

# As a Perfectly Foolish Young Man I Wanted 15

By : Carl Halling

As a Perfectly Foolish Young Man I Wanted - Book Five - Where the Halling Valley River Lies - Chapter One - The Heroic Life of Phyllis Mary Pinnock

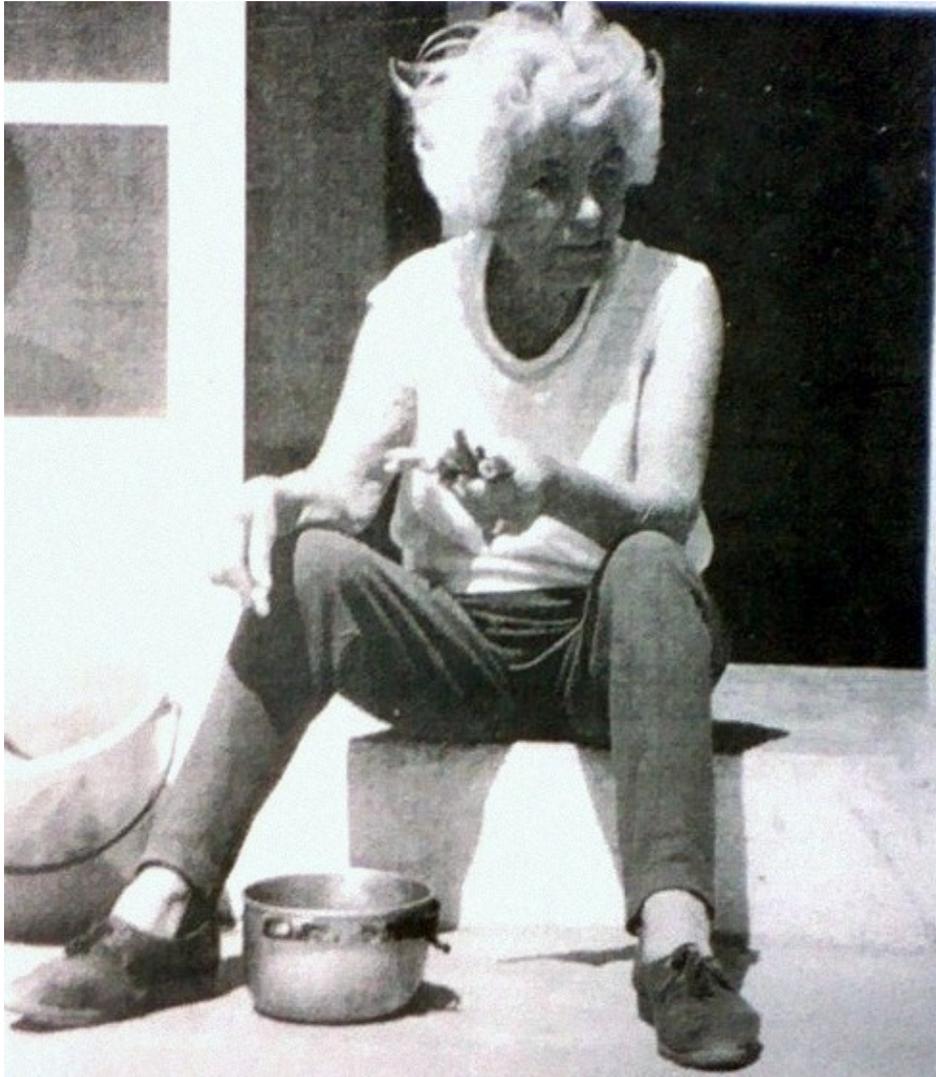


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In the Beautiful Valley of Tamar

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My paternal grandmother grew into a remarkably beautiful young woman with dark hair and blue or green or hazel eyes and an exquisitely sculpted mouth according to a photograph the only one in existence as far as I'm aware of the youthful Phyllis Mary Pinnock.

She'd been born sometime towards the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century, possibly in the Dulwich area of South East London. And given her father had been what is known as a gentleman, which means he forsook all labour, it may have been she was a scion of that part of the upper middle class known as the lower gentry.

