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## **In the Pleasure Groove Love, Death, and Duran Duran**

### **Excerpt**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Today, I am comfortable to admit that I was a little unnerved when John Taylor formed a band before I had left school. You see, we met when I was ten years old and he was twelve—both only children, living in the Hollywood hood, we swiftly adopted each other as brothers, so I always imagined we would do this together. Fortunately for me, his first group, Shock Treatment, didn't last for more than a season. The Assassins followed briefly, and then Dada, despite such a gloriously pretentious name, were rapidly destined for obscurity in the post-punk Birmingham music scene. I remain personally grateful for John's early setbacks.

In 1978, through immaculate correction, everything fell into place: we reverted to our original plan and set off on a mission to realize our childhood dreams. Fueled by the power of unbridled naïveté and ambition, we formed Duran Duran version 1.0. From this time onward, we were aboard a one-way, nonstop roller coaster, which traveled exceedingly fast.

I don't often reflect upon the past because we are always too busy trying to invent our future, but it does seem strange, if I look over my shoulder for a moment, that somehow we went from being a couple of kids who loved music and went to endless concerts together, to creating a band that has shaped our lives in entirely unforeseen ways.

You must all be wondering what will be revealed in the pages ahead. I certainly know that John has a plentiful supply of captivating tales to tell . . .

I admire John's determination and tenacity. When we played our first show, he designed and printed the posters. We couldn't afford fancy lighting, so we projected his school geography field-trip slides over the stage. We have always tried to find a way to make things work. Practicality has served us well. Little has changed; I know today that if John and I have a vision, we can rely upon each other to make it happen.

I could tell you a lot of secrets about John: I was there to witness his first girlfriend, his first concert, and the first time he picked up a bass guitar. We figured it all out together—we made music, made mistakes, made some friends and lost a few, too, learning to deflect scandals in newspapers when they sold their stories; but we always found our way. You will see what John chooses to unravel from the exquisitely

frivolous to the profound. Perhaps he'll mention the time when he had just acquired the second of his three Aston Martins, and invited me out for a quick spin around London. Being a nondriver and easily susceptible to luxury, I willingly accepted the invitation. He picked me up and we glided smoothly into the late afternoon; but our trip soon came to an abrupt standstill, directly in front of Harrods, when the car broke down during rush hour. John looked at me and calmly announced, "It's stalled for some reason, we'll have to get out and push . . ." This wasn't exactly what I had in mind, but, needless to say, there were no other options readily available. A line of cars was building up behind us, and exasperated drivers were sounding their horns, which of course focused more attention on John and me, as we sheepishly climbed out of the car, trying not to look conspicuous with our newfound fame and brightly colored hair. Soon a small crowd had gathered, and startled onlookers began to ask for autographs, as we tried to maneuver the car out of traffic. We were shaken but not stirred. Maybe John has forgotten this incident, or more likely chosen to omit it, because there are many more significant episodes for him to recollect. It particularly resonated for me at the time, however, because in that snapshot I recognized just how much our lives had changed over twenty-four months.

Although we have both been on the same trajectory with Duran Duran for more than three decades, it is the choices we have faced and decisions we made in our personal lives that set the course for our individual pathways. It would be hard to find five people in the same band who have lived such diverse lifestyles in parallel. I have seen John at the top of the mountain. We had number one records, sold-out tours, and performed to audiences who screamed so loud we couldn't hear what we were playing. He got the cars, he got the girls, and always received sackfuls more fan mail than anyone else in the band. Each of us reacted and adapted differently to our circumstances. John burned very bright, and then spiraled out of control in a spectacular fashion. It is no secret that he has struggled with addiction. We first noticed signs early on, but never grasped that things were getting serious. We all lived in a bubble of chaos, moving from limo to plane to hotel room to venue, then back to the hotel. So when someone didn't go to bed all night, or surface until the following evening, it was not particularly unusual. Somehow we managed to keep functioning as a band. It never occurred to me how close to the edge John had gone, until the late nineties, when he announced to us that he needed to take action to confront his problems. Simon and I were shocked. We had no idea that he was still haunted by drugs and alcohol, because although John can be an open book, he also has the capacity to be private and guarded.

