As a Perfectly Foolish Young Man I Wanted 1

By : Carl Halling

As a Perfectly Foolish Young Man I Wanted is the flower thus far of Carl Halling's writings to date, collected, with fresh edits, in 2012, and then, further edits, with the title When Compared to the Fathomless Joy Awaiting ultimately replacing that of What Though Are the Wonders of this Brief Life. And then with the cream of a later work The Boy from the Tail End of the Goldhawk Road being added to it towards the end of the year, as As a Perfectly Foolish Young Man I Wanted. This same crÃ¨me de la crÃ¨me being in the shape of the concluding three pieces of Darling Fan and a Further Octet of Essays. And so consisting of the previously published Where the Halling Valley River Lies and Far Beyond the Borderlands of Scotia...in their entirety with modifications...and extracts from the previously published eBook, At the Tail End of the Goldhawk Road, again with modifications...as well as selected extracts from The Boy from the Tail End of the Goldhawk Road. It's a truly panoramic work, much of it of overt or subtle autobiographical origin, an incredibly informative compendium of essays, verses, memoirs &c., created in a spirit of Christian truth and integrity...a thrilling voyage...featuring culture, history, art, literature, verse...addiction, humour, redemption, faith, love and so much more besides. While in the cases of all the autobiographical writings except Where the Halling Valley River Lies, names of people have been changed, or modified, to the best of my ability in the name of privacy. Unless, that is, their privacy is affected, or in the cases of those I consider to be public figures...one of which has been afforded two names, his own and a pseudonym. The same applies to certain places or institutions if I believe naming them might infringe on their right to privacy; thence a certain place of learning has been tendered two names, as in the case of the previously mentioned celebrity.

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As a Perfectly Foolish Young Man I Wanted 1

Part One Where the Halling Valley River Lies

Book One

Leitmotivs from an English Pastorale

One thing is certain. Paul Runacles had not been born into a typically privileged upper middle class family, and so by the time he arrived at his college, he was bereft of a frame of reference; unlike the majority of his fellow pupils, weaned on the gilded sports of the British social elite.

And he escaped from his college once, like some kind of hysterical gymslip schoolgirl...just the once it was...around 1971 or '72 to avoid being punished for something stupid he did.

It was an utterly pointless exercise as it was the last day of term, but he just panicked and bolted, and kept on running...until he ended up wandering through some muddy field in the heart of the English countryside before simply giving up and sitting by the side of the road.

But he never did it again, and in later years, when he looked back at his time as a public schoolboy, he'd insist if he possessed a single quality that might be termed noble such as patience, or self-mastery, or consideration of the needs of other people, then he owed it to his education, and not least the four years he spent at his college.

Yet, looking at the facts after his eventual exit, you'd be forgiven for thinking he'd simply picked up from

