labour – albeit the latter is rarely recorded).

Finally, I wonder if Virginia heeded *Miss Livvy's* wise choice on the Arts' stage half a decade later when she presented spicier stuff for the taste of a tougher audience, who were eager for a roaring laughter or a proper howling and sometimes even tempted to throw a few punches in the *Catalyst* play. That reduces stress! It's not good for anyone to let emotions simmer beneath the surface of a steamer, just as little as ignoring a certain bubble that will eventually burst when it has risen from the abyss.



Suddenly all work ceased end of '64, to ponder about the reasons. Interestingly, *The Wild and the Willing* was only released in the US two years after its UK premiere (oddly titled *Young and Willing*) just now – she couldn't get rid of this sad strip. Therefore we may assume that Virginia and her relatives weren't amused to be confronted again with the lascivious stuff that differed so much from her sophisticated image both in public and in private (albeit I have no source to verify my speculation). However, now at the latest she vanished from the public eye like Will during his lost years to be totally unemployed until the *Prisoner* will be filmed two years later for a fleeting glimpse over the horizon of her shrinking world. Her only life sign will be another bad incident in the spring of '65 (to be reminded of a certain crushed carp – we also can't get rid of the latter).

Lest we forget the Chinese puppy that she adopted on Lavinia's suggestion. She had so much pity with him since he was also a desperate orphan (well, that's the dramatic version), or (to add the sober one although not politically correct) he was a stray dog from the Rupert Street Market (where she had used to stroll around with Pedro and loved to eat simple dishes in contrast to the spoiled palate of the bourgeoisie who preferred the Cafe Royal at the next corner), saved from his fate of being turned into a Hot Dog in China Town (albeit there was not much meat on him, just as neither on Twiggy).

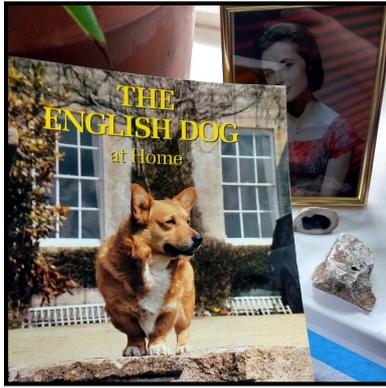
But let's be serious again about his nearly fatal case: As we learn from a report of the British Small Animal Veterinary Association on occasion of its annual congress in April '65, titled *How to lead your dog to a long life* (strange what there is!), Rupert had recently *a severe street accident* that resulted in a *dislocated hip*. But with great medical effort (to assume Virginia could have spent whole her earns in this spring) and lovingly cared for, he *became a happy healthy pet once again*. Even though Rupert served as their mascot, given his fate the report ends with a general admonition, that *pet owners should be more careful with their companions*. Ouch! This sounds to me as if she was again attributed to live a little *fey* and carefree – you can't simply get rid of a cliché. And given such annoying press, she had good reasons to avoid publicity (remember the nasty horn that she had allegedly blown?). However, the unpleasant event may have had an aftermath. Because we were never enlightened about her intentions to leave her London home, that she had painted so passionately just three years before, we can assume that she had enough from life in the hustle and bustle to settle outside Downtown with its dangerous streets. What is certain is that her studio will soon get too small for her growing family; and it was indeed not really ergonomic to ascend steep ladders (even more risky if your are having a baby) to better look for a barrier-free dwelling in the tranquil countryside. Last but not least, let me add that I wonder if there was nothing more important to report from her life than a couple of dog tales.



The report lacks an illustration. But an iconic photo of our heroine holding Rupert was taken at the same time for his premiere in the spotlight. And she strikingly presents (like in *Willing* before and *Interlude* later) her blue carbuncle as if giving a visual message of her fondest status to be a good wife (well, I tend to over-interpret). But let me be honest, I dislike this photo! Virginia, dressed like her own grandma and highly backcombed, looks so outdated and unfashionable that I have to

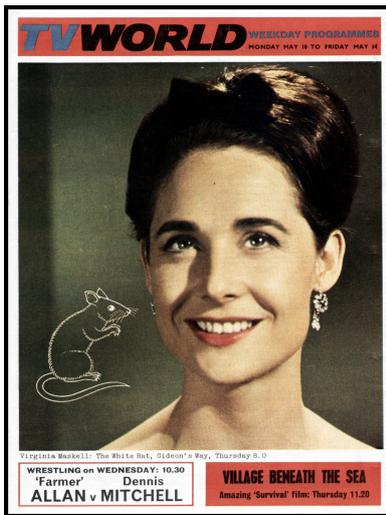


wonder into which closet she had locked up her Urchin. Her appearance differs so much from the genuine young woman (as seen on another popular photo from rather about half a decade before) in both elegant and casual clothing like from another generation. Swinging London seemed to have hurried along her. That might be the curse of being a chess piece in an unfitting environment. And as for the screen, our former *English Rose* was five years too old to compete with aspiring youngsters (as she had already learned in *Willing*) and apparently hadn't strived for an image change in time.



But given the adorable photo of love of dogs, I dare a little preview to ponder about a certain book of Thommy that will be published two decades later with bewitching portrayals of pretty Aristos with their spoiled yappers being fed and fondled in four poster beds or chased through stately gardens. Well, who likes it. But what is noticeable, that is the absence of one model – his most magnificent ever. Who deserved an appreciation in retrospect, at least seen through my Panda eyes. To ponder about the reason why hardly a handful of private portraits remained, and about the memory culture of a photographer who would be praised for his *intimate portraits* of the rich and beautiful. And what about the soulful ones?

*The White Rat* was aired on the 13th of May, 1965. This was perhaps again a bad time to say goodbye with a double of shady appearances to another hiatus of two years. Virginia simply had no luck in choosing her roles.



Or a certain Al has to be shamed for his advice. Yeah, we learned just now that she *had* an agent! He was an elder American lad who had settled in London a long time ago (when Stan and Ollie were just on their heyday) and established an actor's agency (that still exists albeit he passed away in biblical age short after our heroine), rich of illustrious names. As he will later testify, he promoted her since her first TV role, even if admittedly not really successfully in terms of her career development. But we can assume that he must have been quite desperate with his protégée, since she herself had rejected nine out of ten offers due to her *disgust* for showbiz duties off the screen and eagerness *not to conform to clichés*, so that she used to counteract her good image by playing naughty characters against the expectations and the palate of her spoiled audience – including me, I have to admit; it simply doesn't suit to her

transfigured appearance. And indeed, as we can convince ourselves through another beautiful portrait from which her magical left eye looks into the beyond: If you are gifted with such an angel's face you can't convincingly play a sinner!



A second article with Rupert's tales advertised the *Rat*. It's the last home story I found before she fell into public oblivion. It states: *Virginia plays the girl in the life of an underworld character (...)*. To continue with a doubt (once again referring to her unusual vita that confused the public as much as she herself: (...)) *It's a far cry from Virginia's convent upbringing and her hope to become a nun*. She even shares with the audience a photo of her past to visually emphasize how happy she was both in her convent and in nature (and perhaps how she longed for it just now). We see her working in casual clothes in a heap of hay on her school farm. Furthermore we gain current insights into her privacy through a telephone call with the journalist while Rupert, obviously recovered, *is just visiting his Tibetan girlfriend Alooka* (probably Lavinia's Shi Tzu). She must interrupt humorously: *Please hold a moment. It's the dogs – they just dashed out of the front door and I have to chase them round the garden. When they are together there is no holding them.*

Oh Virginia, how alive you sound, how fulfilled to be in nature as petting creatures great and small – to ponder feverishly how it came about that your appetite of life will soon atrophy in time lapse?!

The funny little article is strangely called *It's a Dog's Life for Virginia Maskell*. Well, that would have been nice. One day, you could *become a happy healthy Urchin once again* if those people around you gave you the same attention and care that you gave Rupert, and didn't ignore your needs and nature.

But given the light-hearted vibe of the mentioned events and against all my pessimist narrative, our protagonist may have been in spring fever! And therefore let's add good tidings: Since at the same time while romping around with Rupert, Virginia was blessed to have a second son, who will be born coming February in Hammersmith. To assume that the rest of the year was certainly a rather busy time with, of course, absence from the stage – well, that's female destination but even more a dilemma for an actress. And so around these days, she told Al (who will speak in retrospect very warmly about a *lovely person with two lovely children*) that *she decided she did not want to film any more, but she wanted to settle down*. T'was time to leave her cozy little studio and set off on a trip into the unknown.



According to the statements of a certain Dr. Silver the couple moved to Somerton at the end of '65, a tiny hamlet in Risboro Vale where the escarpment shapes the biggest of all Chiltern bays. Albeit the location isn't as sublime as Ossian's realm, it's surely *a beautiful spot in the country* with waving farmland and rolling hills, looking like a painting of Kit Williams whose book *Masquerade* – a real treasure hunt after a golden hare that was hidden under a cross in the neighbouring county – triggered me as a child to seek for the gem, just like countless followers back then (even if sadly, I wasn't the chosen one who revealed the mystery). And indeed, Virginia could have well served as Kit's model, in terms of her natural beauty and enigmatic aura, which correspond very much to his artistic preferences – but I can't believe that they met at the end of the '60s when his career was just beginning.



And look, here's also a cross greeting from the Whiteleaf Hill over whole the vale, a significant landmark carved in the chalk a thousand years ago by believers of the olde religion; and on the ridges all around are Iron Age mounds. We don't know how she became aware of her new residence that is embraced by magical sites both of Pagans and Christians, but her choice to settle in the Somerton Olde Parsonage seems to confirm again what Pedro tells about Virginia having always been attracted by sacral places, monks and nuns like a magnet. And the grange lies on the Upper Icknield Way which is said to be Britain's oldest path that dates back in Celtic times long before the Romans defeated the Iceni – a big load of history so that you could imagine a long procession of ancient folks silently passing along the white gate (at least if you are a receptive mind).

The white-washed manor itself, crowned by outstanding chimneys, was (and still is, since largely unchanged) a particular place: Given the house shape from manifold parts with unpolished corners and edges that look different from all four sides, we can assume that she fell immediately in love with it – and perhaps acclaimed like a certain Malaparte: *Una casa come me!*

But first of all it is more a comfortable farmhouse than a stately home, flanked by a wing of stables in wide meadows. Particularly when we are looking from Lodge Hill over unaffected countryside (that differs so much from how Doyle's monster uses to spread its tentacles into the neighbouring vales and

threatens to swallow the rural periphery) with the tiny farm ensemble always in the midst, we may guess that her intention was to run an agriculture rather than to represent a celeb’s household in any Metroland’s retreat; and we can assume that the project was planned sustainable for the future.



Indeed, it’s a suitable place for a young Gentry couple with a growing family for doing a little pet farming, keeping some horses, chickens and pigs and strolling around with Rupert and the bunch (even better since they can’t run onto Cromwell Road to be crushed by a lorry, although by a chain of trains, beware!) through the surrounding hills – which remind of the slope of the Downs where her dad’s cottage was similarly nestling to be tempted to assume she could have also sought for some familiar place reminding of her youth – with endless views over the horizon that perhaps give a glimpse of (or long for) the Celtic Sea. But actually water is largely lacking here except for a withering spring a mile away, oddly enough in terms of her nature being something like a mermaid. And last but not least, it’s worth mentioning that their new residence lies more than a hundred miles from Sussex – possibly well-intentioned to build something own far away from annoying know-it-alls.



The grange nestles at the slope of a little chalk hill with such a hard ground that the Chiltern Mainline had to be built on two tracks which embrace the estate like lobster claws – for me an ambivalent feeling, unsure whether protective or oppressive (but maybe my whimsical sense is just too receptive for local vibrations). On the



east side is a gap leading to a tunnel, on the west side an escarpment; and since therefore the estate’s back converges to a V-shaped point, we are both granted with an iconic perspective and even more a pretty sheltered space for rides and roaming kids. Or you simply enjoy the blooming meadow as a see-woman and relax (best rocking in a hammock if not on a *raft of love*) amidst buzzing bees (as I could convince myself when I was hanging around there under a big tree for hours and hours) and listen to the gentle rushing of the trains, perhaps similarly soothing like from the railway embankment of the Shepherd’s Bush Market or the Kensington Tube gaps (albeit missing the gurgling of a mill stream).

The first view of the estate is also linked with the railway: Approaching on location (when coming from Marylebone), you can catch a glimpse of it in the twinkling of a right eye when the signal sounds shortly before a couple of daring pedestrian crossings. And beyond that, the place reminds of the most



iconic *Marple* adaptation from the early ‘60s: The body of a lady was thrown out of the train into the backyard of a similar estate after she was strangled on her way from Paddington; and the murderer of the poor victim was of course – spoiler-alert! – the evil quack (but the inclined audience that shares my devotion to whodunits, will certainly know the plot). Last but not least, it’s worth mentioning that James Robertson, Virginia’s fellow from the *Doctor*, played the master of the manor, grumbling as always. I generally like both Christie’s novels and movie adaptations; my favourite is the episode of a young lady on the West Indies who is driven into an almost fatal neurosis by being over-drugged by her shadowy husband (if not once by the quack); if I remember correctly this wasn’t part of the Rutherford series but later filmed with Hickson, or perhaps someone else.

By the way, Margaret actually lived near Ol'Amersham in the neighbouring Misbourne Valley; and Vivien had settled down off the escarpment nearby for a couple of years. The latter would soon pass away prematurely in summer '67, another strange coincidence. She was a rather popular and similar beautiful fellow (if more an angel with icy eyes, largely missing Virginia's warmth), sadly now in decline, who got famous with the role of a whimsical lady somewhere in the West who couldn't cope with the longing for her youth love to lose her husband at the end (who was neither a really nice guy, let's be honest; perhaps she should have better attended a convent). But I don't want to deepen this B-rated stuff since I prefer decent English drama to Hollywood kitsch. However, many celebrities liked to retreat from the roaring city in the tranquillity in and off the Chilterns (and still do so).

And there are other film connections to the parish of Somerton and Bledlow:

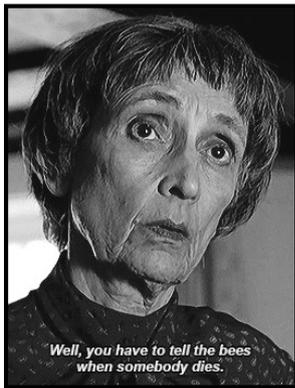
The fictional *Midsomer County* was the real setting of the Life and Death of Virginia Maskell.



I apologize for exposing myself as an enthusiast of British crime time, even more such telly stuff, but it's a striking coincidence: The first episode will be filmed right here exactly three decades after her catastrophe; to ponder about what if... Virginia had been blessed with a longer life? She could not have just played the first lady of



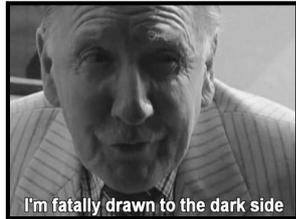
the manor, but even on her own estate, oh what a beautiful idea (even if only from a quirky guy who often tends to merge fact and fiction)! Yet it's not really unrealistic, given the fact how the cast of the golden age of cinema has formed the backbone of television whodunits through noticeable cameos since the 1980s. Look just at Rosalie who plays a wonderful character as a witty old lady in the mentioned episode: *Miss Bellringer* lives in Bledlow aka *Badger's Drift* in a cottage next to the church and has to tell the bees about the murder of their mistress. But the actress wouldn't be granted to see her own appearance due to her death by cancer short before the episode is aired, sadly by fact. I like her at the latest since she had also played an inmate who longed for the *Prisoner*; but first of all due to the fact that she looked in her youth much like Virginia. In a subsequent episode we meet an old parson who was driven to despair by another unsolved incident – an alleged suicide in the woods – from thirty years ago; he finally jumps from the tower of the church in Bledlow while the slopes of Wain Hill lurk in the background – the most outstanding landmark of the Chiltern escarpment between Ivanhoe Bacon and Goring Gap. I had to rub my eyes about this synchronicity for holy shivers down my spine – as it is the very place where it is rumoured that Virginia got lost (even though I couldn't find any proof and I myself believe it happened somewhere else entirely beyond the sunset).



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In a more recent episode we even have to see a weird young lad just walking past the Bledlow Pub where a gentle wood tongue tickles the edge of the village, ascending Wain Hill and scattering ashes of a deceased (who died of a severe disease that was diagnosed too late and wrongly treated by a quack, what else?!) in a discreet little dale at the foot of a hunting lodge halfway up the slope; and the bees have to be informed about the incident again just like Rosalie did a quarter of a century ago. What bewitching similarities – as if another screenwriter (hello Hugh!) knew about sinister secrets and passed the information on across the generations.



Last but not least, let's mention a more delightful episode. We find even Leslie in one of his last roles as a charming scoundrel, exactly as we remember it from his heyday. Oh, how I would have loved to see you both play one last time – as a merry old couple! But sadly that was not granted. However, these plots are worth to be mentioned, located in and off the Chiltern Hills full of myth and magic and dark tales of people who got lost in the woods and skeletons hidden in Cavaliers' closets.

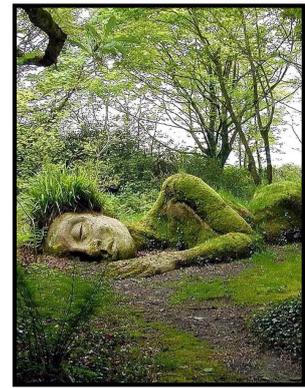
And indeed, how I could convince myself when I roamed through the sublime nature on hidden (and even some forbidden) traces as Virginia might once have done with Rupert on the leash, I had some strange experiences, particularly when I was first circumnavigating Wain Hill in summer '22. I lost my way completely (albeit I am said to be the human navigator app so that I was rather embarrassed) as I was wandering about 10 hours through the deep, dark woods in something like a mental miasma to find myself again at exactly that spot where my journey had begun, on the east slope where the Icknield Way enters the forest, shortly before sunset, jolly glad to have come out of the wilderness; twas a traumatic experience, I assure you! And wanderer blogs are full with similar legends of sudden loss of orientation and oppressive feelings of a creepy presence at your back – like from an unnamed feline spectre (I tend to call it *Pumpkin*) that is said to sneak around at the tongues of Bledlow Great Wood that are licking after careless hikers – to emphasize: Never cross the verges of the Icknield Way if you won't like to leave yourself in the penumbra (whether of the forests or your confused mind)!

