



CHAPTER I: THE UNFINISHED AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF CLIVE RAGBORN, POP SINGER

BONNIE BRITTON

"Cor, Clive, don't be such an absolute beast," the Human Bone wailed for the millionth time.

"Go wash the soot from your eyes and fix your hair," I told my sister, banishing her to the bathroom. "You look like a Soho reject," I yelled as an afterthought.

Lesly is just sixteen, and because she is my sister, she sometimes thinks I can snap my fingers to beckon other pop singers to throw themselves at her feet. Being a top celebrity in the pop music world has its advantages, but the Tom Joneses and Paul McCartneys don't peddle their relatives off on me so I try to return the favor.

Besides, the poor girl looks as though she's just returned from a forced labor camp, she's so thin. I thought that a year in an exclusive girl's finishing school in Switzerland would plump her up a bit with all that hiking and eating cheese. Instead, it's left her with very expensive tastes after living with the daughters of rich and famous people.

Since you've gotten this far, you're probably wondering what the bloody hell is going on and what it is that I'm writing about. In my spare time, which is very spare, I run a bookshop as a secondary diversion, just in case the bottom falls out of pop. My sister actually does most of the paperwork and handles ninety-nine percent of the business since I am on tour most of the year, and she is out of school.

Our store is stocked with one-of-a-kind books and old manuscripts, plus an assortment of current best sellers. You can find our place if you can find Picadilly, and anyone in London can help you with that. Look for us on St. James Street, in a tall building with a weatherbeaten sign (which is actually new, but we wanted something authentic looking) that says "Dead End." When you find that, you'll know you're here.

As I said, we deal in one-of-a-kind books, and that is precisely what this is. I haven't decided yet whether I shall give my book some sordid title such as "The True Confessions of a Pop Music Artist" or the "Life and Times of Clive Ragborn." I could go cultural I suppose and call it a "Midsummer's Ragborn," but anyroad, you are reading it under whatever title it has assumed and that is all

that matters.

At this moment for all you trivia fanciers, I stand 6'1" without my Beatle boots, despite all the the rubbish put about by my manager who claims I am 6'5" in my stockings.

My head is nicely covered with a generous amount of dark brown hair, and just above my nose are eyes, which of course come in a pair and are also dark brown.

Girls have called me devilishly handsome, cute, sort of a cross between David Niven and Peter O'Toole, and even cuddly, depending upon the rapture of the girl and my position on her list of favorite singers. To be honest, I am just another extraordinarily handsome chap with better than average looks.

But that wasn't always true. I started life as a horrible, red squealing infant, completely bald except for two little strips of wispy light brown hair scattered caressly across my pate.

My first appearance was made at a small hospital outside of London on Guy Fawkes day, 1943. The Jerries chose that precise moment as I entered the world to bomb the hospital, and I can still see the nurses and doctors running for shelter, pushing, carrying and shoving patients toward the sheltered areas as bomb fragments tore through the wards.

Naturally I began to cry, as anyone with a bit of sense in his noggin would do in a situation like that. The mess was enough to scare anyone, but what I really objected to was the terribly large woman in charge of me who for some unexplained reason insisted on trying to smother me as she crawled with me under a bed to escape the bombs.

As I was unable at the time to understand the language she was speaking, I tried to get through to the woman by a sort of kicking Morse Code which she simply couldn't grasp. The most humiliating part of the ordeal was that having recently arrived in the world, my wardrobe was a bit on the tacky side. Nothing chic, to say the least.

In fact, at that very moment. I didn't have a stitch of clothes on my back. Not that I'm a prude or anything, but babies have just as many rights as anyone. (Of course, if anyone asked me to do a nude scene today, I'd probably ask him to step outside.)

After a little while, the bombs stopped falling and I was returned to my mother, who seemed quite pleased to see me. She wasn't exactly as I had imagined her, but I felt that with a little love and patience

she would do nicely. I squealed at her a few times, but she was as dense as the others when it came to interpreting my speech.

People kept mentioning someone called "his father" to my mother, and when they did I could feel her tremble. After a while I became quite curious to know who this "father" person was, though anyone who could make my mother cry at the mention of his name didn't seem to be the type of chap I'd want hanging about.

Just before we left for home, Father came to the hospital to see us. He was very young, about my mother's age.

He told the nurse his name was Michael Palmer, which I thought was quite a coincidence, since that was my name too, before I changed it to Clive Ragborn. The chap told my nurse that he was on leave to see his new son, and she mumbled something in that silly language of her's and left my father alone with mother.

Father was wearing a uniform, which I guessed to be the uniform of His Majesty's Royal Navy, since I had seen others like it drifting through the hospital. Mother seemed pleased that this man had come to take us home. At least she smiled and laughed more than she had since we'd been there.

When Father saw me he began exclaiming over my tiny size. I suppose he didn't remember that once he had been a six pound weakling himself. But what was even more amazing, he didn't know my age. I wasn't just a few days old, as he kept remarking, but a full nine months plus. They never did learn, and insisted upon celebrating my birthday on the wrong day until I corrected them.

Our first home was a tiny flat in Kensington, a suburb of London. Dad had to leave Mum and me to get back to the war, but he promised to come back to us as soon as it was over. Mum was really sad when he left, and cried a lot, but I did my best to cheer her through the lonely days.

CHAPTER II: THE CONTINUING STORY OF CLIVE RAGBORN, POP SINGER, AND EXHIBITIONIST EXTRAODINAIRE

After she had sufficiently recovered from my entrance into the world, Mum had to return to her job in the factory to help support the family. Like dad, she was doing her part for the war effort, working in a munitions factory nine hours each day, including Saturday.

