A Final Distant Clarion Cry - Chapter One

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Chapter one of a fact-based novel in the creative non-fiction genre, therefore, with some names changed.

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In 2010, BjÃ¸rn-David Cristiansen told himself that if you're going to be a loser, you might as well be the best in the business, and by any standards known to humankind, David - as he had styled himself from childhood- was a king-size loser, a loser among losers, a loser supreme. The contemplation that he was the best at what he did afforded him some satisfaction at those times of the day when his status in life meant the most to him, such as in those last few hours before he turned in for the night. But when all's said and done, this was scant consolation to him. Yet, it could have all been so different.
He'd been born a Londoner on the 7th of October 1955 at the tail end of a street to the west of the city called Goldhawk Road, his first home, a little workman's cottage in the long-demolished Bulmer Place in Notting Hill. You'll search in vain for this poky little street in any London map, although youâ ll still be able to locate a Bulmer Mews tucked away some yards away from the main road of Notting Hill Gate.
His brother, Dane, entered the world two and a half years later, by which time his father, whoâ d been working as a classical violinist for some years,was in a position to buy his own home at 58 Esmond Road,Bedford Park in what was then the London Borough of Acton.He'd been born Patrick Clancy Christiansen in Rowella, Tasmania, and raised in Sydney as the son of a Danish father, Carl David Christiansen, and an English mother, whom David always knew as Mary.
Davidâ s mother had been born Angela Jean Watt in the city of Brandon, Manitoba on the 13th of November 1915. However, while still an infant she'd moved with her parents and four siblings to the Grandview area of East Vancouver. Grandview's earliest settlers were usually tradesmen or shopkeepers, in shipping or construction work, and largely of British origin. Angela's own father James Watt, who worked variously as a builder and electrician, hailed from the little town of Castlederg in County Tyrone, Ireland, while her mother was a native Glaswegian.
Her mother, Elizabeth Hazeldine, was from Glasgow, Scotland, having been born there to an English father from either Liverpool or Manchester, and a Scottish mother. She was the youngest of six siblings, and while she was alone among her immediate family not to have been born in Britain, she was also the only one to seek permanent residency in the mother country. Within a short time of arriving, she met Pat Christiansen through their shared profession, and they married in the summer of 1948. Seven years later, they decided to have their first child.

David was an articulate and sociable kid from the word go, walking, talking early just like his dad before him, but agitated, unable to rest, what they might call hyperactive today.
His first school was a kind of nursery school held locally on a daily basis at the private residence of one Miss Henrietta Pearson, and then aged 4 years old, he joined the exclusive LycÃ©e Francais Charles de Gaulle, situated in the fabulously opulent West London area of South Kensington, where he was to become bilingual by the age of about four years old.
Almost every race and nationality under the sun was to be found in the LycÃ©e in those days... and among those who went on to be good pals of David's were kids of English, French, Jewish, American, Yugoslavian and Middle Eastern origin.

His first two closest playground pals were Esther, the dusky scion of a successful Norwegian character actor and a beautifulIsraeli dancer, and Craig, an English kid like himself who became a lifelong friend. For a time, they formed an unlikely but inseparable trio:

â Hi kiddyâ , was Estherâ s sacred greeting to her beloved blood brother, and David would respond in kind.
Unlike many Lycee fathers, Davidâ s was far from wealthy, but he was determined that Dane and he enjoy the best and richest education imaginable, and to this end, he worked, toiled incessantly in the London session music world to ensure that they did, and they were dressed in lederhosen with their heads shorn like convicts, so that they be distinguished from the common run of British boys with their short back and sides.
At some stage in the early 1960s, David became a problem both at school and home, a disruptive influence in the class, and a trouble-maker in the streets, an eccentric loon full of madcap fun and half-deranged imaginativeness whose unusual physical appearance was enhanced by a striking thinness and enormous long-lashed blue eyes. Less charmingly, he was also the kind of deliberately malicious little hooligan who'd remove a paper from a neighbour's letter-box, and then mutilate it before re-posting it.
The eraâ s famous social and sexual revolution was well under way, and yet for all that, seminal Pop groups such as the Searchers and the Dave Clark Five - even the Beatles themselves â were quaint and wholesome figures in a still innocent England. They fitted in well in a nation of Norman Wisdom pictures and the well-spoken presenters of the BBC Home or Light Service, of coppers, tanners and ten bob notes, sweet shops and tuppeny chews.
Beatlemania invaded David's world in 1963, and he first announced his own status as a Beatlemaniac at the LycÃ©e in that landmark year. It was in that year that he took an intense dislike to an American kid in his class called Rick. He used to attack him for no reason at all other than to assert his superiority over him. One day, Rick finally flipped and gave David a karate chop in the stomach, which caused him to bawl so loudly that his little girl friend NiÃ±a felt moved to escort him to the safety of their teacher, which she did, while hugging him, kissing him, on the forehead, eyes, nose, cheeks:
"Carl didn't do a thing,â she lied, â and Rick came up and gave him four rabbit punches in the stomach.â