My tour was like a trip in trance, at least since I had approached the light-flooded ridge (called Thickthorn Wood) with something like a wood chappell of bizarre twisted beech trees performing a bacchanal as if being on Laudanum. And stirred up by their dance, another tune by Purcell came to my mind and I hummed it to myself like a little bumblebee: *Oh Solitude my Sweetest Choice!* Indeed, there was such a soothing loneliness that I would have liked to stay (or lie) for hours and ever.

But were we really alone? Maybe it's here the dwelling of natural creatures great and small who



secretly observe careless invaders with their googly eyes. I even believed to perceive a lady reclining under a tree (in fact just some mighty roots, of course). And some ominous chap had carved his name into a bold beech beside and laid down at its foot something like a votive offering – an antique heater rod. Huh? (I asked about *Nick* and his whimsical intentions in a local tree blog, but sadly no one answered.) However – wasn't it another proof that if you think to be in the most distant nature, you will soon find the remains of human culture? Oh my!



To remember the crushed can and the empty pack of ciggies at the loneliest of all Caribbean beaches.

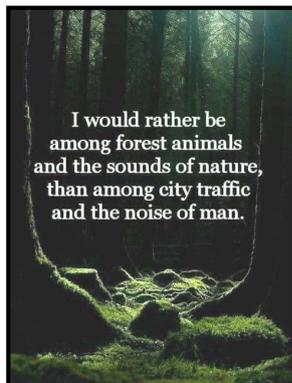
But when descending westward, wanderer, be careful! It's getting more obscure and you will not see the forest for the trees. As approaching the steep slope, I passed a branch-constructed hut (a site I will surely never find again) that seemed to me like the perfect place to be for a stressed escapist seeking for silence from the *noise of man*. Or it was the Greene Man himself who had built this hut; and indeed, when I turned my head around, he threw a twig after me and grumbled "hither this way!", either annoyed by my raid or referring to the Bledlow Cross, another carving in the chalk that had been visible for many miles on Wain Hill's western slope before it fell into decay many decades ago.

And given the fact that she was attracted to magical places, I wonder if Virginia ever blessed the cross by tickling the warm stone with her pretty little toes (just like Hayley danced in rapture on a hill ridge some years later, albeit only on screen) or even lay down in its middle and blinked in the evening sun lulled by the murmur of druid's (or just by a swarm of buzzing bees). But probably she wouldn't have found it at all (even less in the wintery twilight) since the Whiteleaf's little sister got lost in the undergrowth – and so did I, because I didn't find the destination as if it wanted to withdraw from me. At least I didn't miss the board alone; you will hardly find a native who was able to locate it, as Anne told me (a local lady by whose courtesy we will later find Wain Hill illustrated in the most stunning sunset ever; I only hope that she will not be annoyed by being mentioned in my quirky tale) – and my readers, hark, now I have to add that when I closed my manuscript, explorers from Bledlow had just unearthed the cross and started its restoration. Good people!).



But back to my shameful wandering path: I soon slipped down the slope without having discovered just a single chunk of chalk and found myself with blurred sight somewhere at the foot in a sinister holloway (in fact a dead end of the Icknield Way) deeply cut into the slope by ancient folk or eroded by wind and weather or both. It's said by the locals to be haunted if not even cursed (therefore called the *bloody lane* due to whatever events we don't even want to know in order not to be scared to death). And indeed, as I crept through the lane, I felt a strange presence as if I were accompanied by pale figures lamenting their forgiven lives and seeking for their lost beloveds; I saw torches fading in the twilight like Will-o'-the-Wisps and I listened to the murmur from the wilderness. Just Pumpkin liked to hide herself, oh what a luck considering my poor weak nerves. I spare with a sober solution so as not to disgrace my pretty little tale, but even more – the inclined reader wouldn't have guessed it?! – because I believe in such things from the sphere beyond; and I promise that all this really happened when I followed in the footsteps of our silent heroine (albeit I may have just inhaled a little bit too many spores of some wild mushrooms stirred up by my elephant feet).

But what is certain is that I have not met (or missed) any living person about whole the time to become aware of Lavater's wisdom: *Loneliness is my most faithful companion!* (Well, for some others it may be a little mutt. To each their own.) And never before have I felt so much like Simon the Saint in his hermit's tree – well, that was the best experience of them all.



But let's return to where it began at the edge of the woods. The Upper Icknield Way (ascending the slope from Somerton that lies a mile afar) forms something like a wood gate at a confusing crossing – the only place accessible by car and perfect for parking a Traveller on the verge, albeit not permitted – with many ways converging in any direction but certainly not all of them to the path of happiness. In order to avoid the steep exhausting climb to the mentioned ridge through chest-high undergrowth (and naughtily ignore some pretty rusty warning signs not to enter Thickthorn Wood) – albeit as we heard above it's a calming place that is worth the effort – let's rather ascend a mound after just 700 feet,

sometimes called *The Cop*, where Boudicca's mightiest warriorress had been laid in earth; and we even know that she was called *Bledda* (where the village's name comes from; but I don't want to be the know-it-all). On its peak we may listen to her battle cries still wafting in the wind over the valley, summoning the knell of falling Rome; but first of all we are granted with a magnificent view into the unending plain that stretches like a yellow sea, at least in the oppressive summer. But oh dear! Hellsbury lies in the middle, an ugly little duckling with the County Hall always in the focus from miles afar, then a brand-new Brutalist carbuncle (not to the Bonnie Prince's taste, as we may assume).



Or we curve along the Icknield Way that now clings to the slope as if over the sea and leads to a lonely lodge, called Weston Hut or so. It has been recently refurbished by another quirky architect who kept nothing from its wooden glory (apart from the garage, oddly enough); but I don't think you will bother about such trivialities. At least in my perception there's a threatening vibe that doesn't really invite many happy returns. Before you reach the hut, there lies a horseshoe-shaped vale just on the right, hidden from every human sight with silent leaves gently rustling in a breeze like in the sea of tranquillity of a certain park in Woolwich, or in a dreaming Mill Leat far, far in the west; and albeit there is probably a hornbeam missing, there may have been, or still is, a magnificent ash tree on the hill tongue to Bledlow. But beware to enter the valley from the way: You could carelessly slide down the steep and wooded slope to be badly whipped by branches. Ouch (and besides it is forbidden)!



Disregarding that abyss, sitting on a lonely block from a former gate that invites us for a while, I ate my lunch pack at the mentioned crossing again in summer '22. I was pretty exhausted and sweating like a swine before my long way through the woods had even begun. *Twas so hot!* At least I was pleased with a bucolic view over the meadow beside to the eastern escarpment of Risboro Bay, forming a beautiful horizon with the Whiteleaf Cross brightly shining; but first of all the Parsonage lies always in the middle, shyly hiding in a clump of trees at the end of the wide slope, as if it is waiting for your return. And when a flock of sheep appeared, I too felt like a blessed shepherdess. But despite the lively atmosphere in this beautiful spot in the country I was overwhelmed by bad feelings, maybe triggered by a tome in my trunk of Pedro's best works; and I believe to remember that at the same time a little pooch was barking from the Icknield Way.

I suffered something like a sudden flashback of the *Watership Downs* (where Virginia's dad had lived nearby) and remembered a depressing film, if not even a childhood's trauma – if you know, you know: I saw a misty wave rising quickly from the vale to cover the meadow completely (albeit not in



dreadful red) under a white veil and to arouse a blurry vision of how I imagine the place of Pedro's most sinister poem, *slipped with leaves, mingled beneath the gaunt branches. The hungry wind mongrels the evening, a lone yellow rose begs for pity. Beneath a shorn hedge an olde ewe lies in labour; magpies in evening dress wait to dine on the afterbirth. Night treads across the wet field with its lantern of darkness. WINTER envelopes us, we drown.*

It sounds so sad to sob a fortnight, and even more so familiar like *February '63: This is winter, and this is you!*

But maybe my blackened eyes were just rolling under the oppressive sun at 31 degrees; and the gullible bleating of Shaun and his flock soon drove away my dark visions to enjoy the landscape again. I descended Wain Hill to immerse in locations – as we heard in Bledlow at the foot were filmed so many episodes of my favourite TV show (forgive my negligence to deviate from your tracks). And when I stood on the churchyard, I had just eyes for Beehive Manor, thought about Rosalie who had told the bees about the deceased, and both the old parson and a young lad having been driven into madness by strange incidents in their woods just a mile afar and six hundred feet that were concealed for so long to summon up Jacobean revenge even generations later. Strange folks in *Midsomer County*, I have to say; and once again I pondered about where those screenwriters get their inspiration from?



But let's now return from the roots to the Parsonage in fact. Virginia would probably be pleased that today the residents offer bed and breakfast as she herself had liked to support her Devonian patchwork by hosting tourists in their so-called hermitage at Malcount Mouth. And it's noticeable that the white-washed manor looks much like a Westland farmhouse, outstanding in an area of mostly flint and brick. By the way, we find a small estate at the edge of Meat (where the steep lane descends to the West Mill) in a strikingly similar situation; even if I couldn't find any literally hint, I tend to assume that this place was her dream home. And as we learn from Pedro about the Devonian practice of renewing house paint annually (as the Danes still do today, particularly on my fondest isle, Bornholm, whose tiny hamlets and rocky shores look much like those of Heartland), it's well possible that Virginia also maintained this tradition (all the more so since we know that she was an avid painter) because to *white-wash the facades* would promise *protection against demons* – but also the ghosts of the past?



We enter the estate through the white gate between two pillars crowned with globes, which opens to a curved driveway. A tennis court just on the right reminds me of *BLOW-UP* (I can't see since when it exists, but you can well imagine a pantomime match; and if you listen to the silence, you might even hear the popping of the balls). We approach the manor that lies behind a soothing forecourt, sheltered by a row of trees. After we have stepped through the Georgian door with a pretty fanlight above it, we stand in a light-flooded hallway. For unknown reasons I imagine the walls painted in bright orange and I see a lady rather blurry, refracting the rays of the late sun while sitting on a telephone bench. When we pass two living rooms – the rear one, a cozy little library with wood panels and a bay window overlooking the bowling green, is possibly the place where Virginia's last portrait will be taken which we will shed light on later – we have to duck under a steep stair to reach the kitchen that

looks strangely like the *Willing* set. But we will certainly not find the good lady here as she is currently presenting her pretty little toes to any guest, unfortunately; and we can hardly see Virginia in this working space at all when we recall that she was allegedly the worst chef throughout the country (until she will pass the baton to the inspector's wife in the movie *Frenzy* – by the way, a pretty role for our star, even though anachronistic; and please forgive my tasteless joke).

It's worth mentioning that while I was writing, the kitchen annex was being demolished; and given this change, I let myself be carried away to ponder about that if you will return one day to a place you left behind, there will be everything unfamiliar and you will hardly find your way in a strange present. That may be the fate of those who pass away prematurely – especially if you take your own life as nature didn't intend your final – so that their restless souls are doomed to strand at any time in search of the lost past, basically speaking. But it's questionable whether Virginia's steps would even lead to this place or rather to somewhere else entirely (where we hear the seagulls giggling and the water rushing of mighty waves on sublime cliffs and the mill wheel's repetitive clatter) since we have sadly to resume that the Chiltern project wouldn't be blessed. As Long John will later claim, almost her entire life phase here would mean nothing but decline with much sorrow and little employment.



Last but not least, let's mention the pretty large space (not to think of the costs) that contrasts strikingly with how Virginia has always lived so far (if not out of the suitcase or the side table) in just a single room. Even more so given the gossip that she was an opponent of tidiness, and considering that a certain Sue worked only part-time as a maid (we'll meet her later under sadder circumstances), our poor exhausted heroine will probably have been quite busy running the household. In this regard, let's also remember the doubts of Dickens (who didn't even grow up as a frightened little girl in a fancy school, but as a tough tomboy in a workhouse gaol) in relation to the effort of his *frightfully first-class family mansion, involving awful responsibilities.*

To wonder about: Why are you doing this to yourself?



By ascending the stairs to the upper floors, we find several children rooms and a maid's chamber but first of all the master bed room in the northwest wing, containing three windows with a pretty view to Wain Hill on the left and straight ahead the tennis court behind the bowling green – albeit missing a sea-sight beyond; but at least we can take a bath en suite in the warming sunset. The comfortable room group in the L-shaped section is separated (or protected) by something like an energy lock, a small storeroom with a door to the staircase and a window in the corner with a view into the backyard – to perhaps perceive papa ante portas. And indeed we may imagine to catch a glimpse of Thommy carrying a food pack from the local pub (a pretty good idea better than misusing the AGA for a sweltering dish that no one likes to eat) as he enters the rear door where a second corridor leads also to the kitchen with the dining room next to it. Here comes Virginia's radiant appearance as a hostess of a lavish dinner for the local Gentry, celebrities and relatives from throughout the country (maybe even spiced by philosophic monologues of a certain Westland poet), much looking like the scenery when a group of bored Sophistos, while smoking chain, babble about God and the world and, last but not least, cross-generational love (aka lust), so that *Antonia*, as she stares enraptured into a candle, will reach her moment of enlightenment – but the inclined audience have to wait a while until we enjoy together the wonderful performance of our late protagonist in her last movie *Interlude*.



As we roam enraptured the house and its surroundings, we will find the place in all its ambivalence of vast spaces and cozy corners also as a grateful frame for handicrafts. In memory of how Virginia had painted her studio and beautified the West Mill by hand, we could assume she would have also made improvements in and off the manor, created another pretty garden and run a little pet zoo. And indeed, Long John will tell (apart from the fact that she grabbed his silver) that she was a woman with manifold *artistic talents, a painter and a sculptress*. But sadly, her ambitions were probably reduced here, since everything was ready and many worries, both physical and mental, would possibly have blocked her passion; yet we will never know, because apart from Silver's tales we neither find a single source regarding domestic activities nor any sign of life from her *Midsomer* years as if *the lost actress* was losing herself as soon as she had stranded at the farthest rim of Metroland's commuter belt.

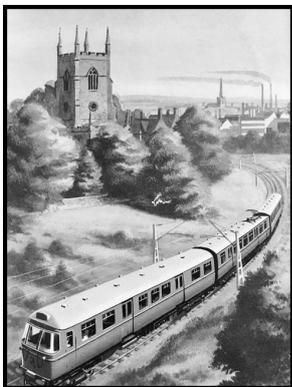
But if you have decided to run a farm in London's rural boundary, it may have been a wise choice to settle there on one of the main traffic axes so that you can reach the studios of Shepperton and Pinewood in just an hour per car (but beware to use the roads in winter!), in order not to be completely cut off from your professional past. Or we take the train together on the way to London's West End; and since you certainly prefer the smoke compartment, we have to rub our eyes when we look through the hazy panes into the surroundings: At West Wycombe we soon pass the hill ridge that is crowned with Dashwood's tomb to imagine lustful bacchanals given in its bowels – oh those were light-hearted times centuries ago (just updated by Peter's most bewitching role which we have recently enjoyed on telly). Then follows Filmland – full of locations like living in an endless movie, including the *Doctor* with the site of *Nicola's* surgery in Beaconsfield Old Town that looks similar to the *Cross and Bones* surgery at Risboro Parade where you'll have to swap your doctor's coat with the patient's gown. When we cross the Colne just before Uxbridge, Denham lies nearby, aka the fictional *Millchester*, where *Miss Marple* lives in a water mill – the actual lodge of the actor John Mills, ironically isn't it? By the way, his daughter Hayley is one of the most lively young actresses, embodying the swinging years (no wonder if you grew up in a mill house, powered by sparkling water); and we will later remember the latter regarding *Endless Night* as a lively young girl who suffers a nightmare in a rural mansion while being poisoned by her deceptive environment, just in fiction, of course.



By the way, did I ever tell you how much I love water mills?! One of my most memorable childhood impressions was in 1977 when a witty little film (a production of the BBC Children's Film Foundation in an undubbed super-8-edition; rather strange since the audience of little brats didn't understand a single word) was shown at a midsummer party at my primary school. *The Treasure at the Mill* with a

bunch of ragamuffins bobbing on a mill pond, swimming, riding and seeking for a silver chest filled with Royal gems (which are later plundered with pleasure), had been filmed just twenty years before in the countryside of Essex not all too far from Wain Hall, what a strange coincidence. The movie is hard-to-get-stuff today; and I got mine in a limited edition with another adorable short film from the mid '40s, starring the young Petula who sings and dance like a mature revue star. Remember her? However, that was the moment how it began (and once again you little rascal know that I don't lie) – how I got intrigued by British landscape and culture. Indeed, the neat Georgian street of terraced houses and the flat church tower, crowned with tiny gothic needles (much in contrast to the continental architecture), had burned itself so deeply into my remembrance that I really shivered down my spine when I strolled through Dedham many decades later because it seemed so familiar to me as if I had never been away from this site of my daydreams. But I apologize for another meaningless digression.

As we approach *Downtown*, we first catch a glimpse of Horror on the Hill with a knife-sharp spire towering the mound. It's that inglorious place where a hundred generations of poor orphaned Pavlov puppies were conditioned to become wild wolves in a chauvinist jungle to learn nothing meaningful than fighting in constant competition for the better conquest and the bigger sword (and this is where the causal paradox in generally lies, since Bonaparte for example had the tiniest of the latter, as plainly readable in Josephine's letters). Then follows Wembley where just the Brits revenged the Blitz. By the way, I've never understood the sense of such games. Why the heck do those goofy folks roar in a crowd (or a kraut) and put their brains in the claws of the howling pack and its alpha wolves? Give everyone their own ball and nobody had to struggle for the one meaningless goal! That would cause the final of all competition (as it is fed in chauvinist institutes all around the world) and men-kind would be redeemed. Never confess to any squad and their evil leaders! Think about what *IF...* the hopeful youth would renounce from following the failures of disgruntled elders, who seduced them to fight each other (just for the benefit of decadent elites), and overcome the latter in unity together. Damn'n dump it! Kick their ol'butts rather than balls (preferably both) far beyond the rainbow to turn off once and for all the repetitive beat of the Ps! (Indeed, they'll try in 1968 but we'll sadly not live to see it; and anyway it will also be a total failure, as all action means the destruction of the ideal.)