where he left off before he collapsed in that muddy field in the heart of the English countryside and started drifting in circles again leaving so many tasks unfinished he effectively wrecked his gilded destiny. But in fact this was far from the truth, for he was never without purpose; but simply...he lacked the go-getter's ability to turn his dreams to good account.
And looking back on all he'd lost in late middle age, he'd often weep silently to himself at night, at the end of yet another day spent doing really very little when he thought about it.
And there'd be times when certain pieces of quintessentially English pastoral music still had the power to evoke his strange and sudden flight, or rush of blood to the head, of over four decades ago. Such as Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*, which seemed to him to bespeak a passion for the Arcadian soul of England that verges on the ecstatic. And the same could be said for the opening sections of Mike Oldfield's *Hergest Ridge*, which tended to convey to him a deep mournfulness silently existent beneath the picture perfect image of English privilege.
Any argument in favour of such a tragic element would be powerfully reinforced in his eyes by playing the music of the much-loved singer-songwriter Nick Drake, who was not so much handsome as beautiful in what could be called a classically English, soft, wistful, romantic, Shelleyan fashion, with seemingly perfect skin, full lips and a head of cascading curls.
And in some of his many photos, he bears an uncanny resemblance to the former Doors front man Jim Morrison; and like Morrison, he was a poet as much as a musician. But the likeness ends there, for while Morrison was able to conquer his natural shyness and become a wildly charismatic showman, Drake never mastered the art of Rock performance.
However, blessed with a precocious musical genius, he secured a recording contract with the Island label while still only twenty years old and at Cambridge University.
On the surface of things, he was destined for a long and happy life, but unlike his near-double, was unable to translate his enormous gifts into commercial success. And he became very seriously depressed as a result, dying mysteriously at the age of just 26, after having released only three albums in his lifetime.
Looking back from the vantage point of the early 2010s, Runacles couldn't help thinking that in any era other than that ushered in by the Rock revolution, Drake would have pursued a career more suited to his background and temperament. As opposed to one which, while ensuring his immortality, clearly caused him an inestimable amount of pain.
And he came to maturity in a Britain whose young were in active rebellion against the Judeo-Christian value system on which the nation had been founded. So was perforce affected by the spiritual chaos of the times, which propelled him towards the endless night of worldly philosophy, deadly for a mind as litmus-paper sensitive as his.
And listening in late middle age to such perfectly English examples of pastoral music as Drake's *River Man*, which seemed to him to bespeak a passion for the Arcadian soul of England that verges on the ecstatic, Runacles became suddenly cognizant of a colossal compassion within himself.
But not just for the youthful Runacles...who ran away from his college once like some kind of hysterical gymslip schoolgirl...so much as for the privileged classes as a whole...those traditionally educated at public schools.
A somewhat unusual receptacle for the milk of human kindness, some might say. But the privileged among us are surely no less in need of consideration than any other social class.
For despite the fact that the vast majority of those who pass through the British public school system go on to lead full and successful lives entirely free from melancholy, social advantage can clearly be a heavy burden to bear for some. Such as Nick Drake who sang so devastatingly of "falling so far on a silver spoon" in the dark pastorale, *Parasite*.
As to Runacles, he'd not been born into a typically privileged upper middle class family, and so by the time he arrived at his public school, he was bereft of a frame of reference, unlike the majority of his fellow pupils, weaned on the gilded sports of the British social elite.
Yet, a close connection existed in the shape of his paternal grandmother, arguably born into what was once known as the lower gentry, in as much as her father was independently wealthy, and so had no need to work.
Yet, she left her first husband to live in Australia with a man she'd met in Ceylon while working on a tea

plantation, a Danish citizen who'd allegedly once been a successful businessman, until some reversal of fortune reduced him in social status. His mother, on the other hand, was the product of working class immigrants to British Canada from Ulster, Ireland and Lowland Scotland. And it amused him to think there was a good chance distant relatives of his continued to live in these regions.

But that was not the reason he had trouble adapting to public school life, for his brother positively thrived within it.

No, there was something intrinsically askew about Runacles himself. For after all, who thinks of running away on the last day of term without any purpose or aim, only to finish up collapsed by the side of a muddy field in the heart of the English countryside?

The truth is while public schools have long served as the traditional places of learning for future members of the British governing and professional classes, they have never done so in the capacity of pampering wet nurses.

And so not every child who finds themselves within the bosom of such institutions is able to develop along extraverted lines. For during Runacles' time at his own college, there were boys who responded to the intensely hierarchical nature of public school life with varying degrees of self-effacement. And not just initially, for most new boys are inclined to quail when confronted with this ancient way of life for the first time, but afterwards too. So that they remained relatively quiescent even while succeeding within the system.

Yet he himself was not among them, for while he could hardly be said to have thrived, he was yet happy in his own way, and enormously popular. What they used to call a character. So this strange flight of his was totally out of character, especially seeing as he was famous for his resilience, having been one of the most intensely disciplined pupils of his generation.

But he never ran away again, and in later years, when he looked back at his time as a public schoolboy, he'd insist if he possessed a single quality that might be termed noble such as patience, or self-mastery, or consideration of the needs of other people, then he owed it to a significant degree to his education, and not least the four years he spent at public school.