In 1996, as a consequence of John's decision to change his life, he and I had a difficult phone call, during which he told me that he was leaving the band. I was numb, and although I had been feeling his presence slowly waning, with increasingly extended trips to LA, for me, it did not seem like the right time to give in. His mind was made up. He wanted to go, which left us with no remaining Taylors—an unthinkable predicament for Duran Duran! In the aftermath, I wrote a lyric for a song called "Buried in the Sand" about our conversation, but it didn't change the fact that things now felt completely different. John left a gaping hole in the personality and sound of the band; we lost our focus and a crucial part of our identity. Simon and I missed him terribly.

After this, John and I continued to drift further apart. We had precious little contact for a couple of years, which seemed so alien, having spent virtually every day together since our childhood. Then, a few

scenes later, like most Hollywood productions, just when you think it's all over, something dramatic happens to save the universe: the Reunion. John came striding back into town, triumphantly flanked by the other missing Taylors. I will leave him to paint the scene, but suffice to say, our time apart made us better appreciate the chemistry we have together. John can be fragile and sensitive, yet equally strong and determined. He turned around his addictions and now concentrates his energy on helping others with similar issues. John is the real deal. I have known him longer than any of my other friends. There is no one I would have rather shared this journey with. He's also my favorite bass player.

Finally, I should confess that I have not yet read this book, only resisting the temptation thus far, because I, too, hope one day to deliver my version of the events we encountered along the way, and I don't want to borrow what I don't remember.

I am inordinately curious to hear John's perspective, and to understand how he saw everything. What he thought. How he felt. What he went through. And ultimately what became important. I know for John, that writing his autobiography was a process of catharsis, involving many hours on the couch, laying bare character flaws, trawling through transcendent memories, and reliving painful experiences. I am sure his story is heartfelt and delivered with candor and panache, which is John's style.

Enjoy the ride, but be warned, it may get a little bumpy at times.

—Nick Rhodes

*To look backward for a while is to refresh the eye, to restore it, and to render it the more fit for its prime function of looking forward.*

—Margaret Fairless Barber

*But I won't cry for yesterday, there's an ordinary world Somewhere I have to find And as I try to make my way to the ordinary world I will learn to survive*

—Duran Duran, "Ordinary World"

*Crisis = Opportunity*

—Chinese proverb

### **Brighton, June 29, 1981**

It's a Monday night at the Brighton Dome, two weeks before our third single, "Girls on Film," is due out. It's a week after my twenty-first birthday. The lights go down and "Tel Aviv" strikes up. We have chosen the haunting, Middle Eastern-inspired instrumental track from our new album to function as a curtain-raiser, to let the audience know the show is about to begin.

But something strange is happening. None of us can hear the music. What is going on out there? The sound of an audience. Getting louder. Larger. Chanting.

Screaming.

And then, out onto the stage, behind the safety curtain we go. A frisson of fear. We look to each other with nervous glances. Faces are made. "*Is that for real?*"

We plug in; bass working, drums beating, keyboards and guitars in tune.

Ready.

"Tel Aviv" reaches its coda. Here we go.

And the curtain rises on our new life.

The power of our instruments, amplified and magnified by PA stacks that reach to the roof, is no match for the overwhelming force of teenage sexual energy that comes surging at us in unstoppable waves from the auditorium.

The power of it is palpable. I can feel it take control of my arms, my legs, my fingers, for the duration of the opening song. It is unrelenting, waves of it crashing onstage.

There is no way we can be heard, but that doesn't matter. No one is listening to us anyway. They have come to hear themselves. To be heard. And what they have to say is this: "Take me, ME! I am the one for you! John! Simon! Nick! Andy! Roger!"

As our first song grinds to a hiccupping halt, we turn to each other for support. But the next song has already somehow begun without us. We are not in control anymore. Seats are smashed. Clothes torn. Stretcher cases. Breakdowns. It is a scene out of Bosch. Every female teenager in Britain is having her own teenage crisis, simultaneously as one, *right now*, vaguely in time to our music. The frenzy is contagious. We are the catalyst for their explosions, one by one, by the thousands.