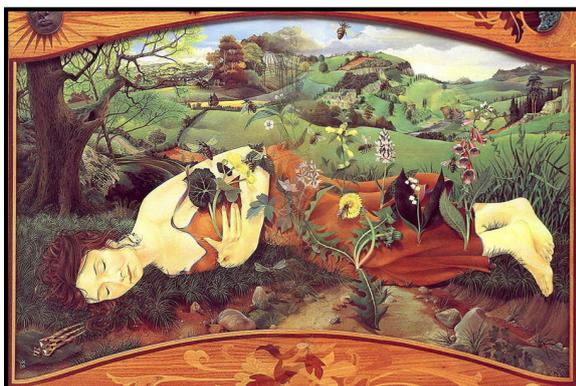
We reach Marylebone (also my favourite station since it lies in the backyard of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the greatest of all detectives. Lesser noticed is that he supported damsels in distress who suffered discreetly big injustice at the hands of their husbands in many of his cases rather than solving exciting crimes; sadly we can't consult him in the case of the *Lost Lady in the Woods* since he retired already in 1914 at the dawn of the old world when the evil Huns threatened the brave Britons once before, and he died in the early '50s; but a certain young Sergeant Barnaby could perhaps take over his baton). Some steps afar you will enter a building with arched windows and newgothic pillars where Thommy's photographic company is located at the foot of the Post Office Tower, and you may also meet here Ricky's sister just being in a light-hearted conversation about how to throw a party for the righteous needs of all the celebs and swinging Aristos throughout the country (or whatever vital else for the benefit of the world). Perhaps you furrow your eyebrows just as little amused as I am and turn your head around to look out of the window with a disturbing view into the claustrophobic streetyard of the gloomy block of the Middlesex Hospital just opposite with masses of carbunched people crouching in and out like the Elephant Man and a vibe of Whitechapel wafting; and accidentally, it's the very place where Mad Pete passed away (a single fact in my quirky tale; I promise). Although I hardly believe

that you care about the latter, you may think about the fine line between well-being and sudden misery. One moment vibrant youth, the next terrible decay. All flowers must wither away and nothing remains but bitter remembrance (and sometimes not even the latter but ostracism, oh my!).

But let's end the trip together and leave Doyle's monster to return to the silence of the landscape far away from these overheated hotspots of social explosives. And we find peace on your favourite bench next to the rear door leading to the kitchen. One day, the entrance will be replaced by a window; but a mighty tree trunk – of what I believe, it's an old chestnut – is still there in the middle of the backyard. It's a beautiful place to settle under its protecting treetop and listen to the silent rustling of its leaves while the puppies are romping around and waiting for Thommy's return with interesting novelties from Downtown, but first of all (not to say essential) a food pack from the pub (so that no one starves) with a big cheesecake and ersatz coffee. Yummy! But then suddenly a ball might bounce against the panes of the west wing's upper floor and you turn around your head to the right corner with an awkward vibe. It feels like a sudden *déjà-vu* of a repetitive nightmare with scraps of images of times so long ago but yet so close when the Blitz had almost erased your memory of Holland Park Court (or whatever else was the reason that you urged yourself to spread the legend to the press that Shepherd's Bush would have been the place of your birth); and you may feel in the twinkling of an eye a phantom menace of your tiny little haven and foresee (if not summon) that nothing can be held permanently.



To clear your mind and blurred vision, you stumble to the blooming meadow by buzzing bees surrounded; maybe similar to how I felt on my third trip on the dog days in August '24. *Twas so hot!* Renovations at the manor house's entrance and the kitchen wing were just in progress so that this time no pooch barked at me like Rupert had done (or how he was called) two years before, oh what a luck. But I was so exhausted by the burning sun that I could have slept forever on the golden hill when I dreamt in a hammock hanging from a mighty tree (thanks to the gracious residents); maybe it was already growing when you were alive – to wonder if you also loved this tree and reclined underneath for hours and hours. And albeit the place has perhaps never been so bright since the Summer of Love, a thunderstorm was brewing just behind Wain Hill, the daily goal of my hike (and again, my little rascal, you know it is true). Therefore, instead of ascending Mound Maskell, I was happily expecting a cooling breeze; oh what a relief for my bumping head and heart! And suddenly I felt your presence on my neck; to imagine you standing in despair despite of the beauty in the face of a stunning sunset and speaking only with your eyes: "I don't want to be here!" But no one harked (apart from the bees).



Yeah, my more or less annoyed readers, caught! Lacking information like of Will's lost years, I had to spin a little yarn and lose myself in ominous tales and some willfull retro trips, hardly related to our heroine's true story. But what is certain is: She could never really settle at Somerton down, such a pretty place where you belong, that meant for her (if we are inclined to swallow Silver's dishes) nothing but the set of a perpetual depression, enduring from at least summer '66 until her last breath. Lest we forget: Our heroine had once arrived here from manifold adventures in Downtown and on the farthest shores, even from the Wide Sargasso Sea. There in the distance she had been one with nature and natives, lived out her inner urchin on swinging streets and roaring waves, and she drove horses over the cliffs rather than petting ponies on the backyard – and now look here pure booredom! It feels to me as if she was marooned on a dry boulder, condemned to die of thirst and horrible frustration. And therefore I think it is appropriate to now add a line from an obscure review related with a certain play in which Virginia starred and *spanned perfectly the bridge between the stage-struck girl of the first act and the disillusioned woman of the last act*. It was called *The Seagull* – that had lost its wings.

Documents of this life phase are xtremely rare, whether due to her living discretion, her delicate condition or even posthumous ostracism, who will ever know? But I found some years ago in a local website (and later purchased it in high-grade) an outstanding postcard showing Risboro Parade in summer '66 when the last roses were just fading. And there is a certain couple from behind that eludes our gaze like in a fugitive review: They are pushing a pram; and we are inclined to guess that they have just left the Ol'Cross and Bones surgery right beside the photographer's position. On my restless trips I found the location almost unaltered, apart from an ugly lantern happily replaced (but considering your less delightful memories of having entered that sinister surgery countless times, I don't think that you care about my absurd observations. It's just the haunted place of your decline).



When I discussed the scene with the admin of the site, he and I agreed that they hardly look like locals but rather like strangers washed up on the sidewalk. According to my conversation partner *the gent looks pretty toff* as if just arrived from Kings Road. The lady with shoulder-length chestnut hair and with a boyish back is dressed with casual clothes, has tiny slippers and, that's the height, she doesn't wear socks! That's much like Pedro describes Virginia's clothing and a visual confirmation of the journalist's observations concerning her *naturalness*. Therefore we can be pretty sure that it is her. I was intrigued by the story behind the deceptive summer scene. So let's hurry in medias res and face sinister depths beneath the sparkling surface (and if you will blacken my eyes for being that indiscreet) to consider whether her addiction on Silver's treasure chest has just begun at this very place and time?

*A severe postnatal depression was assumed* just around these dog days by a certain village quack (and it would magically last further one and a half years – a pretty long “postnatal” phase, I have to say). Even worse, his lonesome statements, deviating from other sources that have since been embezzled, would lay the foundation for all the nasty legends that are stubbornly held and still circulate today. That alleged “depression” was a piece of cake in comparison to her actual true misery: A horrible turmoil gnawing like a cancer, fire and fury from her deepest inner self that was suppressed both by her self-denial and their ignoring until the pressure in the cauldron would discharge in a big bang. What is certain is: She felt fundamentally uncomfortable in her skin like restrained in a straightjacket – and there would have been no problem to loosen the bonds if her surroundings would have respected her innermost nature!

Let's now introduce the actual Catalyst of the catastrophe, the most influential supporting character of our avoidable tragedy (as we know that it is usually the villain who spices up the drama and ensures whether flop or top. Lest we forget movie icons of the golden age with damsels in distress threatened by villainous henchmen like Sanders' *Brian* and Rathbone's *Guy*):

Long John was the man – maybe by lacking any knowledge of the deeper causes of both her unresolved past and certain physical aspects which would be veiled for so long – who made that superficial diagnosis and rigidly poisoned with masses of pills her inner Urchin who simply asked to be heard. But no one harked except of Pedro who would many years later break his silence to explain her holistic decay: *Virginia felt to BECOME A BOY* – so simple, so fatal!

Forgive your second biographer this sudden opening out of the blue under the Chiltern's burning sun of the Swinging Summer '66, since we sadly know, how your first one – from whom you had wrung the promise when you lay under your shroud to write the truth (as you had begged him a myriad times in life) – was immediately blocked by his cowardice and your closest, both of whom were greedy for discretion, so that he revealed your conflict no sooner than a decade later on his last pages before his pen dried out. And thus your self-betrayal in life became the posthumous lie that is still circulating.

Basically speaking: For elderly clans, there is nothing worse than gender misconduct in their noble lineage – those were the times (and still are). So that misfits are admonished of their duties and their place: Always keep the posture, feign a pretty surface, never show emotions to avoid their sanctions! Aristocats are not famous for their warmth, but well practiced in prescribing drugs instead of hugs.

A non-pregnant lady with a *Boy in the Box* – ridiculous! Unspeakable!

I can hear established folks growling: “Calm down, pull yourself together!”

I can see a shepherdess gently stroking your arm, which is fluffy like *Maid Netty's*.

And I listen to your voice, which sounds so honey-sweet, so different from how your body feels: “My dear, compassionate companions, what do you think would be the better way to comfort me?”



After Swinging '66, the year of '67 reached another overheated peak, later called the *Summer of Love*. For her it would be the summer of loss. So let us now approach her *Annus Horribilis*.

According to a statement of her agent Al, *Interlude* was intended as Virginia's *comeback*, maybe well meant to tear her out of her sorrows when she was hanging around at the Chiltern's outer rim far off Downtown's healing diversity. But bitterly ironic, as it is alleged, the work from standstill would just lead to fatal exhaustion. And we tend to imagine that after the filming our protagonist may have returned (un)usually strained into a huge manor full of absence with a chest at the bed edge full of silver because at the same time, in the middle of that busy year, Thommy was founding his new photographic company in one of London's poshest quarters. Maybe that was another bad timing – remember the *Willing* clash five long years before? In contrast to her career, his business would flourish for many decades with a couple of corporate partners, including Ricky Lich, a pretty popular photographer who is said to have also served as one of the models for the protagonist of *BLOW-UP*. By the way, this stunning work (filmed in early summer '66, released in spring of '67) would become the cult film of whole a generation (and also my personal favourite); and albeit Virginia didn't appear in Antonioni's master piece, we have later to shed light on some connections to *Antonia's* master cast.



Sid, who had become a world star since with an Oscar or three, had just made *To Sir with Love* in East End. I wonder if he and Virginia met in the snuggly Hope and Anchor Pub off Notting Hill Gate, talked about their *Island* adventures and remembered her innocent mischief once in Shepherd's Bush while the juke box was playing Caribbean rhythms. And they could have made a round of the Carnival (that had been newly founded in the previous year) as unrecognized ragamuffins in shared memory of Road Town's happy parade when Sid performed the bridal march of Tricky Dick (in rather an inharmonious version to my ears; but perhaps I am just an ignorant of well-tempered Calypso). I would be so happy for her, but sadly I fear he didn't even remember the simple young girl who almost drowned so long ago but yet so close. To conclude that there was a lot going on in these two years which were both culturally roaring (at least in Downtown) and oppressive on private fields, spiced with a series of flashbacks, so that a receptive soul could have been triggered to feverishly ponder about unresolved incidents of past and present until restless sleep.

*Interlude* is a touching drama of Love and Despair in a highly depressing retrospect of unfulfilled longings and fatal regret. Virginia played *Antonia*, the suffering wife of a vain conductor (starring Oskar, another over-rated Hun with callous eyes and an arrogant voice sharp like a sword; as we are notorious for that) in lewd love with a random girl who is empty like a water glass and eager for superficial joy (poorly performed by a certain void actress whose name I've just forgotten, fortunately for my weak stomach). Once again, Virginia captured the vessel with her Herculean charisma (despite all bottomless hopelessness as she is crushed between those nasty folks like a gasping carp) so that every sane viewer could have only eyes for her (and Oskar wasn't amused. Sounding familiar?).



The *Interlude* aesthetics change between dynamic realism and romantic still-lives (as something like a contemporary moral painting of the Swinging Sixties) seasoned with the appearance of Virginia more beautiful than ever – even if she was disturbingly malnourished with shanks thinner than Twiggy's. And therefore, as the lady reclines with the audience sitting at her bed edge, another quote is wafting (even if not from one of her films): *She's just having a rest! Yet she won't have all time in the world.* But above all, she proudly presents her very own blue sapphire ring (that she had soiled on screen five long years ago in *Willing*) by holding it insistently in front of the cam. Would anyone even recognize the immense significance she attached to this gem when *Interlude* will premiere in the spring of '68?

This sign of a conventional relationship for which she had struggled for so long? It won't matter anyway. 'Twas all wasted love effort.

(And let me ask a general question: *What's the meaning of such a pitiful piece of metal?* Love arises from nature, not from convention, and does not require legitimation! I totally share the whimsical worldview through a couple of Panda eyes, at least on this point. Forgive my amoral approaches.)

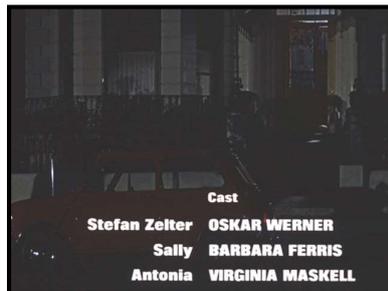
And nobody cared for a shallow romance on the peak of '68 when the illusions of whole a generation imploded in murder and chaos under the guns of the establishment. Once more we had to realize Gryphius' ancient wisdoms that all hopes are just for vain and any achievements of heart-blooded labour are destined to wither away. And *Interlude* also, Virginia's passion, vanished for decades; the delicate stuff was suddenly anachronistic. Last but not least in the face of both her magnificent performance and her touching fate, the superficial love affair of Oskar and the other girl was out of mind and every sympathetic viewer could only empathize with the suffering princess. Just Oskar was annoyed, even more since his conductor sequences (pretty boring stuff, by the way, and we are happily spared more of it) had been largely cut out of the final version (and it is well known that cutting off certain parts is man's greatest nightmare), to be reminded of Pete's grudge when Virginia had become the secret lead role in another shallow romance, albeit reluctantly just due to her natural charisma. But when we read Oskar's callous statements against the background of Virginia's finale, spiced with rebukes *how she could have behaved so irresponsible*, despite lacking any knowledge of her manifold miseries, he turned out to be another know-it-all parroting superficial stereotypes. That's always the same procedure: Those ignorant people who have driven us into despair by coldness and disdain, use to throw dirt at our corpses to soil our memory and free themselves from every shame (if they ever mention our names again without blushing or rather whisper with shudders, given the sad fact that moralistic blockheads had once declared that taking one's own life would be the greatest of all sins).



The late Virginia was nominated for best supporting actress but fobbed off with a posthumous BAFTA award – for whatever. Let's be honest, that's nothing but another piece of pointless metal. All the more so given the fact that in life she wasn't eager for superfluous stuff and lacked any interest for strutting around in public and representing any special status off-stage. It's just sad to realize it would remain the only award of the most passionate person who ever lived on earth (at least on the shores of my limited lagoon). By the way, I couldn't find out (may my sources be sketchy) whoever accepted her award, so I am afraid it may have been sold off at a flea market on Rupert Street or Portobello Road.

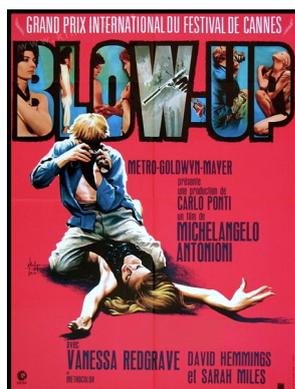
Because we know for sure that her memory's erasure began immediately after her last breath at the behest of her environment, for whatever reason. She wouldn't be mentioned again as if she had never lived (and this elision – or let me name it what it is: aversion – will be admitted verbatim many years later by some people who were close to her. The madness of ostracizing the deceased has always had a method: Just look at how the symbols of Hatshepsut were scratched out by her successor).

And therefore, when the closing credits scrolled across the screen with her noble name vanishing for ever, I wonder if anyone gave her the last farewell. A couple of people may have got lost in an abandoned cinema somewhere in the West or just a single toff sitting forlorn in the dark just like the *obscure lady* running behind a hearse in *Arrival*. We will never know it. And if it sounds kitschy, I can't watch the credits without sobbing whole the night about her unjust fate. Virginia fell in oblivion.



Let's now briefly shed light on cross-connections that may have also led to Virginia's last role: A lesser known fact is that Oskar was Antonioni's preferred candidate to star as *Thomas* in *BLOW-UP*, an outstanding movie that was made in early summer '66 entirely on location in London's vibrant heart. But he rejected the role for some reasons, maybe because of Antonioni's directing style (that was more focused on improvisation) or with regard to his upcoming cast as the star conductor *Stefan*, a lovable character, as arrogant as wife-cheating, which promised then more fame – ironically a fallacy. What if he had known the lasting success of *BLOW-UP* and how *Interlude* would flop? Well, tis his problem and our delight since a handsome blonde lad, newcomer Davie (looking like the aging Oskar in his youthful bloom), got the lot and became immediately one of the faces of the Swinging '60s.

Therefore we can speculate that Oskar is the missing link. Maybe he made Al aware of *Interlude* as an ideal opportunity for Virginia's comeback. And so her agent recommended her for the role of *Antonia*. Over and beyond, it's tempting to assume that Virginia might have even applied for the role of the *Ominous Lady*. It would have been a perfect cast in view of her mysterious appearance, her aura of restrained sexuality and her ability to express emotions that simmer beneath a ladylike surface. The nameless woman is caught in an awkward situation by the naughty photographer, much to *Thomas'*



delight and even more exploited to his potential benefit – respectively he believes so, as it is rather he who will slip into a pretty dangerous matter of events beyond his control. The lady was ultimately portrayed by Vanessa with mental strength and physical spice, exposing a beautiful (and pretty boyish) back, much looking like Virginia's in some *Willing* sequences. Yummy! To guess why she herself might have renounced this delicate role before others would have urged her to do so. But what is certain is that while Virginia stayed somewhere marooned far from the big screen and almost forgotten, Vanessa was more popular so that *BLOW-UP* was advertised mostly with her name in larger letters than of Davie's (and this would have certainly not been to Oskar's spoiled palate, not true?!) – that's probably the sober reason why Virginia didn't appear in her dream role.