Yet, looking at the facts after his eventual exit, you'd be forgiven for thinking he'd simply picked up from where he left off before he collapsed in that muddy field in the heart of the English countryside and started drifting in circles again, leaving so many tasks unfinished he effectively wrecked his gilded destiny. But in fact this was far from the truth, for he was never without purpose; but simply...he lacked the go-getter's ability to turn his dreams into good account.

Now, souls in thrall to the psychological persuasion might assert that failure in life is but the consummation of an underachieving childhood.

But the Runacles of the early 2010s had no time for theories of this kind, since pupils historically written off by their teachers via the medium of the school report have included the greatest Englishman of them all. No, not Runacles...Churchill.

While many might dispute this fact, and goodness knows Churchill has his detractors, few would go so far as to label him an underachiever.

And Runacles himself was offered multiple opportunities to turn his life around; so why didn't he do it...simply in order to prove to the world that while a failure on the surface, he'd been a success all along?

here's no sure way of knowing why other than to have recourse to a theory earlier expressed in this piece, that there was something intrinsically askew about Runacles himself. For after all, who thinks of running away on the last day of term without any purpose or aim, only to finish up collapsed by the side of a muddy field in the heart of the English countryside?

And who knows how long he'd have sat there, had it not been for the fact that as he did so, his Divinity teacher happened to spy him while driving by before offering him a lift back to college.

And as might be expected, by the time he arrived, there was hardly anyone left; yet, he was summoned by his housemaster, who assured him he'd not be punished, for after all, it was the last day of term, and school was over for a month or so, and he was therefore free to do as he wished within the limits of the law.

But there was no one to take him home, as his mother had earlier departed without him, as no one was able to tell her where he was. So he contacted his father, who then set about the hour-long journey from London to

Berkshire to pick him up.

And he later heard from his friends about just how frantic with worry his mother been when, after innocently turning up to take her son home, she was informed he was nowhere to be found. One can only imagine what she went through. And looking back at this terrible afternoon from the vantage point of late middle age, it pained him deeply to think of her suffering.

But he never ran away again, and in later years, when he looked back at his time as a public schoolboy, he'd insist if he possessed a single quality that might be termed noble, such as patience, or self-mastery, or consideration of the needs of other people, then he owed it to his education, and not least the four years he spent at public school.

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From the time he was about seventeen, he was desperate to succeed as actor, musician or writer, yet the evidence suggests that despite an enchanting and extrovert personality he was under-equipped for the task he'd set himself.

For instance, he refused to apply himself to developing as a musician, even when being taught by a true virtuoso, as was the case towards the end of the '70s...when a future member of a supergroup struggled manfully to motivate him. And he was incapable of finishing a single cohesive piece of writing due to his tendency to allow his teeming imagination to take him from one unending digression to another.

As to his professional life, if you can call it that, it was marked by a similar desultory quality. And in the summer of '77, he worked briefly for a sailing school on the Costa Brava, but lost his job before too long; and ended up drifting for a time, spending many a night at the Disco, where he fell in love with Donna Summer's *A Love Trilogy.*

And later that year, he spent a short period of time at Merchant Navy School, before serving as a salesman in a long-vanished jewellery store in suburban Kingston, and after calling in sick while working as a filing clerk early in '78, lost that job too. Still...he'd made a good friend on his day off in the shape of a young punkette covered in safety pins who'd spied him wandering aimlessly around Kingston with spiky blond hair like his Punk doppelganger, Billy Idol.

But by this time, he'd been accepted as a student at a prestigious drama school in the centre of London. Although when it came to his actual studies, he failed to convince the authorities he had what it took to succeed as a professional, so departed in the summer of '79.

What a hopeless case...but then what kind of person decamps on the last day of term without purpose or aim, only to finish up collapsed by the side of a muddy field in the heart of the English countryside?