We have become idols, icons. Subjects of worship.

## **1 Hey Jude**

I am four years old. Confident and shy. Hair blonder than it would be in my teen years. In shorts and sandals, a young prince of the neighborhood, the south Birmingham suburb of Hollywood. How perfect. Ten o'clock in the morning on any given weekday in 1964, and I have stepped down off the porch and wait, kicking at the grooved concrete driveway, watching as Mom pulls the front door closed, locks it up, and puts the key in her handbag; she puts the handbag in the shopping bag, and off we go. Left off the

drive and up the hill that is the street on which we live, Simon Road. Our house is number 34, one up from where the road ends.

We walk together along the pavement, counting down: 32, 30, 28. On the left side of the street are all the even-numbered semidetached houses, single buildings designed to function as two separate homes (ours is twinned with number 36). Across the street, the odd-numbered houses are detached, each building a single dwelling, all much larger than ours, and so are the back gardens, which are long and tree-filled and bordered at the bottom by a stream. The driveways are slicker too, with space for more than one car.

Later on, when I started to become a little status-aware, I would ask my parents, “Why didn’t you pay the extra six hundred quid that would have got us a stream at the back?”

I hold Mom’s hand, remembering the Beatles song that is so often on the radio, as the incline gets steeper. We reach the crest of the hill, where Simon Road meets Douglas Road, and turn right.

We pass a twelve-foot-high holly bush, the only evidence I have found that suggests where the estate got its name. We march on, crossing Hollywood Lane in front of Gay Hill Golf Club, an establishment that will assume mythical proportions in my imagination as a venue for wife-swapping parties, not that anyone in my family ever set foot in the place. There was no truth in the rumor.

Cars flash by, at twenty or even thirty miles an hour. We make it to Highter’s Heath Lane, another main artery of the neighborhood, which must be taken if you’re visiting the old Birmingham of grans and aunts and uncles, recreational parks and bowling greens. It gets traversed a lot by the Taylor family at weekends. It must also be used by mother and son if we are to reach our destination today—St. Jude’s parish church.

All this walking. We’ve been doing it together for as long as I can remember. Mom doesn’t drive and never will. At first, I’d be in my pushchair, but now that I’m old enough, we walk side by side, which must have come as a relief to Mom. There’s no complaining from me, it just is and ever shall be. Amen.

She’s sweating now in her woolen skirt and raincoat, keen to get there. We walk past the Esso filling station where, in 1970, I will complete my set of commemorative soccer World Cup coins. One last left turn and we are on the paved forecourt, upon which sits, in breeze-block splendor, St. Jude’s parish church.

I would go to many beautiful, awe-inspiring churches when I was older— St. Patrick’s on Fifth Avenue, St. Peter’s in Rome, Notre-Dame de Paris— but St. Jude’s on Glenavon Road was the most pragmatic people’s church anywhere in the First World. Built in the post–World War II years, St. Jude’s was intended as a temporary structure, not meant to last more than a few years. It’s coming up on twenty now and yawning with cold air and aching joints. Single story, with windows every six feet along its length, and a roof of corrugated iron.

Its crude purity enhanced the idea the St. Jude's faithful had about being the chosen ones. Why else would we gather together in this cold, ugly place unless it was an absolute certainty that we would benefit from it?

Father Cassidy's great fund-raising scheme of the seventies eventually resulted in a new St. Jude's church. This was no small achievement. None of the congregants could be considered rich or even well-off. Everyone had to count their pennies. Getting the money to build a new church from his parishioners took a great deal of persuading.

Fortunately, he had God on his side.

A communal sense of readiness sends us through the small lobby where, on raw wooden tables, literature is offered; some for sale, some for free. Textbooks, Bibles, songbooks, and other merchandise, including rosaries, crucifixes, and pendants of St. Jude (the patron saint of hopeless cases, really).

On into the nave, where there is a smell of sweat and yesterday's incense. It's usually cool in here, sometimes warm but never hot. A tall redhead man plays a rickety-looking organ, quietly piping sweet music that is barely there. Eno would call it ambient. Candles burn lazily with a holy scent.