And let's take a brief preview to *Interlude*: As we have already heard that Oskar will not be amused about both Virginia's takeover and how she would suddenly leave the stage, he generally rejected her as his sidekick since he wished *Antonia* performed by a certain fellow (Claire, who looked admittedly much more like a housewife and totally lacked Virginia's noblesse; and so we could also understand the husband better). Déjà-vu! It reminds of Pete's mischief in regard to his Welsh mistress. Did I ever resume regarding her partners that she always chose poorly? Virginia was overcast in each of her roles apart from her comfortable *Island*. She should have better fired Al in time (and every suggestive adviser who thought to know what was good for her – ouch, why do I feel a sudden stab in my neck?!)



However, Virginia's absence from the stage for at least two years was probably effective. She was hanging around at the border to nowhere in early summer '66 when London was swinging on its heyday and both *To Sir with Love* and *BLOW-UP* were made simultaneously in the roaring East- and the Westend with a lot of fellows happily participating, just missing the *lost actress* no one has seen for so long and didn't even know if she was alive; and at the same time she was (allegedly) diagnosed with a *severe depression*, so that we may be tempted to assume at least a little bit of causality. To quote a German saying (I don't know how to translate it correctly): *The ceiling falls onto your head* – that's what I think she may have felt in those days when she was forlorn at home and swung the broom instead of London to certainly silently mourn missed chances. And I have deepest sympathy for her and all her suffering mates who had been put in straightjackets of social demaands as if their burden would be intended by nature rather than imposed by patriarchal structures, basically speaking.

*Thomas* again was allegedly shaped after the model of Thommy's photographic circle; and particularly Ricky was said to be one of two or three to choose from. This interesting toff, a sprout of the high nobility and despite his youth already a pretty popular photographer of Swinging London's heyday, will become glorious about one and a half decade later for his bewitching wedding photos of a certain ceremony that will go down in British history as the most inglorious false start.



(Just to be mentioned, even if hardly concerned with our story, that he would also become pretty infamous for his archaic views on social discourses such as divorce and diversity, very much in contrast to his own exalted lifestyle – well, those are the people who use to drink wine and like to preach water.)

Last but not least, Ricky's pretty sister will become Virginia's successor. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*. Well, this is just an overview of her illustrious surroundings when she was still part of a fashionable community (and particularly attracted to photographers at least since the *Catalyst's* times, as we know from Pedro's tales). So that we may imagine her also as a hostess of posh receptions in the course of Thommy's profession (as she had advertised his photographic works on a tour abroad end of '62) – and perhaps even (although there is no evidence) in her very own lodge, the studio in Kensington, which was very similar to *Thomas'* loft (lying off Holland Park Gate that was also her favourite

sphere) before she would leave the vibrant city just on the height of its Swing Era. Indeed, *BLOW-UP* seems like a picture sheet of her personal backstage, from both her social and spatial point of view. Therefore we may assume that when the film was released in early spring of '67, Virginia was sitting in the cinema with one crying and one laughing eye (and mostly looking like – or through – a Panda) and saw it for herself like another retrospect of her own environment from times so close but yet so far before she had abandoned her cozy little haven in the middle of the town and settled at the north cape.



I'll renounce from retelling the plot which is certainly well known to most of the audience, to focus on some interesting aspects that could be linked to our story:

*Thomas*, a fashion photographer, who is bored if not disgusted with his life and Swinging London's surface, is seeking for the hidden truth behind the obvious. On his search he accidentally stumbles upon a puzzle as he follows a strange couple into an idyllic park (whose silence is contrasting to the roaring town) and proves himself to be a little Paparazzo by taking a series of photos of their discreet meeting. It's not certain how they are related; but since they may have an age difference of about 23 years, we may be inclined they are not married, at least not to each other. Therefore the *ominous lady* isn't amused about having been caught and eager to capture the evidence from our wannabe sleuth since it sheds light on an incident that we will find out more about step by step when *Thomas* blows up his photos to the last pixel until the eyes hurt of all spectators and those who are involved. And we realize that a sinister secret is lurking behind the hedges (in the shape of a pistol barrel and later the old man's body) since while the snapshots were being taken, the gallant was shot for obscure reasons we will never know – perhaps because of jealousy or to get rid of the long shadows of an unresolved past. There are many skeletons in relationship closets. For the leftovers from the weekend the photographer is eager to solve the mystery – indeed, he never will and neither will the audience (to be reminded of *The Prisoner* whose obscure finale not even the maker could ever explain), all the less since he will vanish at the open ending so that we may assume he could have also died at an uncertain time and doesn't even realize his tragic fate. This interpretation is all the more tempting in view of the final sequence which looks pretty surreal as if we were on drugs: When *Thomas* surveys the site where the corpse has been deposited behind a hedge, and a gentle breeze is rustling in the trees, there suddenly sounds a cracking – a moment that makes us flinch briefly – perhaps from a broken branch or someone sitting on his neck (but possibly I tend to over-interpret). After he has descended from the upper to the lower meadow, he passes along a tennis court where some Hippies are performing a pantomime (in fact, they celebrate the end of a rag week); and they even invite him to play with them by throwing him an imaginary ball. By joining them, he loses himself in the green where his search once began.



I love this park! So let briefly the location spotter babble: I am magically attracted by this bewitching place that feels like lost in space (and I know I am not alone). *It's so peaceful*, to quote *Thomas*, much in contrast to the uninviting environment of main traffic axes and dwellings in decay and demolition. No London trip is closed without sitting at the tennis lawn and listening to the popping of the balls, and even if just imagined; since the park is also London's loneliest place, particularly wonderful in autumn in a colourful spectacle with mounds of leaves gently rustling. The first time when I saw surprisingly some players, was on the dog days of summer '24 with me as the only spectator – silent, of course. By the way, did I already mention the resemblance of this place to the tennis court next to a certain white gate out there in the Chilterns? And the latter seems to me that it is also waiting for the repetition of a mute match of pale-faced folks that will never score a point.

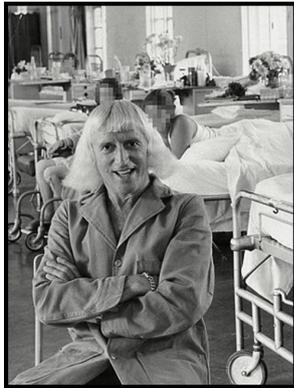
And it's exactly this silence that shapes the movie's mood. *BLOW-UP* looks sometimes like it's crawling along in slow motion at any boring weekend and as if the plot could happen just in your neighbourhood tomorrow (and given this deceleration, I use to watch my fondest film to calm down from stress – and ponder about what if... my fondest actress would accompany me; or vice-versa).



Indeed, the film is actually full of absence and tranquillity, often dispenses from language and swaps the roar of the city with the sound of nature – surprisingly, since it is considered the parable of Swinging London. In fact, the narrative level beyond the subtle crime plot deals also with the meaning of rolling around on posh carpets (or on photographer's canvases. If you know, you know) with nothing but dust underneath, symbolized by a broken guitar, thrown away by fans of a certain celeb who has crushed it in quirky excitement, that exposes itself as cultural waste (but I spare the inclined reader further half-boiled reviews). And as we heard above, the protagonist, annoyed by his surroundings, is eager to escape the superficial fair and its representatives, embodied in his publisher *Ron*. This bewitching and suggestive lad advises the photographer continuing his part (and to have many lustful pleasures linked with his profession, by the way) better than becoming *free like him* – as pointing to a tramp in one of *Thomas*' photos (of a current series that has a deeper claim of social-criticism, contrasting to his usual cheesecake stuff of ultra-thin modells and decadent portraits). Wouldn't every true photographer be seeking for the genuine nature behind a fake smile and for the untamed wilderness behind a postcard idyll? And isn't every actress rather keen on diving into a sparkling art house wave than into the murky mainstream? In this sense, let's remember a certain drive to Devon that was interrupted by a little bonfire made of annoying role offers and financial baits.

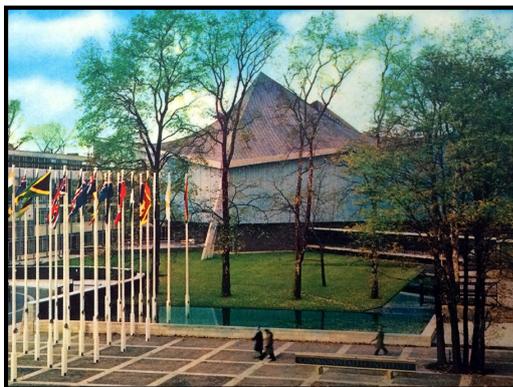


In contrast to its still-lives, *BLOW-UP* is also characterized by iconic driving scenes. And indeed, beyond the film, cruising through the swinging town in an open sports car (if you belonged to a certain class and had the necessary means) was considered at that time as the epitome of freedom and adventure, both to feel the vibrant energy and to escape from convention (as well as boasting properly, of course). *Thomas* also likes to release stress by driving along the tentacles from London's east unto the west (or vice versa) through contrasting social spheres in a heated phase of urban redevelopment – just as Virginia had experienced the rapid change of Notting Hill Gate at the end of the '50s when nothing remained of Victorian glory but a big pit at the top of Kensington Church Street.



And even if we love these rides, it's worth mentioning that a lesser known secret lurks behind the lively scenes: In fact, they used Jimmy's car (that was painted dark just for the filming to be less brightly shining). This interesting dude was then a welcome guest at posh parties on Kings Road and frequently seen (albeit less invited) on the edges of the beds of a certain hospital in Bucks (which we'll sadly have to attend together later). But this is the sort of stories the gullible audience doesn't want to be aware of – to enter the back streets of the *Vanity Fair* and find its appendages buzzing around the Aristos like gnats around the light. And no one would have guessed (as far as it is told) that, one day, he will be considered Britain's most inglorious basterd. Let's just wish *we may never meet him*. But this is, of course (or I hope so), nothing but another of my pointless digressions.

More related to the lead thread is the fact that *Interlude* will adopt the *BLOW-UP* dynamics: *Stefan* enjoys driving his open car (albeit not Jimmy's again), first with his mistress to make delightful trips through the countryside, and later as a lonesome rider through nightly streets at the edge of Holland Park in search of lost time (or vice versa, because the plot will be told in retrospect). Only *Antonia* never sits next to him; she waits at home and swings the cradle rather than London. Good wife!



For whatever obscure reasons, I believe that *BLOW-UP* was Virginia's favourite film (if not even her last happy cinema experience); and so I can imagine another fictive scene: She might well have watched the movie unrecognized in the darkness at the Kensington Odeon opposite of Holland Park in April '67. Behind the concave gate, which she had certainly frequently passed during her Kensington time, was the Commonwealth Institute with an exhibition of the British overseas territories. We can assume that she enjoyed coming here, especially to a pretty little stand called the *Caribbean Eye* – which even had a poster of her *Virgin Island* – to proudly present it to her darling; and even more so now in anticipation of *Big Ten*, a newly opened holiday resort on Virgin Gorda and perhaps her travel dream to recover from the stress of her recent film works in Wales and South England. By the way, the construction of its zigzag-shaped reception reminds of the Institute's iconic open space under a pyramidal roof; both are great modernist works, perhaps to Virginia's taste (and very much to mine). Holland Park is also one of my two favourites in London, both of which are characterized by their mystical contrast of a formal part on the lower level and a wilderness on the upper one. And it's here the very green heart of most of Virginia's London lodgings, accessible by foot in just a few minutes both from the Scarsdale and Carmel Court. Therefore it's highly probable, even if not literally proven, that she strolled around here through the grove, perhaps with Rupert on the leash and pushing a pram,

before she left Downtown a year and a half ago. In the centre is another remarkable building, serving as a youth hostel since the early '50s: the Jacobean fragments of the elder Holland House and its modernist extensions. It's a comfortable conglomerate with a little feeling of a modern cloister and actually shaped like the brand-new quadrum of Wain Hall (maybe designed by the same architect). Isn't it tempting to assume that Virginia could have been attracted by this soothing site? To imagine her sitting at the fountain and relaxing from the summer heat (like me in the dog days of August). Last but not least, we can walk along the paths through the northern wilderness for hours and hours almost alone, and – what stands out visually – along those significant fences (which still exist) like the ones you can see in *BLOW-UP*. It is alleged that the latter had been erected in Maryon Park just as a movie set; but we can be pretty sure that they were already there (you can even find rare fragments but most of them have now been demolished) – well, here's the location spotter speaking rather than your biographer. However these park spheres seem to merge, at least in my mind and maybe also yours.



Intrigued by the dynamics and excited to see the park with your own dark eyes, we may now imagine that you set off on a little ride after leaving the Odeon. You entered your maroon Countryman, crossed the Thames and travelled to Woolwich to find a shabby quarter much in contrast to Kensington's noblesse (reminding of the scenery of *Thomas'* picture book about the less fortunate). You passed Victorian terraces just waiting for demolition to be replaced by a large council estate settlement, as sober as boring; and you pressed your little nose against the panes of that empty corner shop – to recoil when *the ugly old man* suddenly appeared out of the darkness (as I will do just as scared, and also by the *Child Catcher* of 1968 (if you know, you know), when I see the good ol' stuff for the first time on telly over a decade later – highly effective in causing repetitive nightmares, I have to admit).

Oh yes, the antique shop! A cinematic leitmotif of the late '60s and the early '70s that is frequently adopted in an era of impetuous change on every cultural and social field and that also connects *BLOW-UP*, *Interlude* and *Endless Night*. And there may be a deeper meaning as a symbol for something lasting (or threatening) from the past that is carried into the present, and for subconscious burdens that finally come to light –



As through an Aladdin lamp purchased as a sign of love, that will soon extinguish or even never shine.

And let's briefly point out a few town-planning aspects, as we are today in a similar phase of roaring expansion and urban redevelopment, generally speaking; and whole that settlement above has been recently demolished hardly 60 years after it had been erected, to prove another time (and even if I tend to twaddle) that nothing endures for ever. If you don't have to be really sad about the loss of those council estate dwellings – just from the point of the see-woman, surely not the socialist one – since they were pretty ugly; apart from the skyline, of course, of some towers risen up behind the upper meadow, as seen in the film, which I enjoyed so many times – to experience a pretty disillusionment on my latest trip: after Covid they were all gone (even sadder since they looked so similar to Bellahøj in Copenhagen, an accordingly modernist settlement where I used to hang around in my Danish age). In addition, a part of the lower meadow's horizon is also missing, a sham wall of white-washed terrace rear sides (looking rather Devonian, by the way, even if perhaps only through my Panda eyes) – but that was, indeed, just a short-living backdrop, built to achieve a gloomier mood of the enclosed vale.



Let's now approach the park together in all its former beauty and that of its environment. We ascend the steep lane that leads to the entrance on the wooded hill (looking like a certain junction where the Icknield Way enters the forest) with something like a gate to beyond that licks after the brave one who wants to know what lies behind. We pass through the mighty row of trees to enter a sheltered forecourt (that reminds a little bit of the Parsonage's). Just to the left is a long staircase that leads to the mound where the upper meadow slumbers (it is still unaltered and waiting for many happy returns, I promise). Loneliness reigns on the ridge and only silent leaves rustle in a gentle breeze – according to your taste since *April '58*; and it may tempt you to ponder about why Pedro has published your poems right now and called the compilation *Leaves of Silence*. That's a strange synchronicity (or rather a premonition?). And I see you dancing up the stairs in childish delight, loosened from adult restraints, as the protagonist just did on the screen, renounced his meaningless duties and lived out his inner urchin.

It's here where the ominous couple met, a nameless young mistress and a middle-old rake, caught romping around like children. But what seems like a game, would soon turn out to be serious since we have to realize that it was just their last farewell, ceased by a pistol to his head, and his corpse was placed behind a hedge under a small tree where the latter's leaves will fondle the finder's forehead. And just as Vanessa was harassed by Snappy Snaps, you had been caught once too by a little fat sleuth in a sinful embrace – a less happy memory of your Scarsdale from times so long ago; and certainly a good reason why you rejected her role considering the tricky plot. But instead of starring in *Thomas'* tales you accepted another role, much more emotionally charged and fatally effective: *Antonia* calls!

Descended from the ridge, you dive into the rather dark but soothing vale like into a sea of tranquillity that is surrounded on all sides by gentle wooded slopes, just as the photographer did in a kind of narcoleptic trance (and I would like to assume that he wasn't even aware about his disappearance). On your way to the exit you pass along the tennis court where perhaps a pantomime play is just given by whimsical folks with white-washed faces. You watch them for a while and frown in the face of the surreal scene; and then, and this is the climax, you are even invited to participate. As you are floating over the meadow, freed from *all worries, the noise and the hurry* in and around you, you ponder about how it would be simply to vanish, just *like him* here at noon on the screen. It would be heavenly peace.



But Virginia shouldn't have been disappointed given her gone dream role, as she was soon compensated with a similar cast as an *obscure lady* who was even more effective in the plot: Lest we forget her fourth appearance in colour, even though it was only a telly production. She starred now in the first episode *Arrival* of *The Prisoner*, an outstanding work (that is considered by gourmets to be the best series of all time, and I tend to share this opinion) about how to survive in a surreal (?) community of mind controll, submission and physical abuse, filmed in early autumn '66.



If this work was supposed to tear her out of her depression, it was, as always, counterproductive. Think about why! The place is called *The Village*, where everyone is mutual, seemingly happy and a perfect social *Number* (the latter literally). But Evil lurks behind the shining facades: Fierce authorities and their medical henchmen use to condition the inhabitants and admonish their duties and place in the herd, *by hook or by crook* – copied from reality of the gruesome psychiatry in the 1960s when everyone became a Guinea pig of drug research and social monitoring under the guise of science. And mind the *Rover!* An obscure bubble out of the blue, that uses to suffocate incorrigible misfits (well, this was just science-fiction, oh what a luck. To think today about for how much longer).



*A still tongue makes a happy live* – that's one of the *Villages'* mottos. Sounding familiar? *Speechlessness!* The doom of emotive people, who are always forced to keep quiet until they will boil over at some point. Woe, woe! They could suddenly scare the complacent community with unexpected deeds, as indeed, the imprisoned protagonist, called *No.6*, will act like this for a cleansing thunderstorm. As generally speaking, society needs from time to time a well-tempered wake-up call to be confronted with its own ignorance of not having noticed the darkness behind the white-washed walls (particularly those of institutions of so-called public welfare) and misery behind false (aka forced) happiness, so that the sleepwalking folks may be torn from their narcolepsy. But in fact, the paralysis continues. We submit to meaningless demands of a compulsory society in ancient corsets constructed from conventions that suffocate every movement and free will. Never reveal the unvarnished truth that could annoy those people around you and possibly destroy their blurry views about the meaning of being *mutual* (aka submissive) in a humiliating human chess game.