And according to my father's account, her first true love David was a scion of the Wilson Line of Hull which had developed into the largest privately owned shipping firm in the world in the early part of the century. But like so many young men of that dutiful generation, immortalised in cruelly beautiful poems such as Wilfrid Owen's *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, which speaks to us of "sad shires" decimated by an inexplicable conflict, he died young during the First World War. And she subsequently married an officer in the British

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army, to whom she bore two children, Peter Bevan, and Suzanne, known as Dinny.

When her children were little more than infants, she elected to join her husband as a tea planter in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. And it was on that breathtakingly beautiful island, in a tough and typically isolated environment that she met the two men, tea planters like herself, who were destined to become her second and third husbands.

They were a British engineer by the name of Christopher "Chris" Evans, and my Danish namesake, Carl Halling.

Carl had evidently once been a successful businessmen within the linoleum industry before some kind of reversal of fortune found him on the famous tea fields of Ceylon, which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once described as being "as true a monument to courage as is the lion at Waterloo."

Mary's third child, my father, was born Patrick Clancy Halling in Rowella, Tasmania, in the beautiful Tamar Valley, but raised as Carl's son in the great city of Sydney.

And according to Pat, Carl and Mary eked an existence in various fields of endeavour, including fruit farming, gold prospecting and real estate. While Mary was at some point a primary school teacher, and another, a journalist for the Sydney Telegraph. But it was a hard life according to Pat, especially after Carl contracted the multiple sclerosis that would ultimately kill him.

One blessing being that all three children were exceptionally gifted musically, Patrick as violinist, Peter as cellist, and Suzanne as pianist. And while little more than an infant, Pat won a scholarship to the Sydney Conservatory of Music where he studied with Gerald Walenn, soloing for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra on a single occasion when he was still only eight or nine or ten. And one can only imagine the effect it had on his childish nervous system. However, he reserved his true passion for the water, this love of the sea and ships and specifically sailing being a legacy from Mary, who spent much of her adult life by the sea.

Carl died around about the time of the abdication of King Edward VIII which took place in 1936, soon after which Mary and her family set off for Denmark, Carl having expressed a wish to be buried in his native land. And then all three children stayed behind for some time while their mother went valiantly on to London to look for somewhere to live on a permanent basis.

And it was in London that Pat studied both at the Royal Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, under the tutelage of Rowsby Woof and Max Rostal respectively.

He joined the London Philharmonic Orchestra while still a teenager during the Blitz on London.

And at the same time, he served in the Sea Cadets as a signaller, seeing action as such on the hospital ships of the Thames River Emergency Service, which, formed in 1938, lasted for three years, using converted Thames pleasure steamers as floating ambulances or first aid stations.

But some years prior to Mary settling back in her native London with her children, she'd evidently received a significant sum of money as an inheritance. And it could conceivably be said that doing so resulted in a reconciliation with her hallowed social class, although this suggests some kind of rupture, which may not actually have happened; at least in a spiritual sense.

But what is true is that she was convinced she was descended from a lost branch of an aristocratic family. For when I was a young man, my father would occasionally speak to me of it as a means of boosting my morale, as if I was born for the life of a scholar and athlete of distinction befitting blue-blooded origins.

And in this one respect, I was somewhat akin to the legendary movie star Montgomery Clift, whose extraordinary beauty and magnetism could be said to constitute the very quintessence of the aristocratic WASP Prince. For despite being born into a fairly humble middle class family, Clift was a scion of the southern aristocracy according to his mother Ethel "Sunny" Clift.

So Monty and his twin sister and elder brother Brooks were raised as if to the manor born, and educated by his mother and private tutors in both Europe and the US, learning to speak French, German and Italian in the process.

But I never fully believed Mary's story until one day in the 1980s, while my family was being paid a visit by her younger sister Joan, together with her husband, my great uncle Eric, I surreptitiously placed a cassette tape recorder close to the dining table during lunch or supper.

And I did so in the belief that one or another of my parents would quiz her as to the veracity of Mary's longstanding boast of distant blue blood.

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If my memory serves me aright, among the truths she revealed about our family that day was that Joan and Mary's paternal great grandfather had been a coachman by trade who'd been left an enormous sum of money by a grateful employer. And this act of philanthropy introduced money into the family for the first time. Another was that her maternal grandmother's maiden name had been Butler, which allegedly links the family to the Butlers of Ormond, a dynasty of Anglo-Norman nobles named after the Earldom they went on to rule in Munster, Ireland.