For that it was he did; and he never forgot it, for those four years he spent at boarding school were his rosebud years, when everything was heightened in terms of its effects on his temperament which was at once happy go lucky and high strung, an unusual combination perhaps.

And one that saw him at once almost universally popular, and yet beset by tics and twitches. Such as the head-shaking habit he thought he'd never kick. But which vanished soon after he quit college at the early age of 16, at which point he which he mutated by degrees from a round-shouldered youth with a Chaplin-esque walk into a full-blown narcissus. But what an inefficient Adonis he was...he couldn't even cut it at acting school.

Although the '80s were a time of relative stability for him, and he worked as an actor for a time, before completing a degree in French and Drama.

But then he resumed his maundering ways. And perhaps it's significant that one of his musical passions around about the turn of the decade at college had been Led Zeppelin, a band deeply indebted to the Delta Blues whose *Ramble On* from the second album, a key work for him at the time, as well as for a good few of his contemporaries, possesses vagabondage of a romantic kind as its principle theme. And there were many songs from the era with a similar peripatetic motif.

But it's surely safe to say that the vast majority of those who were Underground Rock acolytes at the same

time as him ultimately settled into conventional occupations. So why not Runacles? Why did he persist in relative instability way beyond his college days?
It's impossible to say for certain of course, but it may be that like self-styled poor boy and rover Nick Drake, he'd been blessed - or cursed - with the sensitivity of litmus paper. So that the messages being relayed by the Rock-Youth Counterculture penetrated more profoundly into his psyche than those of most of his generation. And among those was an exaltation of rootlessness; born of a spirit of restlessness.
But, there being nothing new under the sun, its origins lie deep in history, at least as far back as the great Romantic movement in the arts which produced wanderers from life and art alike from its inception. And Romantic nomadism could be said to have reached an apogee in the shape of the Byronic hero, who went on to exert such a powerful influence on French Romanticism, which while the last, was surely the most powerful of the movement's three great waves, for it was the true forefather of the avant-garde.
And Runacles became an acolyte of the latter from his late teens, falling in love with one of its icons after the other...Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Cocteau, Genet; and in time, he developed a taste for avant-garde nihilism, and its repudiation of all of the so-called bourgeois values, including sanity and health, even life itself.
He came to adore the idea of early death, and to resign himself to dying young himself, in fact not so much resign as commit himself to it. But out of a deluded romantic death fixation, as opposed to any genuine desire to die.
And it may be this refusal to settle into any kind of conventional existence was rooted in a desire to be one of Jack Kerouac's "mad ones", and so to "burn, burn, burn, like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars..."
By the time he quit university in 1985, he'd been a devotee of this dark ethos for several years, so that his art was more important to him than his life; and he welcomed every experience, no matter how ruinous to his health, if it could serve as fuel to his creativity. And the art that fascinated him most was literature, and he longed to be a published writer, but most of what he'd attempted to write since his late teens remained unfinished.
But at university he'd evolved into a magnetically intense stage actor, and he inspired many with his performances, as well as his larger than life personality, so he was likened by one friend to Hesse's Goldmund, by another to Don Juan... while still another suggested he read Buchner's *Lenz.*
And one of his tutors informed him he had the makings of a heroic figure, if not as actor, then as academic...and even writer.
But Runacles would not have been true to himself had he not failed to justify their faith in him, and so following his eventual departure, he sought work as a deliverer of novelty telegrams. But not for the money, which was excellent, so much as for the sheer joy of showing off, which points to something awry at the base of his soul.
And by the time he did, he was well on the way to developing an alcohol problem, which in later years he'd at least partly blame on what he termed a negative identity. Which is not to say he was negative in his attitude to others, for contrary to what may be believed given the evidence so far, the effect he exerted on others was almost overwhelmingly positive.
Yet he deliberately chose such an identity as a means of making himself more interesting than he would otherwise have been; to shock, in other words. And his motives in doing so weren't entirely frivolous, for his attraction to the avant-garde was authentic, and rooted in a deep-rooted raging intelligence that also fuelled his constant, frenetic defiance of respectable society.
And looking back from the vantage point of late middle age, he'd muse that having foisted this nihilism onto himself for as long as he had, his litmus-paper mind had finally started to turn on him by the middle of the '80s.
To begin with, his empathetic powers started to recede, which caused him enormous distress, because he'd always found great comfort in his compassionate and affectionate nature.
And he started to drink as a means of restoring them. But what right did he have to them, when his negative identity included a corrosive cynicism of the type he so admired in his avant-garde idols? It's as if he wanted it both ways; to be loved for his personal sweetness...and yet reserve the right to rage like Rimbaud whenever he felt like it.