Beware of getting *unmutual!* By questioning authority, announcing social grievances and your own misery therein if you want to avoid being *corrected* immediately by their medical henchmen – for your own good, of course, and even more for the social (dis)order. And as we will find out, there are white-robed brethren lurking behind the dome gates who shaped us for so long until we were chess pieces of a community without rough edges that functions like a Clockwork (or a beeping bird cage machine) – that’s the dark side

of the so-called “enlightenment” that used to discard Emotion in favour of Reason and to erase every feeling which is alleged to be non-conform (to be converted) according their “wisdom” (respectively the tradition of the repetitive Ps in a scientific garb). Those were the ‘60s when psychology took over the baton from the clergy to watch over public moral and determine the meaning of right and wrong behaviour (constantly changing almost every decade, so that every result (or insult) of “mind research” reveals itself as charlatantry). All human paradigms, whether scientific, philosophical, religious or political, are in perpetual change and therefore absolutely meaningless – only nature is permanent, and there is just one general law: the limitless freedom of the individual! We aren’t crawlers in ant-hills (at least not yet; albeit digitalization is just on the verge of fulfilling the fondest fantasies of all desires for conformity worldwide, by fact not by fiction; but please ignore this anachronism). It’s best to be deaf for all unfounded teachings and live only according to one’s own moral ideas; that’s the only path to happiness. Nobody is responsibility for anyone, even less for the community and its self-righteous thought leaders (and wannabe philosophers are the worst). What is called “human culture” is nothing but an art form against unspoiled nature. “Society” doesn’t exist; it’s a chimera thought up by alpha wolves for their benefit. Only the individual is real. *All (Wo)men are Islands* in an untamed sea.



At least the protagonist proves himself steadfast as an individual until the martial finale when he leads social order to its well-deserved downfall during a highly dynamic sequence. While the *Village* crowd prefers to flee like a frightened flock of chickens, a handful of individualists overcome the system with great ultra-violence – unexpected in Pat’s works which usually avoids this. But time has come to relieve the mental pressure both of *No.6* and the boiling audience, stirred up by months of shared suffering, so that we all thirst for revenge! And that blazing bonfire looks much the same as Malcolm’s method of the righteous way how to cease patriarchal hierarchy.

*IF...* you dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel and burn their manifestos, both all secular and sacred, and every single –ism, you will be *free like him!*



Two totally different misfits will join Pat’s final fight: There’s the system member, disgusted by his own existence and submissiveness (remember the photographer?), greedy to come out off the mill (or even burn it down), as we find him symbolized by *No.2*. Albeit apparently the chief, he is in fact just as exchangeable as any ant (so that in every episode he, or even she, would be replaced), in constant competition against his power-hungry successors, doomed to do his best in enslaving the people – in order to survive himself; but we know that what is called *adaptation to survive* means the contrary: It’s suicide in instalments! And therefore, the re-vived

*No.2* (portrayed by Leo who would almost lose his life in a bizarre scene of method acting, by fact, not by fiction), sickened of his self-denial when he suddenly awakes from his long-enduring nightmare as



a reluctant part of the establishment, joins finally the rebels. Good man! And there is the hopeful, unbridled youth, embodied by a quirky, highly charismatic (albeit a little bit militant) Hippie (whose appearance reminds of certain tennis folks, by the way), who tears the old men’s asses open while dancing in trance and singing *Dem Bones*. Which gourmet wouldn’t be bored or rather disgusted by stale dishes boiled up a myriad times and passed on by ugly old grandpas to gullible grandsons? Every generation needs, that’s the natural course of things, a total new recipe so that their sensitive taste doesn’t fade away! And so our sympathetic little rioters

overcome together the autocratic structures that are so rusted and decadent that even their Makers

don't know what they actually exist for – like every institution all around the world, both sacred and secular power, longs for The Redeemer (so that an ordinary Number can even become the first) – and over and beyond (but this may be just my personal impression), mankind is waiting for the big bang, the new start of the evolution, a completely new species that lives only according to the nature.

But forgive my quirky attempt at a philosophical (yuck!) discourse on the *Prisoner's* base. Since I would have also certainly taken my last breath in the *Village's* asylum, I can't watch the *Prisoner* objectively without raging for a fortnight in the face of a social model that I detest from the bottom of my heart – all the more so considering the fact that currently whole the world is becoming a *Village*, since all the freedoms we have fought for over generations (paradoxically, since every right is not gifted by man but only by nature) will soon be taken away in record time even in societies that are considered “enlightened” (the latter is the greatest paradox of all because “philosophy” is male vomit). All chauvinists of the world are about to reunite and they all are blowing the same Trumpet!

But let's come back to the roots of the *Prisoner's* series: Virginia is surely best remembered for her most iconic role as the *Obscure Lady* aka *No.9* by most of her enthusiasts (as she and I met again for the first time consciously after our Island romance and the funny *Doctor's* joy of childhood).

It was Pat – supposedly a lonesome ranger and similarly estranged from the mainstream biz like her – who created this holistic masterpiece and he himself starred as *No.6*, the *Prisoner* protagonist (who is actually, as it is rumoured, *Secret Agent Drake*, recently retired – he better shouldn't have done this!). As we already know, he and our heroine had filmed an episode of *Danger Man* (aka *Agent Drake*) two years earlier. Virginia's performance, juvenile looking as if *the Colonel's Daughter* had just come of age, had made a great impression so that she was the chosen one now to be Pat's sidekick in the pilot episode *Arrival*, looking like her mother in her most mature appearance (well, tis just makeup). Pat may have had wise reasons for his choice – to lure out, *by hook or by crook*, her best performance of restrained sexuality and silent despair that simmers in the depth. And that's probably a basic of good acting, generally speaking – to explode on the set (better than at home) and enchant the grateful audience in order to be granted with applause (better than annoying your darling to be captured by his quacks). You can reduce stress on stage (if you get the chance to work and not rock in a chair alone).

It is also worth mentioning that the episode *Arrival* was directed by Don who was, as we learned above, a familiar fellow from her happier past when they had made most of her early films together, last but not least Virginia's first TV appearance as adorable little Eve exactly nine years ago. *No.9* would be now their last joined character study, as if another thread was being cut. Oh sinister destiny!



Virginia's scenes were shot entirely in Portmeirion, an Italianate folly on the Welsh shores, intended by a noble dilettante half a century ago and still under construction when the filming began. Its beautiful location and picturesque appearance reminds much of Ol'Clovelly, that hamlet in Heartland founded by the Spaniards, who were stranded on stranger tides after the Armada was sunk, where Pedro and his patchwork used to come together for *Many Happy Returns*; and a line from his tome about Devon (1966) sounds just as fitting for Portmeirion: *Where a waterfall of cottages meets the sea*. And we may remember Road Town, similarly nestling at Tortola's slope, with the lively procession of a large bed, looking like a *raft of love*, being towed through the mainstreet down to the bay while cheerful music plays. But back then it was a Creole Pageant, now it is a Funeral March, and Virginia sleepwalks in it as if lost in space and time. Let's be honest: Nothing is left of her great expectations but a sad cameo of hardly five minutes – this is her only work in two long years.



Indeed, according to her actual mood just around these autumn days after *a severe depression throughout the summer*, we first meet the *obscure lady* as she follows all alone the hearse of her beloved. The latter jumped out of an asylum window to escape the maltreatment of *Ludovico Institute*; and a female inmate will do the same some episodes later when she is threatened with abuse in her clinic cot by the rake of the rakes – just two of many fictive incidents which are sadly adopted from the everyday procedure in institutions of so-called public health, where, as it is well known, sane patients are misused for pseudo-scientific experiments and brutal harassment by an insane staff to be released totally devastated, sicker than before they were turned through the mind and bone mills. And I ponder about if Pat considered her actual condition (certainly her temperament) when he chased her after that hearse in order to trigger a high degree of passion. In any case, it's an effective form of *method acting*; and our receptive protagonist knew a lot about this, both in private and on stage.



Then comes the most touching sequence: The lady observes the strange burial in the tidal sands to her feet; and as she looks to beyond (aka *westward ho!*) with her spherical gaze that flees time and space, she may lament quietly: *This is tide, this I am!* And as she stands there narcoleptically lost in grief, she is fiercely turned around by *No.6* in the twinkling of an eye (just like a helpless inmate by a savage keeper) to *suddenly burst into a waterfall of tears* that a *raft of love* could be washed into the Irish (respectively Celtic) Sea. And never before and again I would have liked to break through the screen pane (or pain) to *biff him one* and cuddle the little wet sparrow (I'm sorry, I know twas only fiction. Was it?). Rather, I remember Pedro's observations that *her tears were not ordinary tears, they were sobs from the depth of her being* – so that I am tempted to believe that both trance and tears were real, attached to the questions of how the time flies and where we want to be or not to be (and with whom).



By the way, didn't we see her in the same pose already just two years before as *the Colonel's Daughter*? To ask pretty Pat (and not only him) why he had always to treat her so badly?

Indeed, he knew much about method acting: In their finale sequence, Pat and Leo – the epitome of *No.2* – became so engrossed in a hot-blooded dispute that the latter suffered a heart attack on stage (and he was more of a tough guy than a delicate actress who had to cope with many current miseries). Yeah, my baffled readers, that's one of many true anecdotes from the making of *The Prisoner*, which is perhaps the best-reviewed film work at all, thanks to a community of loyal *Village People* (who may have been lucky enough not to be converted there – of course I am just kidding). Everything has already been said. And therefore I will renounce from further analyses beyond Virginia's involvement – but not without joining (rarely enough, as I prefer to stay alone) a certain group of believers, concerning THE question of *who is No.1?* The answer is, of course: *You are, No.6!*

And I am so bold as to suggest an additional scene off-stage, which is, of course, completely fictive: Since Pat was a gent despite his naughty methods, he may have invited our battered heroine to a clarifying meeting (and certainly for some ciggies, as we hardly see him either in a single pic without them) on that evening after the strained filming. They would have probably met in the lighthouse cottage where he lived with his family during the work, the waves crashed against the cliffs and the seagulls giggled – soothing sounds and even more familiar as they wafted over from Heartland.



To reach the lighthouse we passed the stone ship where they had just met for a movie sequence, too, albeit for a less meaningful dialogue, just to quote *electro-pass* – if you know, you know (and better forget it, since it was hardly a good reference from a serious actress who was praised for her *elocution talent*, to be honest). However, the stone ship was (and still is) a pretty backdrop of Portmeirion's creator. It was modelled after a vessel that suffered shipwreck in the tidal sands (if it wasn't sunk by an ominous bubble that suddenly emerged from the abyss) to never set off again – like a gull with broken wings marooned on a rock, or the Rhone forever anchored to the ground *full fathom five*. When we entered the cottage, I think I remember that there was music playing from the jukebox, a lively Hippie song by the Sun Setters (that would reappear in a certain Kubrick movie a few years later): *I want to marry a light-house keeper / and keep in company*. And for a moment I saw a beam of an Aladdin lamp fleetingly shining through the panes from far beyond the sea. But here was also a scenic place to talk about experiences in a deceptive business in which they both felt like stranded strangers. And once again I played a listening mouse and what I believe to have picked up is something like this:

Regarding the *Prisoner's* embrace, our heroine complained pathetically:

"I was always pulled around by others who determined my stations." Pat reminded soberly:

"No.9, you'll be a Lady"..."No.6, *I am not a Lady. I am a free Urchin!*" Virginia exclaimed.

(Stage direction: established laughter from behind the curtain.)

Then she begged for his advice: "Brother, what shall I do?"

I am not sure what he had to say; but it sounded like (since *Drake was a free man*):

"Cease your miscast in their play. Renounce from being *their pawn!*" Or was it rather:

"Submit to the place that the Looord has assigned you!" (since Pat was also a devoted Catholic)?

I didn't hear her silent reply but I guess that she thought about the first and preferred to do the latter. (However, Pat will probably take over our little dialogue when he later publicly reflects on the final declaration of his whimsical work – that even his fondest fans will not understand, and neither will I – to paraphrase the misery of self-denial as *being imprisoned by oneself*. Wise man!)



And despite his rough embraces (better than bruised eyes, by the way), I would have liked to see them as another matching couple (on screen) – but once again it shouldn't be. Since Pat was an Irish gent who refrained from every lascivious role, his *Secret Agent Drake* never took a single woman either (much in contrast to that Scottish rake we briefly spoke about above, who became infamous for this). At least his fellow actress Rosalie was granted to fall in love with *No.6*; but the latter would reject her. Oh desperate lady! And hard to believe since even though she was 10 years older, she looked beautiful and quite similar to the mature Virginia. Rosalie is well remembered for her great performance in *A Tale of Two Cities* from 1958; and one review states: *She exuded such an aura of restrained sexuality*. Sounding familiar? And as we heard above, we'll meet her again in *Midsomer County* (aka Virginia's parish) as an elderly lady, who will have lived out a long and fulfilled life, both in fact and fiction (albeit she wouldn't watch her very last work either due to her death by cancer short after the filming).

Let's mention another familiar cast in the *Prisoner's* love episode: Peter was the chosen one to star as *No.2* and to scare poor Rosalie. Only Virginia would never play with him together, that bewitching lad whom we met already in the *Avengers* and who looked like what we imagine her brother's appearance.



Another of her *Prisoner* colleagues, the late actress Annette who played an obscure spy in the episode *ABC*, will not be granted to see her own performance either due to her free death in October '67, found poisoned by Barbiturates in her own bath, sinisterly synchronous at exactly the same time as Virginia struggled in the cold and hot asylum's tub. In contrast to Virginia's vanishing (which was treated with great discretion, maybe due to her upper social status or whatever), Annette's incident attracted a lot of attention (well, she was just some celeb) and it is still reflected today. Everyone knew everything.

in the County of <del>London</del>		
6	7	8
Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered
Barbiturate Poisoning combined with the effects of exposure. The poison was Amytal	Certificate received from <del>M. J. Van Couver</del> for <del>Bill Under</del> Inquest held 15th February 1968	Sixteenth February 1968
Suicide whilst balance of mind disturbed		

Her death certificate is circulating publicly and worth to be considered also in comparison to that of our heroine. Annette's document was filled out reliably – Virginia's is full of errors in almost every column as if written in hast by an outlander's claw (a bit like me) who knew nothing about the circumstances: Her profession was concealed and replaced with *a company's director wife*. Wasn't she an active actress, registered in Al's agency? She was! But perhaps that's the natural fate of a Lady attached to a future Baronet (and my ignorance of etiquette doesn't bother me). Thommy, in turn, was given a false forename (well, that's balancing justice).

Their residence was strangely called *Somerton House* instead of *Parsonage* – although the latter’s address should have been well-known in the neighbourhood since the hamlet always lacked a manor. This error was all the more effective. It was adopted by almost all articles. Not earlier than in the summer of ’68, the correct address will be mentioned in just a couple of announcements of Virginia’s inheritance’s release – a sum of ten thousand and a few hundred pounds. That’s a pretty fortune, I have to say (an equivalent of about 100.000 pounds today. And look how hard she had worked!) to wonder why she didn’t use it for her health care – so as to visit a surgery in Harley Street rather than medical barracks in borderland, Bucks; but I surely don’t want to give any advice how to spend your money, even less so with regard to quacks, who are generally best avoided. What remains is only a small discrepancy, at least through my bruised eyes. Do you remember Virginia’s efforts she didn’t shy away to cure Lil’Rupert? But as we know *she didn’t care for herself, but just for her big loves*. Last but not least, we have to find on the form two different places of death some hundred miles afar – that’s a thing, huh?! But perhaps I let me get confused simply by a current copy of header and body poorly assembled; or some negligent clerk *made somewhere a bad mistake* then. And I don’t want to lose myself in senseless speculations of secondary spatial doubts since Silver’s confusing narrations concerning her medical treatment will later be the bigger challenge to find the forest for the trees. And back to the facts regarding Annette, I am tempted to believe her coup de theatre could also have inspired our heroine, as she was fighting with therapy against her will and her nature, to choose from various methods how to escape from the madhouse – what gentler way than to be carried on warm waves over the Styx?! Or reclining in the warmth on tropical shores under a beach tree with pyramids glittering at the horizon – at least perceived through blurry eyes or trembling ones, as in her very last scene of *Arrival*: The *obscure lady* worries about *the Prisoner’s* flight, frozen with fear and speaking only with her eyes under a helicopter’s roar, as if sounds from the future were penetrating her bones.



And speaking of unpleasant things, let’s mention bouncing Carole, Virginia’s fellow from *Doctor in Love*, who will take her own life also in her bath in 1974 after a long phase of private and professional decline, by chance in the night of Virginia’s birthday. And as we heard, their biographies, while full of contrasts, also have some similarities: Both women were brought up in and around Chelmsford rather a mile afar, one in a shabby terrace, the other in a noble convent; and while one continued her studies in the RADA school, the other preferred to run away from home at the age of 16 (to be

reminded of a certain Beatles song) and to become an actress on her own (with even small successes to be later swallowed by the greedy bosses and be dumped in 1962). Therefore we may ponder about whether these different characters could have been tempted to exchange experiences of their Essex time; and we may speculate whether they have ever met again after 1960 (for some further ciggies, of course) to chatter about their delicate relationships. On the *Doctor* screen they look like they hate each other heartily. At least Virginia, this gentle nature who was loved by all her creatures great and small, is able, when she is jealous or angry, to throw ice-cold glances (not just at Carole) which *could kill you* (and for that I also avoid turning around to her portrait on my window sill while I am writing indiscreet lines like these). But what does it mean? *These actresses know a lot about wearing masques. You never reveal what they really feel* – to quote Pedro, our fondest women’s understander.



However, given the amount of unnecessary shipwrecks on the showbiz’ cliffs, I conclude (and if I tend to repeat myself) Virginia should have become a lucky shepherdess in Down (or Devon) Under or on the Greene Island(s) under the Sun) rather than a reluctant celeb and a lost Lady in a sea of predatory creatures and storms (or lulls), some of which were unpredictable, others self-inflicted. And because we are currently that passionately entangled in sinister legends (which are sadly all true), let’s finally mention

Pat’s almost fatal odyssey some weeks after Virginias’s departure: As they filmed offshore, there raft

was overturned by big, big waves and whole the crew and him were bobbing in the Irish Sea, threatened with being dragged into the abyss (by the ominous bubble, of course). Sounding familiar? Oh my, these quirky artist folks, practiced in method acting (like some in writing) tend to lose touch with reality and cross the border of reason (and sometimes of the Rubicon or even the Styx)!