And the Butler saga begins in earnest with the Norman Invasions of Ireland, which took place in 1169 on the orders of one Dermot MacMurrough, King of Leinster, one of five kingdoms of pre-Norman Ireland.

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The Mystery of Ormonde

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But who precisely were these Normans who went on to create one of the most powerful monarchies in Europe and whose territorial conquests would ultimately include not just Ireland, but England, Scotland, Wales, Southern Italy and the island of Sicily?

Unsurprisingly, they are largely Nordic, although believed to have been of mixed Viking, Frankish and Gallo-Roman stock, a mixture which apparently produced an instinct towards elitism and dominance.

And the Norman conquest of England was famously sealed with William the Conqueror's success at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 AD, which introduced a new aristocracy into the country. Which means that the Normans replaced the Anglo-Saxons as the ruling class of England, while becoming part of a single French-speaking culture with lands on both sides of the channel.

And this explains her fierce rivalry with mainland France, as well as the 1842 poem, *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*, in which Tennyson makes the valid point that "Kind hearts are more than coronets, And simple faith than Norman blood," which of course inspired the classic Ealing comedy, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, directed by Robert Hamer in 1949.

And what the poem was alluding to was the specifically Norman nature of the English aristocracy. But back to the travails of the Emerald Isle.

By the fateful year of 1169, Ireland, a land once given over to the ancient Celtic faith of Druidry and the worship of the Sidhe or Faery Folk, was profoundly Christian, despite a remnant of paganism.

But an invasion had already been authorised as early as 1155 by the first and only English Pope Adrian IV, decision which occasioned centuries of English dominance and Irish misery. While MacMurrough had been forced into exile in 1166 by a coalition of forces led by the High King of Ireland Rory O'Connor, and had fled...allegedly to Bristol first...and then to France.

There are various accounts of what happened next, but it's certain he asked Henry II, first English King of the Norman House of Plantagenet, for help in regaining his kingdom. And after Henry had pledged his aid, began recruiting allies in Wales, with Richard de Clare, known as Strongbow, foremost among them. So Ireland was earmarked for invasion.

In 1167, he returned to Ireland with a small army of mercenaries, but it wasn't until '69 that a full-scale invasion by the Anglo-Normans and their Welsh and Flemish allies got under way. And while contemporary accounts refer to the invaders as English, they have also been described as Anglo-Norman, Cambro-Norman and Anglo-French. With the Flemish contingent recruited largely from those Flemings who'd arrived in Britain with William the 1st and had settled in Wales...only to be perceived by the hostile Welsh as English. And also believed to have taken part was one Theobald Walter, patriarch of the Butlers of Ormond.

Two years afterwards, Henry II set foot in Ireland, the first English King to do so, and so High Kingship was brought to an end, to be replaced by over 750 years of English rule.

Henry was an ancestor of future generations of Butlers, and a grandson of William the Conqueror, which may provide a kinship with the mysterious Merovingian dynasty of Frankish Kings.

And when his son Prince John arrived in Ireland in 1185, it was in the company of the said Theobald Walter, whose father had been Butler of England; and so he was appointed Butler of Ireland and given a portion of land in eastern Munster that would become known as Ormond. Thence the name, the Butlers of Ormond.

Around 1200, he married Maud le Vavasour, purported inspiration for Maid Marian, wife of the mythical outlaw Robin Hood, himself allegedly based on Maud's second husband, Fulk FitzWarin.

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And they had one son together, Theobald le Botiller, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Butler, who, by marrying Margery de Burgh, a descendant of both Dermot McMurrough and the legendary Brian Boru, brought royal Gaelic blood into the Butler bloodline. While their sole and only son...also known as Theobald, took Joan FitzJohn as his spouse; and from their union came eight sons, the second of which, Edmund Butler, married Joan FitzGerald of the ancient FitzGerald dynasty.

It was for their eldest son James that the earldom of Ormonde was created for the first time. And his appointment came in 1328, only months after his marriage to Lady Eleanor de Bohun, beautiful grand-daughter of Edward the 1<sup>st</sup> of the House of Plantagenet, known as the Angevins from their origins in Anjou, France.