Yet, his inner turmoil proved an asset when it came to his acting career, and he provided some extraordinary performances in the second half of the '80s.
The first of these took place at the University of Cambridge, where he studied for a term in the winter of '86 as part of their teacher training unit, before typically taking off in the early part of the new year. While the second was at Notting Hill's famous Gate Theatre, where he received some fair reviews for his acting from various periodicals including the London Times.
But no sooner had he done so than our boy was on the drift again, taking a job as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language in one of several TEFL schools situated on London's teeming Oxford Street. But to be fair, he needed the work, for the acting profession provides little by way of remuneration for all but a small minority.
And by the time he did, his drinking was under control, but long-term tendencies had developed into full-blown Obsessive Compulsive Disorder so that his day was marked by an endless series of rituals:
At the height of their intensity, his rituals included parting his hair so that it went from his crown to a specific point above one of his eyebrows (he'd carry a tiny mirror on his person for the purpose of checking on it throughout the day)...ironing his shirts inside out with the seams inclining to the right, and touching every item of clothing including his belt with said iron...arranging the items in his jacket pockets so that they went from left to right in terms of importance...constantly wiping the insides of his boots before dousing them with water...and holding an intimate part of his anatomy for a set number of beats...
But if the physical rituals were tormenting, the mental ones were even more so. And every time he met someone, he became beset by a need to compare them to someone else, so that some kind of card index set to work in his mind, proffering faces until to his horror it stopped at one resembling the person in question. And he'd not rest until he'd calculated the significance of their names.
It was as if his mind had assumed a life all of its own and started producing thoughts independently of his will. But he came to view it with a certain morbid fascination; and if he drank enough at night, he was able to sedate it. It was a wonderful feeling.
And yet for all the turmoil of his existence, he remained almost manically elated by life, so that on Saturday mornings, he'd often be seized by a sense of joy so intense it verged on the ecstatic. For all that, though, he was at all times aware of a need to keep depression at bay, for on those rare occasions he succumbed to the blues, they were so violent he could be moved to minor acts of self-harm. But they were usually short-lived, and once they'd moved on, the elation returned. It was a wonderful feeling.
Yet, there may have come a time when the latter started being produced not so much endogenously, as through alcohol. For although he didn't drink on a daily basis, the effects of his nocturnal binges persisted throughout the day in the shape of a euphoria which he supplemented with endless cups of coffee.
But as might be expected, as a result of poor attendance and other issues, he lost his beloved job early in the 1990s.
And having found a degree of fulfilment in his post as an Oxford Street English teacher almost unmatched by any other means by which he'd attempted to make a living, he tried desperately to regain it. But his efforts were unavailing.
So by the summer he'd made a return to the stage, and despite the fact that his work was once more the object of justifiable acclaim, it was a short one. And by the end of the year, he'd embarked on another teacher training course, quitting this one before the end of the term. At which point, he set himself up once again as a peripatetic deliverer of novelty telegrams.
But the following winter saw him roving anew, ending up in Hastings, an English coastal town with a large London overspill population, a distinction it shares with several dozen towns throughout the UK, some new, some older towns like Hastings, expanded to accommodate the newcomers.
And once there, he set about taking a course intended to net himself a TEFL certificate, which would entitle him to teach English as a foreign language on an international basis. Because, he still hankered after his days as an English teacher of foreign nationals, having effectively fallen in love with this vocation.
But if he thought he was going to pass the course, he had another thing coming, because although he was well-liked at Hastings, there were few who knew him there who'd not be of the opinion that something was