In fact, Virginia's catastrophe will occur in the *Prisoner's* pulse as if a certain Jung were drawing the lines. *Arrival* will premiere between the 29th of September and the 1st of October, 1967, just around those days when Virginia is admitted to the hospital because of an obscure *nervous breakdown* out of the blue that allegedly followed the strains of filming of *Interlude*, or because of ominous *depressions*. But this is probably a temporal coincidence and we will never know if she was granted (or inclined) to watch her own performance (to possibly be triggered to overreact in the face of tide and time).



What we know for sure is that she will never see the series' finale: *No.6* passed his steadfast struggle against *Ludovico's* mental mills and leaves the dreadful place through a sinister tunnel leading to the light while juke boxes are playing *All You Need Is Love*. Wow! The last episode, *Fall Out*, will be aired on the 1st of February, 1968, one week after her death; but it will also be that very day when her wrecked vessel would vanish in a white cloud. And my heart threatened to tear in a surge of emotions when I first saw this scene after having suffered months-long and raged against authorities with him and her together. Indeed, it felt to me like redemption, even more so during the final battle like a cleansing thunderstorm when the villains get what they deserve for holy shivers down my spine; and I know I am not alone! Afterwards, we'll find each other again in the heart of vibrant London, but now it seems like a void backdrop and as if the end is also the beginning at that very time and place where the plot started (with a drive in rage of a free spirit who is done with his surroundings and his contribution in their deceptive play) to suspect that both the reluctant protagonist and the compassionate viewer would never tear their *web of pain* in that we are woven together, but will be urged to experience the same misery over



and over again in an endless cycle of cause and effect. Pat himself will later explain his open ending to myriad of annoyed enthusiasts – perhaps reflecting on our nightly talk – that *we are all just Prisoners of ourselves*. However, what is certain is that this period during which the *Prisoner* is aired and we are rooting for the Righteous (in bright colours on the screen), will be exactly the time span of Virginia's galloping health decay (hidden on the backstage) that leads to her downfall. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

In autumn '66, Virginia's transformation is already obvious. Although a lot of it may be just make-up, she looks so worn-out and prematurely aged in just a few years, so we have to ponder about her physical health. And in her *Prisoner's* role she isn't even urged to hide her hirsutism so that we

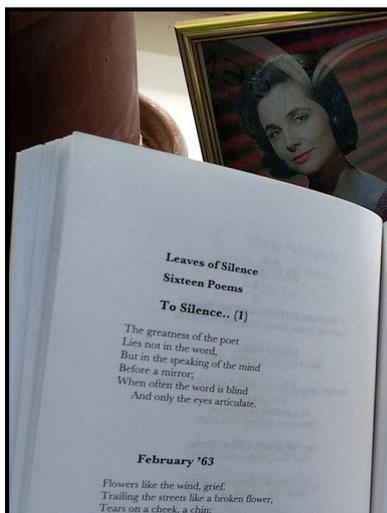


perceive a little lady's beard (forgive your naughty fetishist who adores your *boyishness* just like Bluebeard did before and, by the way, like Keller loved to fondle fluffy limbs, generally speaking). Indeed, her karmic companion will later write plainly about her *rare hormonal disorder and an ovary cyst*, which were diagnosed at Hammersmith Hospital, where she had been admitted mid 1958 on Pedro's advice, allegedly due to her hairy little secret that was pretty annoying when she was mostly dressed in swimsuits during filming in her blue lagoon and therefore had to shave twice a day. Well, that sounds reasonable. But, but... The chronology seems a bit strange. Why bother about those completed things? We know for sure that she wasn't about at all to make another film abroad since she didn't like to be a pin-up-girl but just settle in Devon with her darling. Rather, I was surprised to read how the young Muse, who had met Mephisto just some months before, confided her intimate secrets to him instead of a female friend – to prove another time

how completely dependant she seems to have been on his advices (or embraces); and all the more so since she allowed herself to be persuaded to stay in a clinic, just returned to London from months of adventures in the outback where they had almost lost themselves under the constant clatter of the mill. To let me ask generally why would a gallant advise his mistress to have a medical examination related to hormonal disturbances, and what may his wife think about these incidents?

I apologize for being so indiscreet, but these facts seem to me essential to understand the causal chain of her decline that had nothing to do with *disturbances of mind balance*. As Pedro literally determined (even though the hesitant revealed Virginia's secret only on the last pages – but that was perhaps his coup de theatre), her peculiarity was first of all a physical predisposition with diverse aspects that will never be considered in the Pitt'n Silver Show so that the construction remains of a mental disorder.

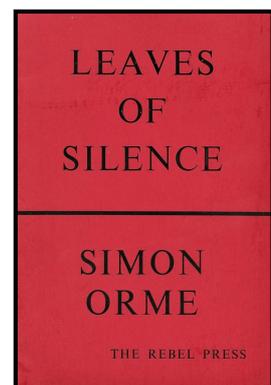
In 1967, it would get worse as every viewer can convince themselves in *Interlude*: Our heroine has become a light-weight. She looks like a twig blowing in the wind, or to speak soberly, as if she suffers from anorexia; and we can only speculate about physical or mental (respectively reciprocal) causes that were also not discussed. Maybe she suffered from a chronic or acute illness (like a friend of mine lost 20 kilos in just half a year, struck down by an endocrinological disease out of the blue to almost die of exhaustion just a month before her 32nd birthday) or she simply felt *imprisoned in herself* and her surroundings (like another popular Lady who always had to maintain posture, both scrutinized by the public and ignored in private life, was urged to adopt eight limbs like a wriggling squid on the dry – still better than being crushed like a carp, by the way – to cope with all her challenges). However, literally certain is that in the face of his starving little birdie, Pedro would admonish Virginia in their later letters to eat better (but we guess her stove was mostly cold and particularly around Christmas).



But first of all in this oppressive year, Pedro also published 16 of her poems as the *Leaves of Silence*, a collection of both her earliest works (most of them dedicated to him) from the era of their concubinage and some newer ones from her early matrimonial time in a willful compilation that doesn't follow their chronological order. Virginia is still disguised as *Simon Orme*. The sequence begins with a brief exposition of a silent poetess who expresses her emotions only through her eyes (since words are often pointless) as if she were looking in a mirror or to her beloved. (Sadly Pedro will have to take up her quote later when he finds her battered body lying in state and is urged to a similar silent dialogue – it seems as if she had composed her own requiem.) He continues without temporal relation, but since he was experienced with parables and allusions, we can assume that he wants to tell us a mystery that only she or someone familiar with the background could ever decipher. Therefore we may ponder about it long and hard why he set off

from *February '63* to go back in time via *Hospital* and *Rockhall* – two highly significant works related with her fate, created in 1958 – to such elder works such as *Limbo* and *Heat touching heat* (her eldest poem, published in an early issue of *Agenda* in April '59). I don't want to speculate about his cryptic tale and yet I must (sadly without any result. I feel like a fool, and unlike Pedro, I am not a Sophisto).

The *Leaves* were self-published in a limited edition – interestingly with a pretty maroon frontispiece, maybe referring to her favourite colour – for a tiny audience of just a handful of companions to remain largely unknown to the public (including two gentlemen, the Doctors Silver and Pitt, who will later show great negligence in investigating the Riddle of Rockhall) until our days. But hardly that she intended at all to become famous for her poetic works; rather, she talked to her own soul (maybe in a looking glass) and those close to her, used to express her feelings artificially due to her own emotional restraint and her social circumstances. Therefore her poems are revealing what drove she deep inside in the face of both threatening and healing nature, but above all of love torments. Since she was frequently separated from her beloved and always socially stigmatized, she fell into deep longing to the point of self-destruction – and Pedro answered her with works of similar dark mood. Our spouses-in-sin realized,



while they dreamt together, that their hopeless limbo lacked any future. Anyway, the little bundle of sixteen sheets of self-reflections is a colourful still-life and Virginia's small but fine literary legacy.

The original is hard-to-get stuff with only a handful surviving copies. But thanks to my letter friend, I was granted to take a glance into Ron's original. The broad audience, however, had to wait over three decades until a new edition was published in 2002 – and this time even together with Pedro's *Solitudes* so that the inclined reader can deeply empathize with their secret conversation of *Love and Despair*.

Incredibly, in their joint biography Pedro will be denied citation from Virginia's poems by an ominous force lurking behind the curtains in nasty disregard that he and he alone was the chosen one addressed. But inseparable natural bonds cannot be severed by social conventions, even though obviously some ignorant folks did not want to face what cannot be denied: *Abelard and Heloise* would never be parted, not by resentment in life and not even beyond!

But look what a luck: Her poems were finally released in the *Agenda* millennium edition *A Tribute to Mephisto* on occasion of his 20th death anniversary (and have been republished frequently since then on different media of questionable quality to trigger more or less pointless internet discussions, taken out of context). I quote from this issue (apart from *In your Hands*, her intense expression to be one with the companion, which is still withheld from the inclined audience, for whatever obscure reason).

So let me add an overview of 15 poems in the latest chronology:

1. *To Silence (1)*: Articulation through looks instead of words.
2. *February '63*: Depression in nature, given the Big Frreeze.
3. *Hospital*: Her biggest enigma; maybe a sinister premonition when she was faced with restrained inmates in a geriatric ward.
4. *Rockhall* aka *April*: Redemption in nature, given the Mill Leat.
5. *The Tears*: Another riddle of obscure relation. Mourning for an unknown little boy who is marooned in a street (or in a soul).
6. *Emmie*: Her only poem in a complicated layout; an invitation home to a person unfamiliar to us.
7. *Impasse*: Love torments always again – and pretty concrete: *Why are we bruised by the hands we love?* That sounds familiar!
8. *Prayer*: Her longest poem. An oppressive portrayal of a destructive relation; given its masochistic mood, it sounds like the response to Pedro's *Solitudes* with similar expressions of physical and mental pain and pseudo-religious allegories.
9. *Class*: Living in different worlds but sharing a tragedy.
10. *Post Script*: Short but intense; a fictive nightmare or an actual dialogue, perhaps related with the 1967 publication.
11. *Heat touching Heat*: Her very first poem, sinisterly sounding, perhaps revealing dark secrets. *Innocence* meets *spiderweb of pain*.
12. *The Sunday Hours* aka *Limbo*: Physical pain by love torments.
13. *To Silence (2)*: A mute dialogue of people passing each other.
14. *The Burden*: Love according to schedule, waiting for the partner. It sounds like a preview to a plot thread of *Interlude* – that of the gullible young girl and the vain old gallant who cannot stay together.
15. *The Stranger*: Physical pain again, due to love and discretion. Do never speak about your feelings! Given these leitmotifs, there can be little doubt about the cause and effect of her turmoil: Obsessed dependence, insatiable longing and, last but not least, both personal and prescribed speechlessness that gnawed on her like a cancer about almost a decade. Enough sa(i)d.



A twiggy on the tree trunk

But isn't there something missing? Where the heck is No.16?

Of all things, *In your Hands* was secretly concealed. It expresses in a remarkable ambivalence how it feels like to merge holistically with the beloved: calming but oppressive, shielding but numbing – and their union doesn't include the name. In fact, her dream did not endure and at the bitter end she will not even be granted a public epitaph with any of her names – for obscure reasons; perhaps due to a mystery person, driven by irrational aversion, greedy for Jacobean revenge and ostracism by mean elision. Well, an eye for an eye.



Lest we forget where her lock of hair is still preserved: high above the cliffs with a view to the *Reclining Lady*. This is also the place where the *Leaves* were prepared to be published (and it will later see how her obituary is written). And we know for sure that Virginia went to Devon until her last year of life. But given their poetic dialogue that took place so many years ago, it's worth to ponder about Pedro's intentions to compile her poems just now: Perhaps it was a first attempt to blow up his pillbox of discretion – the beginning of a process that will end a decade too late to save our heroine, who had already drowned – to do her a favour after she had begged him for so many times to break the silence that took her breath away. Therefore it's tempting to assume that *she* was the driving force – and that's exactly what it sounds like in her poem *Post Script* as she speaks to Pedro: *And then you wake, and say this is a dangerous game / Calling all our past into our present.*



Or it was *his* advance to encourage reunion or even to get himself back into position, given the longing of our two protagonists. Albeit actually this didn't seem necessary because all the time they were sharing their sorrows in a myriad letters; he was even the keeper of her manuscripts and of her diaries – all locked in his treasure chest (as he will later reveal) which he could hardly open for over a decade without filling it with tears. Oh *Abelard and Heloise*, you really lived!

Rather, I assume the *Leaves* should be a compensation for her disappointment as expected due to his second biography that will be published in January '68 – as we will learn, he will only mention her twice on the very last page of his tome (strangely called *How to Make Enemies* – sic!) to leave her behind confused and deadly desperate. Or even more, he guessed that life is finite. I tend to the latter, since when you read beyond his lines of both his second and his third (eventually their joint) biography, you will find it sounding as if a dark menace was hanging over the last phase of her life – and who else would know all her fears and physical pains if not her karmic companion?

Even though their mutual intentions will remain unclear, as far as the effects are concerned it is almost certain that his literary (r)aid was not helpful at all to tear their spiderweb of pain. Instead of comforting her, he summoned further doubts about their tricky limbo in the present and past and triggered her to rack her brains about what if... she had remained *in his hands* and had borne *his name*. What may have been well-intentioned to enrapture Virginia (by immersing her into her reflections on dramatic events, mainly from their dreamtime) was certainly counterproductive. Do you remember *Miss Livvy? The return of her former fiancé only deepened her melancholy.*

Indeed, he was back again!



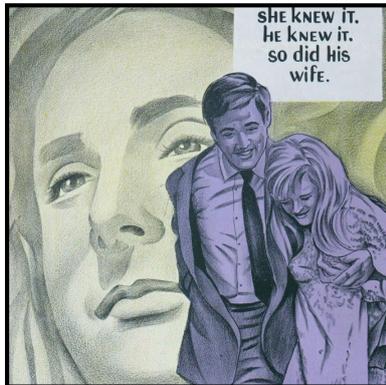
Henceforth you are accompanied by your colourful *Leaves* (respectively *sheets* – and, by the way, both terms are the same in German: we Huns call them *Blätter*) during your fall (until you'll change your reading to Pedro's shocking tome on your last weekend to be thunderstruck by your omission). We don't know if the title of the issue was invented in relation to *Rockhall's* healing green, but what is certain is that escape into nature had a big importance always in your life. You could express yourself by talking to the trees (or perhaps the bees) when human words are pointless (like often my ramblings, admittedly), if not crooked relationships at all. And even more now in search of lost time and your longed-for companion. But as far as for the embrace of a protective tree to which *you'll tell your secrets*, Pedro couldn't possibly have foreseen your final journey westward ho – but perhaps you can?

Hark, Simon calls from his hollow tree in the distance on Mound Carmel! Oh, what a wonderful place to find peace from all the clamour and demands! And we can imagine that you will be stroked by mossy twiggies (or struck by barren branches. Who, who won't be there, will ever know?) while you hold the bundle of your fondest verses in your little veiny hands.

You will likely feel the coming months in the rhythm of the poems (and of the soothing sound of a water wheel, even if only in thought), both of *Simon Orme* and her revered master.

And what we know for sure is that afterwards your trip in trance, just a single further meeting will follow between you and him *speaking alone* on your very last morning, as silent as summoned in *To Silence: When often the word is blind – only the eyes articulate.* And they will be as dark as Pedro's.

Then came *Interlude*, made in the middle of this overstimulated year with such a tricky plot as if Virginia's own past had been mirrored, so that her series of flashbacks reached its midsummer zenith. *Too hot, too hot to retreat!* If the *Doctor* had looked like the slide show of her everyday-life, *Interlude* was the holistic review of her partnership from long ago but yet so close, down to absurd details like a well-cared-for gold fish (although it wasn't crushed at the end). The plot can be summarized quickly:



A mature wife is torn out of her deceptive haven by an unripe girl who suddenly breaks into her life, stirred up by a selfish rake who loves to sip two wines together (yeah, we always need a male villain to punch him properly, of course, to tell a pretty objective story and with obsessive conviction). *A complicated ménage-à-trois* – that sounds perhaps bloody familiar to most of us, but even more to our poor protagonist, who now felt compelled to reflect on both of her phases of life by having to witness Mistress Maskell's questionable actions in the role of her antagonist, while immersing herself into Mary's character – a dangerous way of method acting, made under duress and fatally effective, as if Hugh had been the ghostwriter of two mourning souls in one, eager to break the silence

that was imposed them by gentlemen's discretion. And it's a tempting little hypothesis, his plot could have partially fulfilled what Pedro had denied them for so long – *to tell whole their story*. Indeed, this Hugh, who had written most of the script, was once again a lad from the Greene Island; and he would speak in retrospect, like the great Leslie, unlike the fierce Oskar, very nicely about *our late star, the lovely and gentle Virginia Maskell*, even decades later (to wonder how they were connected, but this is rather trivial in the face of her tragedy); and he will demonstrate a high level of detailed knowledge about the true causes and circumstances of her Last Night of the Wood Proms.

She should have better rejected the role that gnawed at her like a cancer feeding entirely on her very own experiences. But maybe she imposed it on herself as a challenge or even purgation – just as the ancient nuns liked to flagellate themselves when they were torn between natural longings and moral demands – as if she were willingly summoning up her own catastrophe.

However (regardless of whether it arose by chance, through nasty little goblins on her neck, or through her contribution), this script was certainly tough stuff for a receptive soul who sadly tended to take her work home (or vice versa bring her home onto the *Doctor's* stage), unable to switch the plug between fact and fiction (as well as some biographer who presumes to know it all, although he knows nothing).



We don't know if she watched all the scenes of both herself and her antagonist before the master cut was finished to be so absolutely agitated. Nor if she ever listened to the draft of the magnificent classical soundtrack. Particularly the title song, performed with a deep and tremulous voice by a female singer who was alleged to be a diverse person, touches you, sending shivers down your spine. Indeed, our *Time is like a Dream* – if not an endless nightmare. And albeit the music differs a little from our taste, as it is not related with Baroque, Calypso or Doo Wop (best sung with a falsetto), I

would like to recommend it to the audience as incidental music for this chapter, if not whole the play (preferably on Vinyl from 1968).

I feel so much pity for the suffering *Antonia*; therefore I ignore the quirky little love affair, that was intended as the whimsical lead thread. For me, *Interlude* is hard-to-watch stuff not to be driven to sob a fortnight, given Virginia's upcoming fate that lurked behind the bright curtain.