But Rick wasn't punished, because the teacher knew full well it David who had started all the trouble in the first place.
By the end of the year, a single new group had started threatening the Beatles' position as David's favourite in the world. They were the Rolling Stones; although an initial reaction to what he saw as a rough and sullen performance of Buddy Hollyâ s "Not Fade Away" on TV, was one of bitter disappointment.

But before long, he'd become utterly entranced by these martyrs to the youth movement, and during a musical discussion he had in about 1965 with some of the new breed of English roses, who may or may not have been flaunting mod girl fringes and kinky boots, the precocious David proudly announced his undying fealty.

One of the girls was a Fab Four loyalist and had the requisite seraphic smile, while another preferred the Animals, and acted cooler than the rest, as if those Geordie bluesmen were somehow superior to mere Pop acts like the Beatles and the Stones. As if irked by her snobbery, David felt compelled to ask her a question about her favourite band, while making sure he alluded to â the fat oneâ in the band, which provoked the shocked assurance that â there ainâ t no fat oneâ , which was true enough, but David could be perverse beyond his years.
During this golden era, David divided his time between the LycÃ©e and his West London stomping ground, and from a very young age, took Judo classes at the Budokwai in South Kensington. Some of the other kids knew him as Alley Cat, which was a pretty apt name for such a feral child. And it was there that one of his teachers, a former British international whoâ d fought in the first ever World Judo championships in Japan, once despairingly confessed:

â I always know itâ s Saturday when I hear Hallingâ s voice.â
Later, he took classes at the Judokan in Hammersmith, but if he thought he was going to raise Cain there he had another thing coming, given that its owner was a one-time captain of the British international team who'd served as an air gunner with 83 squadron during World War II. He later held Judo classes in Stalag 383.

David went on to study Karate with him, and was still doing so as late as 1973, when he got it into my head that he no longer wished to have anything to do with anything martial, precious blooming aesthete that he was.
For all that, though, he was rarely happier than on those Wednesday evenings he attended the 20th Chiswick Wolf Cub pack, and he was less of a menace there than pretty well anywhere else. Memories such as the solemnity of his enrolment, and being helped up a tree by an older cub to secure his Athletics badge remained with him for many years afterwards, as did the times he won his first star, and his swimming badge, with its peculiar frog symbol, as well as the pomp and the seriousness of a mass meeting he attended, with its different coloured scarves, sweaters and hair.

And then there was the Saturday afternoon, following a soccer match between rival cub teams, during which David dirtied his boots by standing around in the mud,and his elbow by tripping over a loose bootlace, when an older cub offered to take him home. They walked along streets, and through underground passageways, teeming with rowdy kids, both white and West Indian, all shod in black plimsolls with elastic side strips.

"Shuddup," shouted Davidâ s new protector, and they did as they were told.

â Where exactly are you taking me?â David queried anxiously.

"The bus stop at Chiswick 'Oigh Stree' is the best plice, oi reck'n. You be awroighâ deah, me lil' mite."

David became convinced heâ d never see his home again, and so started to loudly wail, his cherubic little face contorted into a hideous mask of anguish ; and as they mounted the bus, faces both white and black suddenly turned towards him in concern, and what a strange sight he must have made, this imp in distress, surrounded by a bevy of older wolf cubs.