troubling Paul Runacles.
Precisely what, they'd be at loss to say...but one things was certain...his mind had become such a chaos he was losing his ability to communicate normally with his fellow man. But he still only drank at night, and to such an extent there were times he lapsed into incoherency. It was a wonderful feeling.
Soon after returning to London with nothing to show for a fortnight's hard graft and a fairly hefty sum of money, Runacles' drinking assumed a lethal quality from early '91, although in truth it had done so almost a decade earlier. But there was a new recklessness to it in that it became diurnal as well as nocturnal. And perforce, in later years, he'd have little recollection of the rest of '91, and much of '92 to boot, and so struggle hard to recall precisely how he spent his time.
Looking back from the vantage point of the early 2010s, he recalled quite regular work as a television walk-on. And among the parts he fulfilled as such was that of a crime scene photographer for a long-running British police series.
He also saw a lot of a close friend from East London, performing with him for a few years from about 1990 as half of a musical duo in various clubs, pubs and restaurants, and even busking on one memorable occasion, which saw the two musicians being showered with cigarettes from an appreciative member of Leicester Square's homeless community.
And at some point in what may have been '91...or '92, he resumed his career as a deliverer of novelty telegrams for a third time.
While all throughout this period, he wrote...constantly...in a bizarre style replete with archaisms culled from various sources, some being ancient dictionaries, while one was a cheap facsimile of an ancient edition of Roget's Thesaurus.
In the summer of '92, he made one final attempt at passing a TEFL course, but the strain proved too much for him, and he left before it had finished.
While towards the end of the year, he was praised for his portrayal of Stefano in a production of *The Tempest* at Conway Hall in London's Red Lion Square. This despite the fact he was intoxicated from his very first rehearsal to the second he quit the stage after the final curtain call.
Then a little later, he accepted a small part in a play based on the life of James Joyce's beautiful troubled daughter Lucia to be performed at the Lyric Studio, Hammersmith. By which time, he'd embarked on yet another teaching training course; and resumed his career as a deliverer of novelty telegrams for the fourth and final time.
And while his life was hectic, he lived it as if in a dream, which is to say in a state of near-constant elation occasioned by vast quantities of alcohol.
It's difficult to explain the appeal of alcohol taken in the kind of quantities characteristic of Runacles' intake towards the end of 1992 to all who are not nor have ever been alcoholic. But there is a theory held by several authorities on alcoholism that in certain alcoholics, alcohol comes in time to exert a morphine-like effect. Although how true it is its impossible to say.
While another proposes that in common with other drugs, alcohol can ultimately tamper with the body's ability to produce the naturally occurring pleasure-inducing substances known as endorphins, such as serotonin and dopamine.
Certainly there came a time in Runacles' life when the thought of an existence without his beloved elixir filled him with the utmost horror, for what would he be without it, other than the most hopelessly dull and timorous individual? Which would not have been the case for the Runacles of about '82, who was the most incandescent individual even when sober...a natural extrovert whose warmth, while verging at times on the fulsome, was viewed with almost universal appreciation.
And while much of this warmth remained in late '92, it was being sustained by booze, in fact his entire existence was being held together by ethyl alcohol. So that when he finally did collapse under the strain of his responsibilities, it was a messy crash indeed, provoked first by alcohol alone, then by alcohol in cahoots with prescription medicine. And a few weeks after that, he suffered another crisis involving a potentially deadly combination of prescription medicines.
But by this time, he'd undergone a Damascus-style conversion to born again Christianity; so that his life from early '93 onwards was as tranquil as it had once been frantic. Not that it ground to a halt, but it certainly

slowed down to a snail's pace.