But let's stay on stage and speak about *Antonia*! Her name is the same as Mephisto's mistress, who was Mistress Maskell's predecessor shortly before *The Catalyst* premiered – and now the good wife bears this name, played by Lady Virginia. Quite a strange coincidence, I have to say, to be inclined to suspect a bizarre irony of Hugh – all the more so as the fictive wife of Oskar's bosom Don is called *Mary* – that's the confusion of the grand opera, isn't it?! And Don's revelation that he has just cheated on the latter is something like the catalyst of the further plot: *Antonia* remains silent on the matter and doesn't yet suspect that she herself will soon be washed out of her tranquil bay into the roaring sea to lose the trust in men-kind. Every woman has to learn her lesson at a certain time that *All Men Are (...)*

(...) *Islands*. But she will be enlightened at the upcoming dinner. When Oskar twaddles about obsessed love across the generations and the righteous needs of elder men to sip young wine, a light beam from the candle suddenly reflects in a twinkling of her eye. It's a magical moment of her glance to beyond: Virginia looks as if her life is passing her by in a retrospect in time lapse how she had let herself entangled in a spiderweb of pain, what she did and what was done to her. Now at the latest she may have remembered Mary's wise teachings about Adam's nature and Eva's contribution and realized the statements of a certain Inkling that *you shouldn't let your happiness depend on someone you may lose*.



*Antonia's* surface of life and relation has finally collapsed under the thunder of the great organ; and paralyzed like by a knell, she sneaks down the mighty stairs of the Royal Albert Hall in deepest misery (albeit not threatened to slip on a crushed carp, which would certainly not correspond to the film aesthetics; but it would be worth a laugh, at least in Pedro's weird perception) to enter a black cab and return to her manor that lies now forlorn far away in the middle of nowhere, just waiting for the final confrontation of the estranged couple (in the shadow of a mighty tree and eyed by a stuffed bear).

The choice of dwellings also seems as if someone wanted to put the finger deeply in her very past: That unnamed girl lives in a basement just as Virginia had when the latter met Mephisto, filmed (if not in the Scarsdale) at Holland Park where she was born in the neighbouring street; and the interior looks also very similar to hers back then – right down to tiny details like a fading lamp (of particular interest), a tank with a lucky gold fish (even though a turtle and Pumpkin are missing), and, last but not least, a jar with fifty shades of ciggies; but first of all we find a fancy metal cot reminding of the *Island* bed) – and the inclined viewer guesses that it will soon serve as a raft in a waving sea of love.



And the former mistress even drives a maroon Mini (even if not a Traveller) as she is chased through the nightly streets off Holland Park Ave by her former partner and followed in her just abandoned flat. Sinister! By the way, I might have forgotten to mention that the story is told in retrospective at an uncertain time after they parted. But apart from the fact that the young woman recently got married, we don't get to know anything about her life; obviously she isn't really happy, sips ersatz coffee and longs to reunite with her lost and obsessed loved companion. However, her absurd feelings are, of course, irrelevant since the plot is focused on the latter's good wife (at least through my bruised eyes).

Let's talk briefly about that lamp: In another iconic scene Oskar buys an ancient piece for his mistress as a symbol of their love – we will later find it dark, as extinguished as the candles of a love feast that never occurred. It was exactly the same nine years ago when Pedro intended to transform the West

Mill into a festive setting for a ballyhoo to celebrate Virginia's arrival – but his Aladdin lamp would never shine either, due to a series of separations. It could have well served as the viewpoint of some nightly folks, having lost their path in the wild cliffs, or like a lighthouse as a ray of hope for a vessel in distress – but beware of reef pirates and their Will-o'-the-Wisps for which the coast was once infamous! And while I'm digressing, it's worth to shed light on the magical attraction of antique shops again (as already mentioned in regard to *BLOW-UP*) that are frequently used as locations in times of rapid changes – and here once more symbolically in contrast of the ages (and last but not least the relation of the sexes). It may be no accident that the elder have even to explain the younger one how the lamp is put into operation (an interpretation Pedro would certainly support), albeit rather an anachronistic point of view at the end of the '60s when a witty girl was probably more experienced than both her sober partner and his decent wife (but sorry for another quick and quirky analysis).



And there is that kitchen scene (or sink) with the mistress waiting desperately for her unreliable darling who prefers to have fun in a circle of peers (like Pedro used to retreat from some relation stress in the Boodles Club as Beau Brummell's worthy successor) – to remind Virginia's traumatic Christmas of 1958 when she was hanging around similarly forlorn at her cold stove, returned from a gloomy tour through nursing homes on the Southbank, where she sat at the edges of the cots of elderly inmates (to perhaps be inspired to her eerie *Hospital*) while her fellows were dancing on the tables. But let us be honest, she wouldn't become a charity princess. It was just another of her fancy ideas – if not generally symptomatic of people in the spotlight just giving a show of good will rather than empathizing with the less fortunate (even more of those who pretend publicly compassion just to cope with their own miseries in privacy); we are not all destined to become the Lady with the Lamp. And nobody would care about her: Virginia's apartment, lovingly decorated for her first Christmas with her darling, was suddenly *just full of absence* since Pedro spontaneously chose (not Boodles for once, but) to crawl back to his recently dumped family. After they had slammed the door in his face (can't find why), his one-day horror trip through half the country followed, memorable and frequently told, in which he was stuck at stations and driven by abominable pain. Sometimes after midnight he returned to the Dolphin Yard to find a sweltering goose in an oversalted sauce – as we got to know, Chef Virginia was a pretty bad match for a gourmet – and they had to go hungry to bed.



Tis the right time to remind her long chain of living her own Christmas Carol. As it is well known, family conflicts tend to escalate during these blessed days when reality collides with ideals (only sticking in a traffic jam with nagging brats is worse!). Admittedly, I am myself a little Scrooge (the inclined reader wouldn't have guessed that, huh?!). Indeed, it's hard to overlive the pageant when the blessing of the house is crooked (or how this German saying is expressed in English) and you don't see the forest of relationship problems for *Too Many Christmas Trees*.

Let's carry on in 1959. The tasteless dish was probably better digested than her recent clash and breakdown. Therefore she accompanied her mother – hard to believe in regard to their icy relation – to Rheindalen, the brand-new headquarter of the British Rhine Army in Germany (sadly it had just moved southbound from Oeynhausen Spa where the High Command had lodged in a couple of manors surrounding the Kurpark. And since it's the place where I would go to boarding school someday

decades later, I sometimes ponder senselessly about what if we had met here? Oh, my biggest dream!). And we may assume that mother tried to match her child of sorrows with a dashing officer (like once herself when the Blitz struck her) on the Christmas ball. Oh my, always surrounded by such people who thought to know what (or who) was good for you. The best would have been if you had lived out your Urchin! (But that's the principle of the Ps: The elders use to ignore their offspring's fondest needs – even more as they transfer their longings to them to charge the poor kids with lifelong burdens, basically speaking.) Anyway, she came back alone (at least for some weeks). Her dad's side will be more effective (and all of them involved would later wish they had been spared this). Early disillusion on Christmas '62 finished her Annus Mirabilis. Icy air was suddenly brreezing and she shivered at the chimney, now buried in her tiny cottage with snow mounds blocking the doors and food and ciggies lacking for another three months. Well, that was the *Big Frrreeze*, but also deep grrrief. Our heroine had fallen into a black hole after loss and glory both in her professional and private life; and her doubts and inner darkness escalated in *February '63*. But let us also add contrasting joy at the end of '63 when she was brought to bed in the very last Advent days. Yet we know that the happiest memory can also become the saddest of them all in the face of loss – for a rollercoaster of emotions like to change between the cold and hot clinic tub.



Well, concerning '67, we know nothing about it – to ponder which of her bumpy Christmas pageants was more narcoleptic. I suspect that this time, there was no big ballyhoo where'er she walked (or lay), when she had allegedly returned from her sentimental journey *to the West Indies just before Christmas*. Strange, I have to say.

It's hard to believe she would have liked to travel, much less she would have willingly returned to an abandoned home after she had been (mal)treated in *Ludovico Institute* for two abominable months. "That's all rubbish!" a certain green man had once exclaimed on stage. And I completely agree. To add: *Virginia didn't weep for herself; she wept for her lost loves!* The Parsonage would have felt now like *Hammer House of Horror*, only full of emptiness and a sense of loss. She would have rocked in a chair in front of the telly with the same programme always repeating, and she would have sought for a hideout where she could crawl under like a mouse (but if I have a couple of ideas, both strange and sober ones, where this place could have been, and if I could swear twas not in Bucks, I will not meow treacherously like the Tell-Tale Cat on the cemetery's wall).



The most iconic film sequence Virginia made ever, is certainly *Antonia's* passion when the latter lingers under a tree with her forehead gently touched by the shades of silent leaves (probably modelled after the Greene Lady in one of the most famed Pre-Raphaelite paintings) in a pointless conversation with her heartless husband. Then she raises her swan neck to the



heaven as she sighs: *It's so hot!* And she never looked more transfigured like the Madonna Dolorosa.

But my, there are so many moody moments. Just to mention *Antonia's* loss: The party is over with nothing left but a messy pane and some balloons that would soon burst; the kids are giggling somewhere in the distance and the room is full of absence. To ponder about the remains of the day (if not whole a life). Then the movie escalates into an embarrassing sequence at a dinner evening in a decent restaurant (that I can barely stand without both rage and shame) as our heroine confronts Mistress Void and Mister Vain (both with emotionless faces as if icicles hanging from their noses).





And she delivers her final monologue (in a magnificent performance of her magical eyes and her moving brows) with self-discipline (aka self-betrayal) what some would call dignity (aka pull yourself together) like preached in her convent and praised as the virtues of good wives (aka misled women) – where I would expect an outburst of anger, a wave of tears, a smoking pistol and a couple of scratched eyes (but what the heck? That’s her, the gentlest being we have ever met, all the more noble immersed in grief)! Then she whispers softly like a fleeting breeze as she leaves the stage before the curtain falls:

*If you want the divorce, I give you one.*

*We must talk, of course, about the children. I must go now. I am sorry. Excuse me.*

*Can I have the car?* These were the last words of love and despair she ever spoke (on screen).

As we heard, *Interlude* was filmed entirely on location in the middle of Virginia’s living spheres in and around London. Therefore let’s now imagine her leaving her everyday-life at Metroland’s rim and immersing herself in the swinging city after work in search of clues like Holmes in *The Sign of Three* and harking on the echos of her own past steps – with perhaps a certain soundtrack in her ears repetitively bumping according to her modern taste. Her fellow Petula, barely a few years older, had already been a revue star during the war and appeared in several children films afterwards, to assume young Ginny could have sat enraptured in the audience back then, whether with the flock at the Chelmsford Odeon (maybe Carole was there too) or with her brothers at Shepherd’s Bush Common during the Christmas holidays. Two decades later, Petula has become a popular singer and let us know in a recent song: *When you're alone and love is making you lonely / you can always go – Downtown.*

As starting point we choose the Royal Festival Hall where Virginia has just finished an iconic sequence of *Antonia* listening to a concert that her husband is conducting. Dressed in a breathtaking gown, she looks like a Princess, if not a Queen (with a pretty long neck to every Malcount’s delight; or that of a lewd King; and we know at least since Henry that the rightful Queen will not always share the throne). But we have learned for a long time that Virginia probably would have liked to be somewhere else entirely, namely strolling through the streets of Soho in casual clothes (and preferably sock-less or even barefoot) as the little ragamuffin she actually was – and well disguised in a crowd of whimsical dressed Hippies and the offspring of the upper classes in shabby chic on Carnaby Street.

*To listen to the music of the traffic in the city / linger on the sidewalk where the neon signs are pretty.*

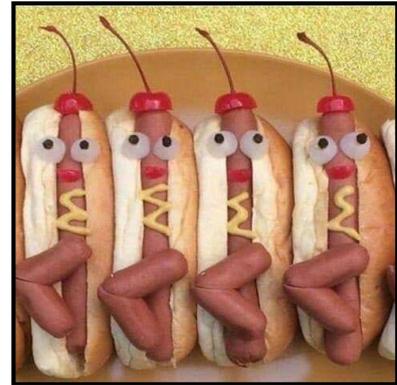


Indeed, London is swinging only a stone's throw across the Thames. But before we set over the Rubicon, we have to cope with the Waterloo Bridge that is always in a sharp breeze; and it is well known as that place where countless people who have been let down by their dearest, seek free death. I have a really bad vibe on this bridge; and I know I am not alone. It's said to be haunted and both London's most depressive and sinister energy place. And I won't spare the audience another one of my whimsical experiences: On my first visit some decades ago I suffered just here a sudden attack of Stendhal syndrome, stopped breathing for a moment and threatened to collapse on the pavement since I felt like a misshapen dwarf, too tiny in the face of Doyle's magnificent monster. But let's stop babbling to carry on walking. Just in some minutes you are in the middle of your fondest dreams, the vibrant theatre district, and soon reach the Ol'Arts to ponder about what if... almost a decade ago Muse hadn't met Mephisto? Well, no plaque remembers of a certain duel in front of the lounge, but interestingly, at the roaring junction there is now a bust of Dame Agatha whose *Mousetrap* has been performed on the next corner for generations (and while the audience has to promise never to snitch who the murderer is, their gag doesn't bother me since I am not part of that deceptive league; so that I can reveal that I am pretty sure it's the doctor! However, we will later meet the authoress again). Sadly, the theatres aren't yet opened and the fairy lights don't shine, so that you hurry through Shaftsbury Ave which lies rather lonely, and turn into Rupert Street; but the market is over and a sharp summer wind that smells like autumn is blowing up stained leaves and the leftovers of messy tables through the canyon (not even a Hot Dog is available and no orphaned puppy can be saved). So let's go northbound and walk along Carnaby Street (enough said about it; if you don't long for the hippest fashion, it's a pretty boring place; and even more so today with a mess of interchangeable brands).

*But listen to the rhythm of a gentle bossanova / you'll be dancing with'em too before the night is over.*



Do you fancy the Palladium? Here's the place where you were urged to dance half nude one single time (in the curse of the popular TV *star parade* in 1959) together with some mates in much too skimpy costumes that showed slimmer legs than those of Longshanks. And I felt as sick as you probably did, given the humiliation of serving as cheap meat for the male palate.



Nevertheless, another stop on your retrospective may be the black-faced stage entrance opposite Liberty to remind a crowd of fans who were screaming for their idol (even worse with perhaps a few love pretenders among them). Adoring the art-figure and ignoring her true shy nature behind the superficial shine – that's surely a bad basis for a meaningful relationship on equal terms, right?! But as it is well-known, some men love to worship the goddess at their side until they are overburdened by dealing with the woman in all her ambivalence and prefer to lock away her emotions in Silver's chest rather than maintain her living treasure. Beware of such toffs! But maybe...

*You find somebody kind to understand you / who is just like you and needs a gentle hand. (Nah!)*



Now let's enter your maroon Mini and set off to Kensington's familiar realms. We soon drive past the Royal Albert Hall where *Antonia*, just awoken from her deceptive life dream, was descending like in trance the external staircase and called a cab (albeit not built by Hansom) to be driven "home" – which now lay abandoned far off Downtown's soothing protection. And lest we forget it's here where Pedro had watched with bizarre delight (and sinisterly prophetically) how the cold carp was crushed by a lorry to interpret the event as a symbol of your devastated relationship – worth to turn the head around for a depressive review of incidents so long ago and yet so close.

At the next corner we catch a glimpse of your ol' coffee bar with perhaps a vacancy – to ponder about what would be more desirable: an honest life off Palace Gate or a masquerade within?

Farther westbound somewhere along Kensington High a toy shop window is greeting with dozens of stuffed bears begging to be cuddled, however they are called – *Teddy*, *Sooty*, *Paddington* or *Rupert*. You chose *Little Pedro* for his melancholic eyes – and look at yourself now: yours are darker than his.

Then we seek for what became of the Scarsdale: Look, here's the basement of a semi-detached house where the adventure began almost a decade ago – and almost immediately ended in the pub at the corner, to soon continue in a Hansom cab, regardless of the nasty little sleuth (a rapid succession of contrasting events, I have to say). Of course the room is empty. But above all we turn to your studio next door where both your lodgers used to crawl under in your tent of love. The latter lies abandoned (since it was carelessly left for whatever reasonable reason; and let me ask a single time what happened to your proceeds?); since then you have been marooned at the edge to nowhere, dependant on their grace. It's just a short stop because the passage is closed so that we see you desperately stretching your hands through the bars as if taking your past into your embrace; to imagine you like *Mr. Bast* calling after Helena – yeah, your far successor as the *English Rose* in another role in which I would have liked to see you, regardless that she's one of my favourite actresses – while Ludwig Van is sounding on their way to *Howard's End* (but I apologize for always confusing facts and film and an anachronism of over a generation). "I want to be here!" you call out emphatically, but no one harks. There is no light in the windows and the curtains are torn as if hastily drawn by the former inhabitants.



Not enough of this rejection, now we are heated up to delve into the drama on the appropriate stage of Kensington old town by wandering through Carmel Court. This moody ensemble of an L-shaped lane bordered by a gloomy passage contains a couple of accommodations with a cornucopia of more or less happy memories. You knock on the garden gate at the farthest cul-de-sac, but there is no one left who could give you a shelter. The scenery now differs greatly from the cheerful days when Lavinia, Rupert and Alooka were romping through the secret garden and *your time was just a dream* before you were ripped from your lightness of being by *worries, the noise and the hurry* of home and hearth.

As a summer rain begins, big drops are falling on the cobbles. And looking down, we have to rub our eyes in disbelief for a moment since there at the corner a pitiful guy is sitting on the kerb, shaking like a wet sparrow – maybe it's a homesick vagrant just stranded like you, or a weary street-sweeper like in my apparition on the trail of *Suspect*; however, he reminds us of a former episode of the Cabal play...

Wasn't there actually another pretender Pedro mentioned a couple of times? Too often for my taste not to be inclined to assume that this obscure lad had played a more important minor role (if not even as a parable of someone else). Albeit Pedro's temporal and spatial descriptions are mostly sketchy, it is secure that a certain green man, whom we may have already met a year before when he used to watch enraptured some of your performances (surely during a tour through Ireland and possibly beyond),

suddenly appeared again in summer '61 on the stage of Carmel Court (where Pedro had nestled himself in one of Lavinia's houses) for another great performance. Our sympathetic couple enjoyed reading here the harlequin's letters of love and despair for a longer time with mischievous joy while they chain-smoked together in bed – and please excuse me, my misled heroine, but only that one time I was disappointed in both of you.