After a few moments, Davidâ s new found friend, his brow furrowed with regret, as if he had done him some terrible wrong, assured him:
"Oim gonna drop yâ orf where yer dad puâ yâ on."
Then, David saw a street he recognised, and promptly left his seat, grinning uncontrollably:
"This'll do," he announced.
"Wai', Carl,â his friend cried out, â are you shoa vis is awroigh'?â

"Yup!" David replied, as he stepped off the bus, which then moved on down the street and out of his life forever.

There was a point in the mid 1960s when David was dubbed "Le GÃ©nÃ©ral" by a long-suffering form teacher at the LycÃ©e in consequence of what she must have perceived as his dominance in the playground with respect to a tight circle of friends, and his tongue-in-cheek superciliousness in the classroom. This typically saw him at the back of the class leaning against the wall pretending to smoke a fat cigar like a Chicago tough guy.
One thing is certain is that he was not above organising elaborate playground deceptions. One of these involved his pretending to banish one of his best friends, Bobby, from whatever activity they had going on at the time. Bobby played along by putting on a superb display of water works, which had the desired effect of arousing the tender mercies of some of the girls. They duly rounded on him for his hard-heartedness, but he refused to budge. Of course it was all a big joke, and Bobby and he had never been closer.
If he was "Le GÃ©nÃ©ral" at the LycÃ©e, back home he saw himself as the leader of the kids whose houses backed onto the dirty alley that ran parallel to his side of the Esmond Road in those days, but which has almost certainly vanished by now.
One fateful day, he crossed the road to announce a feud with the kids of the clean alley, so-called because it

was concreted over rather than being just a dirt track. It was to cost him dear. Soon after the feud had thawed, Dane and he went over to pal around with some of the clean alley kids who he now saw as his allies, but there must have still been some bad blood because before long, a scrap was under way and he was getting the worst of it.

â Hit him, David,â his brother urged above the chilling din of the clean alley loyalists baying for his hot youngblood to flow, but he was no fighter, and the best he could manage was to briefly get his antagonist into a headlock.

Finally he agreed to leave, and as he shamefully cycled off, one of the clean alley kids kicked his bike, so that it squeaked all the way home in unison with great heaving sobs. Shortly afterwards, Dane arrived home, and he too was in tears, having doubtless been roughed about a bit for having loyally stuck up for his chicken-hearted brother.

If Davidâ s good mate Paulie had been with him on that afternoon in the clean alley, itâ s unlikely he would have had to suffer as he did. He lived virtually opposite the Christiansen family in Bedford Park, but he was from another dimension altogether, a skinny cockney kid with muscles like pure steel who seemed to have been born to wage war on the bomb sites of post-war London.

When heâ d made his first personal appearance in the dirty alley on someone else's rusty bike, screaming along in a cloud of dust it rendered all the denizens of the dirty alley speechless and motionless. Yes, despite his grey-faced surliness, he was very affable, a bully with naÃ¯ve and sentimental heart. He was so happy to discover that David liked his old dad, and that Davidâ s mum liked him, and that he was always welcome to come to tea with the Cristiansen family at five twenty five...
Their wicked cahoots included howling at the top of their lungs into random blocks of flats, and then running away, as their echoed screams blended with incoherentthreats of:
"I'll call the Police, I'll..."

For some reason, Paulie was devoted to David; "Davy", he'd always cry when he wanted his friend's attention, and he'd always be welcome at the Christiansen household, even though this brought the family some opprobrium within the neighbourhood. One of his mother's closest friends warned her of David's association, as if genuinely concerned he might end up going to the bad. She was not alone in thinking this.

He left the LycÃ©e in the summer of 1968...before spending a few months at a crammer called Davies Preparatory School so as to become sufficiently up to scratch academically to pass what is known as the Common Entrance Examination.
Taking the CE is a necessity for all British boys and girls seeking entrance into private fee-paying schools, including those known as public schools, which are the traditional secondary places of learning for the British governing and professional classes...the ruling elite in other words. The vast majority of those who go on to public schools begin their academic careers in preparatory or prep schools, and so for the most part leave home at around eight years old.
The school his father hoped he'd manage to get into was the Nautical College, Pangbourne, although his first choice had been either HMS Conway or Worcester, also known as the Incorporated Thames Nautical Training College. However, naval colleges and training schools were fading fast in the late 1960s, Conway being on its last legs as a so-called stone frigate on the south coast of Anglesey, and Worcester having recently been incorporated into the Merchant Navy College at Greenhithe, Kent.
Somehow, though, David managed to pass the CE, and so at still only twelve years old became Cadet BjÃ¸rn-David Christiansen 173, who was for a few months the youngest in the college, and an official serving officer in Britain's Royal Naval Reserve.
Pangbourne's regime was tough in '68, even by the standards of British public schools which had historically trained boys for service on behalf of the Empire, and its headmaster - a serving officer in the Royal Navy for