Sometime in the early part of 1993, while still occasionally attending meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, he received a call from a man who told him he was from an organisation by the name of Contact for Christ based near Croydon in Surrey.
He'd got in touch with Runacles as a result of a card he'd filled in on a British Rail train some months previously. He tried to put him off, before he knew it, he was at his door, a neat, dapper man with a large salt and pepper moustache and gently penetrating deep brown eyes.
He wanted to pray with Runacles, who promptly ushered him into his bedroom, where they prayed together at length.
Later, he found himself a guest at his house deep in the south western suburbs where Runacles was asked to make a list of sins past requiring deep repentance. And once he'd done this, the two men spent a few hours praying over each and every one of these sins Runacles had made a note of.
The man was a Pentecostal of long standing, and therefore convinced that the more supernatural Gifts of the Holy Spirit such as Tongues and Prophecy are still available to Believers.
In this capacity, he opened Runacles' eyes to many facts of the Pentecostal world, including the magazine *Prophecy Today*, then edited by the Reverend Clifford Hill, and the works of the late New Zealand Evangelist and writer Barry R Smith.
And to think there was a time Runacles viewed theories concerning the End Times, or Last Days prior to the Second Coming of Christ with rabid contempt. But he was changing on every level. In fact he was barely recognisable in the early nineties to the man of only a year or two previously, having become calm and sober, even sedate in manner.
But he'd not entirely lost his taste for underachievement, for in late '94, he failed his third and final attempt at qualifying as a teacher. Only to go on to secure a personal rave review from the London *Time Out* for his acting in a little-known play on the Fringe, which is the London equivalent of Off-Broadway.
And his acting triumphs persisted throughout the '90s, a decade throughout which it could be said Runacles survived on the minute amount of energy he had left over after his collapse. But it was hard for him; and in terms of impetus, he was running on empty.
And it may be his experiences with alcohol and prescription medicine, and the health crisis these produced, had left him at the mercy of some kind of depressive condition. But if this was indeed the case, it was one which while debilitating was yet relatively mild.
For he still had a great capacity for joy. But a joy born of the peace that comes from the promise of eternal life, which is infinitely purer and more profound form than any earthly joy born of a love affair with the fleeting pleasures of the world. But which doesn't necessarily preclude great suffering, for from the time of his conversion, he was engaged in a terrible struggle with what some Christians called The Old Man.
And there had always been a dark aspect to Paul Runacles, but not in a romantic, Byronic sense, although this appeal was something he'd always coveted. So much as one that was in terrible conflict with his warmer, more affectionate side, which was no less seismically intense than the other.
It had once made him a ferocious critic of what he saw as the follies of humankind, while threatening to turn his once tender heart to stone.
But as a Christian, he no longer sought to condemn people, so much as seek their eternal salvation. So this aspect was something to be confronted and tamed, rather than fuelled by corrosively cynical writings, and then partially controlled by lavish quantities of alcohol.
And from the mid '90s onwards, he went to war against it, little knowing he had the most colossal fight of his life on his hands. For having been sidelined, it's as if it had assumed a terrifying new force, and was determined to win. And it manifested itself not just as depression, but intrusive thoughts that seemed to have a life and power all of their own, in so far as they had an ability to alter his mood and countenance for extended periods of time, which made him petrified of them, and so at all times inclined to permanent social seclusion.
The first phase came in '95 when Runacles made contact with a former pastor who ran his own ministry from a tiny little village in the south of England after reading an article he'd contributed to *Prophecy Today*. And some time later, he travelled down to meet him where he laid hands on him in his capacity of what is known