Well, I don't want to annoy the audience by retelling Pedro's confessions; but since the little episode will be rather effective, let me add a summery: Once upon a time Ye Greene Man suddenly approached for an unexpected raid. My god! He wanted to marry her, that very evening, and tow Virginia to his Irish stud farm! (That's the natural fate of adorable women, generally speaking. But think about it: You could have allegedly become, albeit not a shepherdess in Meat, a horse-breeding millionairess in Munster. Inclined, at least in retrospect?) Now, as kneeling at her feet, he presented a radiant bling (maybe a blue sapphire) with prosaic phrases to everyone's pleasure (so that even Pedro was impressed by his rhetoric talents and liked to praise them later; and I would have liked to shake his hand for his boldness). But unfortunately, he didn't refrain from a little sideswipe on the present husband-in-sin: *I will rescue you from the clutches of this middle-aged lecher who latched onto your life!*

Ouch, he better shouldn't have said that! Virginia raged like a fury and sank the ring into the ground at his feet. Not because his words were wrong, but because she knew they were true. And she slammed the door in his face while her bold gallant hid behind it (sounding familiar?), quite anxious that the lad *could biff him one* (obviously become cautious after the previous duel which didn't go to *Abelard's* advantage). But the youngling turned out to be just another chatterbox lacking will and fists. In this regard, I would like to call the sequence: "A Tale of Two Mice and Half a Man."

However, there was an aftermath for all of them involved (of future events with their eyes wide shut). If we remember the pitiful lad sitting at the corner above: While he threatened *to take his own life* (considering this, I have a bad vibe that dark clouds were being summoned) he petrified on the cobbles for 10 hours or so to be finally persuaded by Pedro's inglorious quack – yeah, he is back! And pretty engaged in Cabal and Love in the surroundings of our protagonists, huh?! – to let remove him from the kerb and leave the place of shame. And we will never hear of him again or get to know his identity – well, Pedro was the master of discretion. But first of all he was the spearhead of all misogynists...

Look, what Virginia had done just for him and how she proved another time her iron loyalty! And this is how he thanked her: Pedro suddenly experienced his male solidarity and had pity with a brother! To complain to all his buddies and his little man in his ear about the *ruthlessness of women* in general, and particularly of his little birdie whose clipped wings seemed to have just begun to grow back (all the more so as we heard that the resident patient had been discontented with her nursing talents for a longer time to increase himself, now at the latest, in castration phobias (by the way, the natural effect when a man, confronted with (or handled by) a strong woman, realizes his inability on certain fields and suddenly fears to become a gelding).



But this time Virginia had learned her lesson. Just half a year later she took her second chance (or choice) to cease the limbo and dump her charming brute in a sudden night raid – and now it was his term to rage, to bitterly lament that he wasn't even informed about the upcoming events, and to actually wonder what had become of his ring. Lest we forget how warmly he had granted the latter to her just one year before: in a pretty present basket containing a bruised eye in her face and a crushed carp in her bed. Maybe she also sank his silver but we will never get to know it.

When I once returned to Carmel Court looking for your traces, walked through hazy lanes and passed the cottage at the corner, there was a window open on the first floor (with perhaps a stereo playing Pop from the '60s, but surely) with a smell of stale ciggies coming out; and even more not only was the gate to the dead end open with a view to a plane tree in the garden, but someone was just leaving who looked much like Pedro – and you know that I don't lie – to enter the moody passage in a hurry as if he wanted to withdraw from me. And all that remained was the echo of his steps like of the phantom's shadow in Whitechapel's penumbra. That made me think about restless souls wandering through the fog in search for the lost beloved (whom they had failed to hold on to in time).

*To guide them along / So maybe I'll see you there again / in Downtown – or where're and whenever).*



And we depart from Carmel Court together to reach by a couple of feet the curved lower corner of Kensington Church Street, where the convent of Mount Carmel welcomes the wanderer with a wayside place of worship (which we have appreciated earlier above) to think again of Simon the Saint who lived in a tree trunk while abstaining from earthly temptation and all pointless struggles for so long. Oh happy is the hermit (but there will always be people who don't realize this wisdom)!

And look, just opposite a certain jeweller's window lurks with a vast selection of flashing gemstones, both cheap and solid ones – the righteous place to press the nose against the panes in painful reminder. The failures of the past can no longer be corrected. You have starred in wrong plays for so long – but at no other place the reckoning feels bitterer than on the fondest stage here in Mid Kensington where you got the silver goal: A radiant ring for a sore eye – and now you have two and enough of both.

*But don't hang around and let your problems surround you / There are movie shows Downtown!*

Even more such familiar ones: Just at the upper end of the Church Street, you fancy to enter a tiny cinema at Notting Hill Gate (which stills exists; happy is the location spotter) where you sat so many times unrecognized with Pedro to calm down from professional pressure and private cabal just as a common girl rather than a star, to laugh out loudly with *Stan and Ollie* (or maybe *Fy og Bi*) and change the tears of grief with those of joy. And, indeed (by sitting in a cozy chair while the right film is reeled with the karmic companion beside), *you can forget all your troubles, forget all your cares.*



We approach a quiet street off Holland Park Ave to delve now into your deepest past. Pretty terraces contrast with red-bricked mansions of decent prosperity. Two stairs just opposite lead up to comfortable apartments on this side of the street and a primary school on the other side. Maybe that's the place where your mother waved at you (to imagine the scene like the nurse's farewell to an

unknown little boy who has just been discharged from the clinic – well, our memory is often wrapped in a rainbow and tends to look like an illustration of a *Ladybird* book) and that you should have attended if some dramatic events hadn't led your fate in completely different directions; to be first transported overseas (like once the misfits to Down Under), then to Shepherd's Bush (if pretty close and just for a short time) and later – long-term and highly effective – to an isolation camp in Essex. No one had ever asked where YOU wanted to be (and perhaps you never found it out for yourself). Your gaze wanders over the facade to that apartment where you took your first breath (if it's hardly probable that anyone remembers this essential moment). You only have a single scrap of memory from a couple of years later, when parents and kids were the last time together in the L-shaped section at the gloomy court, and you shiver down your spine as the echo sounds of a devastating struggle. Beware, listening back is dangerous (or perhaps forward to trigger self-fulfilling prophecy)! Just threatened to lose your balance, you flee from (if you don't turn to stone on) the stairs and enter hastily your maroon Mini. Now your retro drive comes to an end to leave the monster via a diffuse roundabout where the cars rotate in an endless cycle, once in, never out again. It's a sudden cut between Holland Park and Shepherd's Bush with just erected council estate high-rise towers (some similar would soon implode or later burn like a torch; not really an attractive view from one of those shabby flats there above, not true?) like all around the quarters of the rich and beautiful. After you have scraped past the Hammersmith Hospital (while you were tearing out your hair in the roaring traffic), you approach the Westway at Hanger Lane to finally breathe freely since you have just left the last tentacles of the sprawling city; and the Chiltern slopes greet you on the horizon. *Off Uxbridge* begins Metroland's commuter belt, the appropriate habitat *for a family with one telly, two cars and three kids* (as Pedro once described it condescendingly). But it is also a sparkling space for film productions with Pinewood southbound lurking, the destination of some moody drives in the course of both your second and third colour movie. Then comes Wycombe, once the heart of furniture crafts (and also the place where rocking chairs were made; and perhaps your father was an apprentice here many decades ago).



You had certainly driven along the axis leading to the high tomb many times and imagined the ominous caves in the depths; even more given *A Touch of Brimstone*, the most infamous of all *Avenger's* episodes, that we saw recently on telly with Peter and Diana struggling – and who wouldn't have wished to see the latter's frivolous costume in bright colour?! But in fact, she hated to be badmouthed as the *Queen of Sins* and simply preferred to sit with him together and share ciggies on the backstage while they talked about God and the world (albeit he, of course, would prove to be a worthy New Dashwood). Approaching the junction at the foot of the hill, you had to decide, now at the latest, which path you wanted to take: to the right side leading straight to the icy northern borders or to the left one (on winding paths) into the warm sunset? A sudden grumbling in the air (maybe by a threatening thunderstorm like when I arrived at the site after an hours-long walk from the station and Dashwood's bloody church on the hill didn't come closer as if it wanted to withdraw from me) accompanied the sequence and the vision got blurred, due to the blinding sun just behind the hill (or the dense smoke in your car), so that I can't vouch for the following events being true in every detail. It doesn't matter, what I see is strange folks hanging over the fence of the petrol station, perhaps some marooned Hippies in their quirky clothes (that you might also have liked to wear but didn't dare for several years) far off Kings Road on their way over the rainbow, or young participants of a rag raid, stranded with their Jeep, just as sleepless as you were. And they cockily called out to the customers:

“Choose the chalice, wise or wicked!”

As you had to refuel for a couple of remaining pounds and stood at the pump like at a post box, an urchin approached who looked like a mischievous elf with wild hairs under a bizarre top hat and danced in trance while singing *Dem Bones*. And then he whistled wittily (sounding like a little mouse):

“Hither this way! Maate, forget the teachings of the elders that have been hammered into your brain. DOO what YOUU WAANT; and everything will be fine. Waiver of needs is the biggest of all sins. You will burn in inner fire and drown in swallowed tears!”

While I guess, that albeit surprised, you were inclined to listen, I think I remember another customer just getting out of her Van. A grizzly ol’ lady, heavily backcombed, sweating and pretty annoyed from a summer eve’s family party on a long drive home – as it is well known the parental horror trip with a handful noisy brats banging on the panes (or painfully their nerves) – less amused of that ragamuffin’s advances and the crazy ideas of messy Hippies celebrating the lightness of being. Therefore she started to grumble in a booming voice (sounding like *Nicola*’s substitute doctress):

“Hither this way! Maaid, own needs must conform to the social structure. Submit to its demaaands. Never shy away from responsibility. Forget the nonsense of those younglings. Fulfill the duties that the Looord has assigned you!”



I certainly know what I had done with insatiable longing: Nature’s way would have been mine! Westward, on a bird’s exuberant flight and the more light-hearted the nearer you get to the sea. To snuggle into the nest of your surrogate parents. But what would we have found there? Perhaps your beloved mill was occupied; and if you had dared a furious ride over the cliffs (so long out of practice), you could have been thrown from your steed with bad aches down your spine (as Mary had summoned a decade ago). And it’s a long way back from Devon to London, as Pedro knew from painful experience; to describe some disturbing trips through nowhere, abominably aching, despaired and with many doors which could be slammed in your face: *Was I travelling or was I dreaming? I fear death because I believe it will be like that journey. Slow, unending, going in the wrong direction...*



However, Virginia chose certainly the righteous way to serve as a good housewife, even though distressed with her forehead pounding after the filming strains (remember the *Doctor*?). Halfway home, she drove past the *Ordeal* corporate campus (today called *Somerton House*) opposite the station at the edge of Allnutt’s Hanging Wood – looking suspiciously similar to the labs of *Suspect* and the

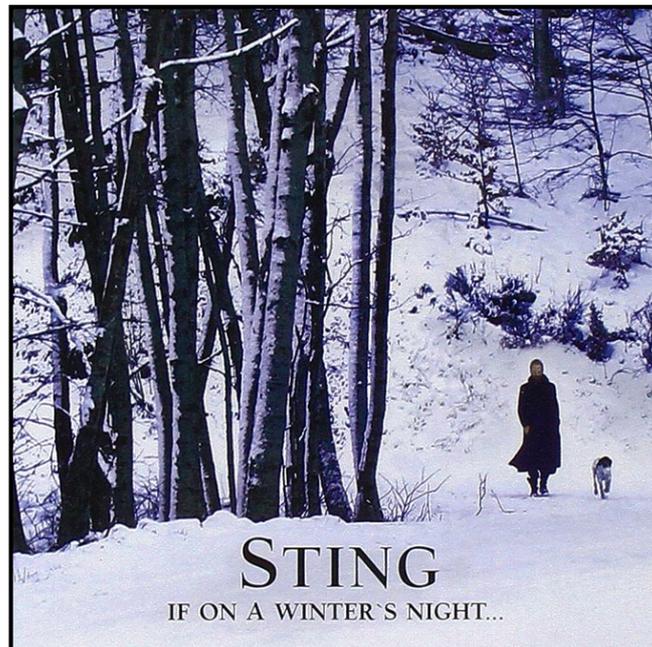
pill mill from *Heavens Above* (the latter is another film by Pete. I apologize for mentioning it); and all three modernist buildings may have been designed by the same architect. Twas the witches kitchen where all those spicy dishes (to speak plainly: hormonal drugs) were stirred together (if not shaken) that were fed to gullible patients throughout the country; and beware: Tippoo's Tiger was always hungry for human Guinea pigs! Returned, she had perhaps to ponder about Ol'Maya's burden then on the Islands (as a woman must be a squid with eight or sixteen limbs to cope with all her challenges), or she remembered the *Man Upstairs* to lock up herself in the Parsonages' attic (if they would *have let her alone*). Well, tis all speculation. But what is literally fact: Soon, she would be found fallen silent, bedridden by and bottled with *Ordeal's* dreadful stuff. That's how it began, her galloping decay.



And once again I hear Dowland's ayre bitterly sweetly wafting, to let me now quote his second verse whose emotional breadth might match her mood in autumn:

*Come again / that I may cease to mourn / through thy unkind disdain / for now left and forlorn.  
I sit, I sigh / I weep, I faint / I die ... in deadly pain / and endless misery.*

I will refrain from quoting the third verse since there will no bridge be forged. It will find an abrupt end, unfinished on a cliff high above the sea, to never reach its destination on the other side of the bay.



### III Photo credits for the third 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 AVA at home
- 1 AVA on loc
- 2 AVA collection (book *Shepperton Studios*), screenshots
- 3 screenshots
- 4 AVA collection (digital press clipping), AVA on loc
- 5 pic courtesy of Rod, net find, AVA on loc, screenshot
- 6 net find, two pics courtesy of Rod
- 7 net find, pic courtesy of Rod
- 8 *Ladybird Books* FB group, AVA scan (book *Masquerade* by Kit Williams)
- 9 net find, screenshot, net find, AVA collection (analogue press clipping), screenshots
- 10 screenshots, net find, AVA collection (movie poster scan), net find
- 12 net find, historical image from the Westland press and current interior of Ron's Writing Hut via *Welcombe Chatter* FB group
- 13 net finds
- 14 graphic via FB group *Britain's Ancient and Sacred Trees*
- 15 AVA scan (book *Masquerade* by Kit Williams), net find
- 16 screenshot, AVA on loc
- 17 press and pic courtesy of Rod, AVA collection (press and pic)
- 18 AVA collection (digital press clipping, colourized by AVA), net find
- 19 net finds
- 20 AVA collection (digital press clipping), screenshots (courtesy of *VM Tube Channels*)
- 21 net find, two screenshots, net find
- 22 pic courtesy of Rod, screenshot
- 23 AVA at home (book *Fishy Tales*, acquired through <https://canonesses.co.uk>)
- 24 (background) net find, AVA on loc, screenshot
- 25 AVA on loc (France), AVA on loc (Essex), screenshot
- 26 AVA on loc, pic from *Gamle København* FB page, AVA on loc
- 27 two pics from *Old Fishes Association* FB page, confectionary advertisement, screenshots
- 28 AVA collection (two original photos)
- 29 AVA collection (book *The English Dog*), net find, AVA collection (digital press clipping)
- 30 AVA on loc, net find via *Ridgeway and Ancient Tracks of Britain and Ireland* FB group
- 31 AVA on loc, screenshot
- 32 screenshots, AVA on loc
- 33 screenshot, AVA on loc
- 34 AVA on loc, net find (book cover with a view to the Bledlow Cross, via *TOMIA* FB page), AVA on loc, net find, AVA on loc, net find
- 35 net find (Warren Cottage pre 2017), AVA on loc, net find
- 36 screenshots, AVA on loc, net find
- 37 net find, screenshots
- 38 screenshots (last one: DVD *The Treasure at the Mill*)
- 39 *Ladybird Books* FB group, screenshot (DVD *Treasure / Trouble at Townsend*), old post card scan
- 40 screenshots, net find (painting by Kit Williams), AVA on loc
- 41 AVA at home (own post card), AVA on loc
- 42 screenshots
- 43 screenshots
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- 45 screenshots, bonus pic of DVD (*BLOW-UP* movie poster)
- 46 bonus pic of DVD (*BLOW-UP* promotion still), net find
- 47 screenshots
- 48 AVA on loc, screenshots
- 49 net find (Jimmy at Mandeville), old post card scan, AVA on loc
- 50 screenshots, net find, screenshot
- 51 screenshot, AVA on loc, screenshots
- 52 promotion still courtesy of Rod, screenshots

- 53 screenshots from several Prisoner episodes / second one from *If...*
- 54 net find (draft drawing of Portmeirion), screenshot, net find (idealized drawing of Clovelly)
- 55 screenshots
- 56 screenshots
- 57 screenshots, excerpt of the death certificate of VM (via <https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates>)
- 58 screenshots
- 59 screenshots
- 60 AVA at home (book *A Tribute to Ronald Duncan*, *Agenda* Millennium issue, 2002),  
frontispiece of the *Leaves of Silence* (original edition of 1967) courtesy of Rod
- 61 AVA collection (*Interlude* promotion still), net find
- 62 net find (death curl), graphic via FB group *Britain's Ancient and Sacred Trees*
- 63 AVA collection (scan from the soundtrack), AVA collection (*Interlude* soundtrack on vinyl, 1968)
- 64 screenshots
- 65 screenshots, screenshot (*The Avengers: Too Many Christmas Trees*)
- 66 net find (Gardens of Heligan), screenshot, AVA collection (Pre-Raphaelite poster scan), screenshot
- 67 screenshots
- 68 net find (Virginia on stage), net find (Hot Dog cartoon), screenshots
- 69 AVA on loc
- 70 net find, *Ladybird Books* FB group
- 71 AVA on loc
- 72 AVA on loc
- 73 AVA on loc (Bath), net find (blog of the *Golden Cross Pub*, Saunderton, Bucks) , screenshot
- 74 screenshot, screenshot (*Heavens Above*), DVD cover (Sting: Ancient and recent winter ballads)
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- 76 screenshot

Second revised version (February 2026)



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