some quarter of a century â was known as the Captain Superintendent.

Founded in 1919, she was still known by her original title, but by 1969 this had been abbreviated to Pangbourne College. However, the boys retained their officer status and naval discipline continued to be enforced, with Pangbourne providing the rigours both of a military college and a traditional English boarding school. In 1996, she became fully co-educational.

The Pangbourne David knew had strong links to the Church of England, and so was marked by regular if not daily classes in what was known as Divinity, morning parade ground prayers, evening prayers, and compulsory chapel on Sunday morning.Later in life, he felt indebted to her for the values sheâ d instilled in him if only unconsciously, even though, by the time he joined Pangbourne, they were under siege as never before by the so-called counterculture. While failing to fully understand the implications of the cultural revolution of the late 1960s, David was to passionately celebrate its consequences, and take to his heart many of its icons, both artistic and political, and thatâ s especially true of the Marxist revolutionary leader, Che Guevara.

He was what was known as a stroppy moosh, stroppy meaning insolent, and moosh a neophyte or new boy, as distinct from a doggie, which was the Pangbournian equivalent of the traditional public school fag, or personal servant in the so-called fagging system. In his first term, he was deemed as so transcendentally incompetent that none of the seniors, or older boys would even consider him as their doggie:

â Cristiansen, why are you so thick?â

Yet, when it came to his stroppiness, this came ultimately to work in his favour, when he became a virtual mascot of some of the hardest and coolest boys in college.

He idolised these lads and happily clowned for them like some kind of court minion, and they protected him in return, instilling him with a sense of invincibility which can't have had any kind of positive effect on the development of his character, which wasn't too strong to begin with.

By his second year, all the social standing he'd worked so hard to acquire had evaporated, as he was required to remain behind in the third form, while all his friends went on to the fourth, a reversal which exerted a devastating effect on his morale. Insecure and disaffected, he started throwing his weight around among his new classmates, until two of them came down so hard on him that he was cured of trying to act the lout with them at least. Eventually, all three became close friends and fellow hard cases.

From the outset, he desperately wanted to distinguish himself at Pangbourne...and especially at sports, beginning with the great ruffianly game for gentlemen of Rugby Football...and oh with what longing he gazed at the sight of rugger colours on the blue blazers or striped Paravicinis of those who'd earned them on the playing fields of Pangbourne. At Pangbourne, colours were - and presumably still are - awarded during one or other of the main sporting seasons of rugger, hockey, cricket and rowing and for such subsidiary sports as swimming, boxing, sailing, fencing and so on, to one showing distinction within a particular team or rowing eight or whatever, and are a long-standing tradition within British private schools and universities. But none ever came David's way.

The fact is that, raised as he'd been in the western suburbs of London in the sixties with its alleys, greens, parks, sweet shops and narrow streets lined by terraced or semi-detached houses, he was wholly ignorant of the secrets of the hallowed sports of Britain's gilded elite...so ignorant in fact that by his third term, he'd got it into his head he wanted to be a rowing coxswain, due to some insane notion of one day becoming 1st VIII cox. As things turned out, he ended up in the conspicuous yet humiliating position of coxing only lesser crews...except for on those rare occasions when a better man was unavailable.

He almost wrecked a boat once, steering it into another crew, which provoked his stroke to shout not at him, but the cox of the other boat, a plucky little guy called Hickey.