as Deliverance Minister. But this was just the first of several experiences of this kind, one of which saw Runacles being ministered to by a vicar in his ancient village church.
But nothing could cure Runacles of his restlessness, and, unable to settle in a single fellowship for any great length of time, he encountered a vast variety of churches throughout the '90s...affiliated to the Word of Faith; Vineyard, Baptist and Elim Pentecostal movements among others.
And in each one, he hoped to find a lasting solution to his shadow side, the darker Runacles who tormented him. And which he saw as a throwback to his pre-Christian self, incubated over the years through immersion in a decadent culture he now uncompromisingly rejected.
And as he did, he acted more or less consistently, notwithstanding a fairly lengthy period of office work, which stretched from about 1997 to 2000, by which time he'd performed in his final play for a long time.
He then made an attempt at launching a modest career as a session singer. And as such recorded a vocal in the style of *Chanson* master Charles Trenet, which received some praise for its closeness to the original. In fact, so much so he was asked to record a second one in imitation of one of his favourite song stylists, Nat King Cole, which was rejected.
But while his session career floundered, his singing career was still in full swing, and he served as front man for a Jazz band for two years between 2000 and 2002. And yet when the latter folded, it was as if Runacles himself himself in a social sense.
But there was still some fight left in him. And in '03, he started taking himself seriously as a songwriter for the first time, before attempting to place some recently demoed songs with a music publishing company. But none were interested.
He turned to creative writing in early 2006. While the following year, a CD of popular standards featuring himself and one of the world's leading harmonica players finally saw the light of day in 2007 after much rehearsal. And while it received a rave review in the official magazine of the British Musician's Union the following year, it only went on to sell a handful of copies.
But he'd achieved a degree of artistic stability nonetheless; and this was reflected in his church life, for towards the end of the 2010s, he tired of church hopping, and permanently settled in a Church of England fellowship in the south western suburbs of London.
Both Evangelical and Charismatic, it was highly sought after, with up to four services taking place each Sunday...which meant Runacles could conceal himself within the congregation if he so chose.
And so it seemed he was definitively quieted; a bizarre state of affairs for one who'd once been among the most frenetically extrovert of souls. But if he found himself all run out, as had been the case all those years ago, when he collapsed by that muddy field in the Arcadian heart of England...well, it was only a temporary situation in his mind, and one day he'd be in a position to quit the wilderness after so many years of languishment.
And yet there'd be times when, looking back on his youth he'd often weep silently to himself in the dead of night at the end of yet another day spent doing really very little when he thought about it.
But he was being typically harsh with himself. For hermitic as he was, he was far from worthless. For instance, in his eyes, he'd seen many results from a powerful prayer ministry. And he continued to grow as a musician, planning a future for himself as a singer-songwriter despite being in the midst of late middle age. While he was able to make a modest living as a writer after more than five years of trying to set the world wide web on fire with his pen...and failing.
And there'd be times when certain pieces of quintessentially English pastoral music still had the power to evoke his strange and sudden flight, or rush of blood to the head, of over four decades ago. Such as Gerald Finzi's *A Severn Rhapsody*, which seemed to him to bespeak a passion for the Arcadian soul of England that verges on the ecstatic. And the same could be said for Elgar's *Elegy* which tended to convey to him a deep mournfulness silently existent beneath the picture perfect image of English privilege.
When he ran away from his college...like some kind of hysterical gymslip schoolgirl...just the once it was...to avoid being punished for something stupid he did. And it had been an utterly pointless exercise as it was the last day of term, but he just panicked and bolted, and kept on running...
And then there was a point he stopped, because he realised to his horror that he'd arrived back at his college. And he saw his mother's car. And it pained him to think what she'd been going through while he ran around

the English countryside like some kind of demented faun, only to finish up collapsed by the side of a muddy field in the Arcadian heart of England.

And having become newly mired, he despaired of ever being fully free again. But he searched for solutions on a constant basis. And he comforted himself with the thought that even if he failed to effect an escape, God was beside him, while four decades previously he had no faith to speak of, other than in the pre-eminence of might. For after all, is Gods Grace not sufficient?

And he took courage from that fact, while continuing to plan for the time he'd find the strength to make good on the faith that had been placed in him by so many for so long. So when he looked back at memories of his youth, such as the time he ran away from his college on the last day of term without purpose or aim, it would be in peace not pain. And he might even return to the scene of his flight as if in atonement, and commune with the soul of his beloved England with a passion verging on the ecstatic, and then along with so many others, put the memory to rest for all time.

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