Dubbed The Hammer of the Scots, Longshanks was that Anglo-Norman king who'd had Scottish noble Sir William Wallace executed in 1305 for having led a resistance during the Wars of Scottish independence. While among James Butler's descendants was Anne Boleyn, whose father Thomas, a Butler by matrilineal descent, became Earl of Ormonde in 1528. This having occurred when Piers Ruadh Butler resigned his claim by orders of the king; only to have the earldom restored to him ten years later. Act which heralded the title's third creation.

And by this time, England had become a Protestant nation, and Anglicanism established in Ireland as the state religion, despite the vast majority of the population being Catholic.

And much to Ireland's misfortune, the Butlers became involved with some vicious feuding with their long time rivals the FitzGeralds in the late 1500s. And when the so-called Black Earl Sir Thomas Butler vanquished his own mother's family at the Battle of Affane in 1565, it helped provoke the Desmond Rebellions of 1567-73 and 1579-83, the second of which was bolstered by hundreds of papal troops. But these were defeated by the Elizabethan Armies and their Irish allies, soon after which the first English Plantations were carried out in a devastated Munster. While the first plantations in Ulster, Ireland's most purely Gaelic region, remained yet in the future.

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Of the Supposed Superiority of Nobility

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In 1609 the first Ulster Plantation came into being in the wake of the Nine Years War of 1594-1603, which was largely fought between the Kingdom of England and its Irish allies and an alliance of Gaelic clans led by Hugh O'Neill and Hugh Roe O'Donnell. While the latter would ultimately include 6000 Spanish soldiers sent by Phillip II.

The routing of the Ulster Earls led to the famous Flight of the Earls to Europe, the end of the Gaelic Clan system, and the colonization of Ulster by English and Scottish Protestants.

While the next conflict to involve the Butlers of Ormond was the Irish Rebellion of 1641, which was an uprising not of the Catholic Irish, but the Old English, composed of Catholic gentry who'd become more Irish than the Irish themselves. And while the fifth Earl, James Butler, was placed in charge of English government forces based in Dublin, the Old English were led by his own cousin Richard Butler; with the Catholic rebels prevailing.

But in time it mutated into a war between the native Irish and the newly arrived Protestant settlers from Britain...which resulted in the massacre of thousands of Protestants, the precise number being a matter of much debate.

While a year later, James Butler was involved in yet another conflict in the shape of the English Civil War. And being a Royalist sympathizer, he despatched an estimated 4000 troops to England to fight for King Charles the 1<sup>st</sup> against the Calvinist Roundheads under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell...only to be made Lord Lieutenant of Ireland by Royal Appointment in 1643 for his pains.

But by 1649, Ireland had become a stronghold of support for the King; with Ormonde in charge both of the Royalist forces and the Irish Confederation of Old English Catholics and native Gaels; and this had the effect of attracting the hostile attentions of Cromwell and his New Model Army.

And when Ormonde attempted to thwart the English Puritan invaders by holding a line of fortified towns across the country, Cromwell defeated them one after the other, beginning in 1649 with the Siege of Drogheda.

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While in the summer of 1650, following a long series of humiliating defeats for the Irish, Ormonde, having been deserted by Protestants and Catholics alike, was urged to leave the country by the Catholic clergy, which he promptly did, seeking refuge in Paris with the exiled Charles II.

Yet, on the Restoration of the Stuart Monarchy in 1660, he was showered with honours by the new King of England, Scotland and Ireland; and was made Duke of Ormonde in the peerage of Ireland in the spring of '61. But eight year later, he fell from favour as a result, allegedly, of courtly intrigue on the part of Royal favourite James Villiers, the 2cnd Duke of Buckingham. While in 1671, an attempt was made on his life by an Irish adventurer by the name of Thomas Blood; but Ormonde escaped, convinced that Buckingham had put him up to it, although nothing was ever proven.

Then in 1682, he became Duke of Ormonde in the peerage of England, dying four years later in Dorset. While soon after his death, a poem was published that celebrated an essential decency that was never compromised. One of his sons, the 2cnd Duke of Ormonde, commanded a regiment at the Battle of the Boyne under William of Orange, and took part in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715. While his own son was the third and final Duke of Ormonde.