â Come on, Hickey, he cried, canâ t you see weâ ve got a cox who doesnâ t know what heâ s doing?â

It would be false to assert that Pangbourne was exclusively composed of the sons of the British privileged, because it wasn't...and neither was it a narrowly Anglo-Saxon institution, because during David's time, he

knew American, West Indian, Middle Eastern and South African cadets as well as British ones, and several of these were close friends of his. What's more, it was supplemented in the autumn of '68 by cadets from the recently dismantled TS Mercury, founded in 1885 by a wealthy businessman and keen yachtsman Charles Hoare for the rescue of London slum boys who would then be trained for service in the Royal and Merchant Navies.

Until as recently as the previous July, she'd been moored on the River Hamble near Southampton. Its regime made that of Pangbourne resemble a holiday camp in comparison. For example, there'd been no heating onboard even in winter, and the boys were forced to sleep in hammocks. Nonetheless, most fitted in well at Pangbourne.

As much as David struggled in the arena of sporting activities, his true failure came in the classroom where he had little if any interest in what the master was trying to teach him in any given subject except French, English and Physical Education. Terminally bored, he was constantly in trouble for one misdemeanour or another, and his grades were rarely anything other than pitiful during the entire four year period he was at Pangbourne. In fact in pretty well every subject except French, he tended to be bottom of the form, term after term, year after year, and if not bottom then very near it. Perhaps he was a slow developer suffering from mild learning difficulties, and youâ d have been forgiven for finding his behaviour medically worrying.

On one occasion, he went for an eye test in the village, only to return to college without having taken it, before announcing that heâ d forgotten why heâ d gone into town in the first place. As for his hygiene, it was so minimal that at one point the bottoms of his feet were literally as black as soot, as if someone had painted them:

â When did you last wash your feet, Cristiansen?â

But it would be false to say he was an unqualified rebel. In fact, he never stopped longing to be recognised as being good at something, anything...even going so far at one point as to become a member the college boxing team. As such, he suffered punch-drunkenness at Eton at the hands - or rather fists - of an elegant young adonis with a classic Eton flop. He later commented on an especially cruel blow he'd inflicted on David with a certain degree of remorse:

â I think you really felt that one, ya?â

Indeed he didâ ¦and how deceptively graceful he was, this flower of Eton...king of all public schools.

However, in around 1969, some time after having seen a TV programme about young revolutionaries who idolised Che Guevara, David became a Che acolyte myself, and one of the greatest accolades he ever received while at college came in consequence of a short story he wrote about a young man who becomes involved with Che in his revolutionary activities in South America. Even the headmaster commended him for his work:

Following on from his infatuation with Che, he came to fancy himself as a full-blown Communist, covering various items with the hammer and sickle, including at various times, a school notebook, and his own hand, which provoked an older, far larger boy into setting about him in a spirit of mock-outrage...but he'd fallen hard for the Hard Left and that was that.

His time at Pangbourne coincided with the counterculture being at its point of maximum intensity, which is to say between the infamous year of rioting and street fighting of 1968, and that, four years later, when the sixties really and truly came to a final close and which was defined in Britain at least by the artifice and decadence of Glam Rock.

One afternoon around the turbulent turn of the decade, David found himself longing to join the Hippie throngs he saw flocking to the Reading Rock Festival one afternoon from the window of a college coach in all their ragged multicoloured glory. Rebellion was everywhere in a desperately imperilled West, and Pangbourne was not exempt, in fact, several of David's circle dreamed of a world of Bohemian freedom lying only just beyond the confines of their college, and intensely close friendships were forged in secret wooded places where the Cadet Officers couldn't find them, and where they were united by a love of Rock music and its iconsâ ¦Hendrix, Morrison, Jagger, Page et al, their defiantly androgynous clothes, their floating, flouting hair

and so on.
For all that, though, there was a part of David that never stopped wanting to be accepted by the system...never stopped hoping that one day, favour would look kindly on Cadet BjÃ¸rn-David Christiansen 173, and he'd be made into a Cadet Officer himself, and so given a star to proudly display on the right sleeve of his navy blue pullover, but it was never to be, never to be, never to beâ¦

Yet, in 2010, David would insist that if he possessed a single quality that might termed noble, such as patience, or self-mastery or consideration of the needs of other people, then he owed this blessing to his education. Within this sphere, heâd place parental discipline, and the four years he spent at Pangbourne, whose authorities extended him a fair and decent report following his premature departure in the summer of 1972. They also gave him a good send-off in the college magazine, mentioning his time in the Boxing and Swimming teams, and his tenure as 2cnd Drum in the college band.