Luckily for me, there was a Grandmum to take care of me while

Mum was away. She was a sweet old thing of about sixty-five or so, and her antics kept me in stitches.

We spent endless hours taking walks in my pram along a quiet little stream which ran near our home. Lots of other mothers and nannies did the same, and we were continually making new friends. While the mothers and nannies caught up on the latest gossip, we of the bottle set exchanged friendly cries and nods.

The days passed quickly with Grandmum, and within a few months she had me up and about, taking shaky steps as she held my hand. That was her big mistake.

I have always been the curious sort, and this was just the case at ten months when I first began to walk around without her aid. Grandmum was getting up in years and wasn't quite as active as she could have been, and I fear I must have been quite a strain on her health.

There was nothing else to do with me but buy a harness for our afternoon walks, since Grandmum couldn't walk to the park all scrunched over, and I wasn't about to be carried like a baby. To say the least, it was a bit humiliating to be led around like a dog, on their eye level, but it wasn't half bad since there were so many of us running around with our harnesses looking for all the world like hairless puppies.

Father came home only once during that time, but when he did, he brought a dog, a Dalmatian I think it was, that he said would be my pet. Never having had a pet before I wasn't quite sure what to do with it, but Grandmum fed it and showed me how to take a brush and make his hair all smooth.

Dally grew lots faster than I did, and within a few months I was riding him around the park to the envious looks of all my friends. But a boy and his dog are soon parted, and the time came when the flat got too small for the four of us, and Dally had to go.

I then focused my attention on a goldfish which was purchased to console me over the loss of Dally. I took fiendish delight in grabbing the poor little fish by the tail and pulling him out of the water to see how long he could survive. Actually I thought I was doing him a service, since I had tried putting my own head in his bowl and found the air preferable to his water.

One day I did it a bit too often and when I put him back in the bowl he sort of floated up to the top on his side. His tail stopped

moving and he closed his mouth but his eyes stayed open. That's why I wasn't too worried, until I returned a few hours later and found that he was still on his side. I buried him at sea the next day in the apartment house's community bathtub.

Here in England not everyone is fortunate enough to have a private bath, so tenants must share. Mrs. Orville Standish, who occupied the flat across from ours was getting ready to take a bath, so she turned the water on, then left the room for a moment to get a towel that she'd forgotten.

Grandmum had dozed off while I slept in my crib, or so she thought. I was able to crawl over the side and slip down to the floor without awakening her. I then proceeded to recover my fish who had been floating overnight in his bowl and opened the door of the flat. I made my escape down the hall to the bathroom and when I heard the water running, went in to investigate.

Just before Mrs. Standish returned, I dumped in my fish and made a quick exit. The light was very dim and apparently she didn't notice Goldy floating about in the tub. She stepped right in, saw the fish floating past and screamed.

Another neighbor, hearing the cry for help, rushed right in without knocking, and was promptly smacked across the face with a wet towel. To this day the man will not speak to me if we meet on the street.

Within the next year my father returned home from the war. He looked much older than he had the last time I had seen him, and there were new medals hanging from his chest. Mother didn't care about the medals or the lines which had been added to his face, just that he had come home in one piece.

We had some jolly times now that father was stationed in London and could be home most of the time. There were many things the two of us could do that Mum and Grandmum had never thought of.

Soccer matches were a favorite place to spend a Sunday afternoon, although at that time I didn't really know why all those men were trying to kill the ball and each other. There was also the zoo where we discovered all sorts of strange animals together, and in Brighton where we spent the summer holiday there were rides and marvelous shows.

Brighton, ah yes, that's here I met my first true love. We were both four, free of worries and shoes and madly in love with ourselves,

each other and the world. She was a real looker, a tiny blond with blue eyes bluer than the sea in which we played. As a token of my affection I gave her my best seashell, and we exchanged addresses. Unfortunately, neither of us could write, and so our love was doomed from the start.

Like all childhoods, mine was too short, and subsequently I was packed off to boarding school. Not that I really minded going away to school since Father was off with the Navy again and Mum was getting ready to provide me with a sibling.

At school I became a real cut-up, always one of the regular fellows. The principal and I were in constant touch, and after a while he began to loathe the sight of me. We never really came to blows nor did he threaten me with expulsion since my marks were high and I was ranked as one of the outstanding six-year-old soccer players in all of England.

Then my sister, the Human Bone arrived, and for the first time in my life I was not the only dear little thing in my parents eyes. It could have caused trouble and should have, but we got off magnificently from the start.

For the next few years I remained at Winton's, and then later settled at Dingle Vale where I met a chap named Richard Starkey. He was a sickly little chap, not the sort you'd expect much from in later life, but we got along well, and I was sorry when he left for good.

At sixteen I had found school not to my liking, so I quite to find my place in the world. Unemployed, uneducated, I cast about at odd jobs until I finally settled as a fish porter.

It was depressing really, looking into the blank eyes of hundreds of fish each day. Just try it once. The smell wasn't exactly to my liking either.

At the tender age of seventeen I was attending a local dance with one of the several birds I happened to be chatting up. We'd been to a pub before, and I'd gotten a little high—high mind you, not drunk. As they did each week, the hall's promoters were holding their talent search, so fearless Michael Palmer, Jr. staggered onto the stage and belted out a soulful rendition of "Does Your Chewing Gum Lose It's Flavor?"

"And tell us sir, what's the name again?" the smiling MC asked. "Clive Ragborn," I lied.

And so the budding career of Clive Ragbon was launched.