However, the Earldom lasted until the end of the 20th Century, becoming dormant in October 1997 with the death of James Butler the 7th Marquess of Ormonde, who had two daughters, but no sons.

And it may be I'm a distant relative of theirs...and if so, also related to many, perhaps even all of the most blue-blooded families not just in Europe but the entire world.

In the end though, the facts of history entirely fail to attest to the natural superiority of nobility, even though the Bible upholds the authority of parents and the instruments of the state. For God has implemented these as a means of controlling Man's innate depravity, while appealing to his hierarchical instincts and deep-seated desire for order and structure.

But all hierarchies erected by Man in order that one section of society might feel superior to another, whether on the basis of class, race, skin colour or some other false distinction, are Antichrist, because all human beings are created equal in the sight of God.

And there is a theory that those blessed by nobility of birth are in fact less likely to turn to Christ than those from backgrounds of brokenness or poverty. While great beauty or wealth or intellectual distinction can fill its possessors with a sense of self-sufficiency which can lead to a refutation of God.

But my beautiful grandmother Phyllis was ever attached to the notion her family boasted blue blood in spite of a life of unending hardship...much of this attributable to sheer ill fortune. For instance, having married Chris Evans soon after the death of her second husband Carl, she lost him in '49 while they were both out sailing together, the victim of a fatal coronary.

I first met her in the early 1960s when I was still just a small child, by which time she was living on a yacht in the south of France, possibly Nice, or Cannes, a striking figure, slim and tanned, with a magnificent head of the purest white hair. But by about the middle of the decade, she'd moved into her own house, Chartley, named after her former house in Sydney. And situated near the little town of Cambrils on Catalonia's Costa Brava.

And for several years until about '68, our family vacationed with her at Chartley every summer, often with Peter's family. Which is to say, Peter himself, my aunt Marge, and my cousins Rod, a future musician of genius himself, and Kris, known affectionately as Krispy. They resided virtually opposite us in Ramilies Road, Bedford Park, while we were in nearby Esmond Road.

Photos of her from around this time reveal a weather beaten woman with wiry white hair, habitually clad in old and even patched trousers; but she could be sweet when her heart was touched.

She was a fantastic spirit, given to what could be called Celtic whimsy, which may have proceeded from Cornish origins, which her maiden name of Pinnock certainly suggested. Although the Anglo-Saxons are hardly less inclined to this quality, for after all, did they not produce such icons of nonsense as Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll?

By the early '70s, ill health forced her back to Britain, where she lived until her passing in 1973, sometimes with us, and sometimes in her own little cottage in Berkshire. While her constant companions were two mongrel dogs whom she'd rescued from the beach towards the end of her Spanish sojourn.

These were Charlot, who was sandy-coloured and looked a little like a whippet, and Phillippe, who had long

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pointed ears like those of an Alsatian.

She was an altogether different person in frail old age, much mellowed and desperately vulnerable, writing desolate poetry for my benefit, or watching old movies with me on TV. Such as the sentimental Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *Carousel*, which she initially dismissed as "slush!"

But the famous climactic tune of *You'll Never Walk Alone* has a tendency to touch all but the most stoical of hearts, and Mary's was not exempt.

For my part, I'd left the room, possibly to weep softly to myself in some secluded part of my parents' house, only to return to find her in tears. I've never forgotten it.

There were times I was able to share some tender moments with her, but looking back, I wish there'd been more, and oh how she'd have welcomed them. But I was young and strong and thoughtless, with little concern for the trials of the elderly, fact which saddens me today.

For does not the Word of God say in Matthew 25:40, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me...?"

Now I'm almost the same age she was when we first met, and I've come to honour the memory of a brilliant tragic woman, and to feel for her in a way I was never capable of during the brief few years of our acquaintance.

A little before her passing, Phillippe vanished under mysterious circumstances into the English countryside. So Charlot came to live with us on his own in '73; and was subsequently renamed Charlie. He proved a gentle, faithful and loving pet, but with a strong character akin to that of his doting mistress, dying himself in 1983 following a short but valiant battle with declining health.

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