And so heâd bless his old friend and sparring partner, and wish her long life in her sylvan sanctuary deep in the Arcadian heart of the English countryside.

Then, he moved back into his parentsâ home in West Molesey, a small industrial suburb close to the Surrey-London border where theyâd relocated from Bedford Park at the start of the decade. Theirown street was quite gentrified, and their two closest neighbours, wealthy businessmen with roots in inner West London, Jack at number 12 being the son of a Notting Hill costermonger, while Johnny at number 16 was the product of what he proudly called â abject povertyâ in nearby Shepherds Bush.

He was stilla hippie at heart; and yet 1972 could be said to be the year in which the androgynous seventies really began, as the excitement surrounding the alternative society and its happenings and be-ins and love-ins and free festivals and so on started to fade into recent history.

The golden age of the long-haired boot boy had lately come to pass, and every street seemed to David to be pregnant with menace in the Glam Rock nation heâd returned to, while so many of the songs were like football chants set to a stomping Glam Rock beat. It was as if the spirit of Weimar Berlin with its unholy mix of violence and decadence had been resurrected in stuffy old England.

Such a terrible time to be young; but for better or worse, it would be Davidâs era, and heâd come to love it, lap it upâ¦

For the time being, though, he was as heâd always been, resolutely masculine in his tastes, despising softness and effeminacy in the standard male adolescent manner. However, a change came over him in the summer of â72, which may have been caused to some degree by the prevailing *zeitgeist*, but which can also be traced back to a single defining incident.

This took placeina bar in the little former fishing town of Santiago de la Ribera, close to the Mar Menor, a large coastal lake of warm saltwater off Murcia's Costa Calida in southeastern Spain, where he'd been vacationing with his family since about 1968.

It involveda young man he'd idolised for several years, and who incarnated a kind of old-school Iberian macho cool. He was quite fair of complexion, as opposed to swarthy, as might be expected, and stocky, with muscular arms, and if he'd worn a medallion and identity bracelet, he'd have been typical of his kind. By that summer, he was sporting collar lengthhair, which was still quite rareamong Spanish men, as well as large-collared shirts, which heelected not to tuck into his trousers.The style of these meant that his hair would occasionally get caught between neck and collar, which necessitated his flicking it out with an elegantsweep of his hand, and coquettishly tossing his head. This he did one evening in full view of Castilla's clientele.

While these gestureseemed perfectly in keeping with his swaggering machismo in Davidâ s besotted eyes, there was another of Castilla's patrons whowas far lessconvinced, andhe dulymuttered his misgivings. Rather than putting David off,these whispered words of censurehad the effect of making his idol even more fascinating than before; and itmay be that as a result of this episode, he came to covet thenotoriety that had suddenly been afforded the young Spaniard.Furthermore, this incident may have marked the beginning ofthe end of his identification with undiluted masculinity.

Yes, his interest in the opposite sex was no less forceful than that of anyother male in late adolescence, to the extent that ifanattractive femalehappened to speak to him in a public place,he'd be all but incapable of sound, while in acute danger of falling in love on the spot.

In fact, he didnâ t even have to be spoken to for that to happen, as it did on the way back from Spain in the summer of â 72.

It was on theship HMS Patricia that he fell in love by sight with a fellow passenger, a young Spanish girl he saw several times about the ship but was too frightened to approach. So, he became obsessed by her, even to the point of roaming the streets of London for several days in succession once he was back in the UK in the vain hope of somehow bumping into her.

Two songs especially served as the soundtrack to this irrationalspell of romantic madness, and these were â *Betcha by Golly Wowâ* by the Stylistics, and â *Last Night I Didn't Get To Sleep At Allâ* by the 5th Dimension, and like all the loves heâ d ever lost, theyâ d remain with David for the rest of his inchoate life. As would the vision of a seventeen year old, sauntering late one afternoon in the receding sun, his quest in tatters, yet, who is suddenly drawn to a girlish voice floating downwards from an apartment of a lofty dwelling in the heart of the ancient city of his birth, causing him to ponder, if only fleetinglyâ ¦â could that be she?â

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