On the stroke of eleven the service begins. The priest enters smartly, followed by a pair of young men in white robes—the priest's team, his posse—one of whom swings a silver chalice from which more incense issues. The air in the church needs a good cleansing before the good father can breathe it.

He wears elaborate clothing, a robe of green-and-gold silk with a red cross on his back. Beneath the cloak, ankle-length turned-up trousers reveal the black socks and black brogues of any other working man.

The music surges in volume and we all stand. The red-haired man leads us in a song we know well, "The Lord Is My Shepherd." I open the hymnal to read the words. I like this one but, like Mom, I'm too embarrassed to sing out loud. I wish I could; I just don't, but I like the feeling of togetherness that comes from everyone in the room singing the same words.

Once the song is over, the priest walks to the dais. He glances down at his Bible, opens his hands wide, and says, "Let us pray."

## **2 Jack, Jean, and Nigel**

Church just was. Like electricity, heat, or black-and-white TV—something that just existed. I assumed everyone went five times a week. I didn't know I was one of a subset, a species. A Roman Catholic.

You don't question things like that when you're little. I never questioned why Mom and I went to church almost every day or why, when Dad drove us on Sundays, he just dropped us off and picked us up afterward.

My parents grew up in Birmingham's inner city. Mom had been born in Liverpool, but when she was a toddler, her family, the Harts, moved to Birmingham, to Colemeadow Road, where they occupied a large detached family house on a corner. They needed the space: Mom was one of five, until her sister Nora gave birth to Trevor, who the family raised, which made six. Mom's dad, Joseph, who died before my birth, spent his working life in labor relations; he worked for the shipbuilding union in Liverpool originally, but moved to Birmingham for a better job. The Lord Mayor of Birmingham would go to his funeral. Up the street from the Harts, the dwellings were smaller; tight Victorian terraced houses that were well built, small but proud, with the toilet out back.

The Taylors lived in one of these, at number 10.

My dad, Jack, was born John in 1920, which made him, age nineteen in 1939, prime meat for the Second World War. He was shipped out to Egypt, where he was given an administrative posting—clerking and driving trucks and officers around the base. One weekend, he was due to be on leave in Cairo but he traded his time off with another soldier. This good deed would not go unpunished. That weekend, the German army seized the base on which Dad was stationed and he, along with many others, was captured. The British prisoners were then transported up through Italy to Germany, where they were interned in Stalag 344.

Dad would spend the remaining three years of the war there. He was forced to live off raw potatoes, watery soups, and the occasional Red Cross food parcel. At least he didn't smoke, so he could trade in his tobacco ration for a few extra spuds.

Mom used to say to me confidentially, "Your father had a terrible time in the war, but he'll never talk about it." Dad's wartime experiences were the khaki elephant in our living room. No one could talk about it, but we were all living with it, still, twenty years later.

It's clear to me now that Dad had post-traumatic stress disorder and what he really needed was some therapy—which he would get these days. The most anyone could ever get out of him on the subject, if he was pushed into a corner, would be: "I had it easy compared to George."

George was Dad's brother. Their father had died when Dad was five and George was ten, so George became like a surrogate parent. Dad idolized him. George did his soldiering in Burma and had been taken prisoner by the Japanese. George had been in a mine near Nagasaki, mere miles from the site of the atomic bomb, and felt the explosion.

When Dad got back to Birmingham after his war, amid the celebrations of VE Day, his mother, Frances, and his elder sister, Elsie, were of course overjoyed to see him. But anxiety still ran high in the household, as no one had heard from George or even knew if he had survived, and this cast a shadow over Dad's return.

Almost a year later, in a scene that could have been directed by Steven Spielberg, Dad was waiting for a bus to take him to work, when he vaguely recognized a figure coming down the street toward him out of the morning mist. It was his brother George, free since VJ Day, but emaciated and exhausted not just by his captivity but also by his long journey home by way of the Pacific, then across the United States by train.

I'm sure Dad looked different to George too. But they were stoic, each with his overdeveloped sense of responsibility, and no tears would have been shed between these men. A handshake for sure, possibly a hug. Dad might have let a few buses go by, but I doubt very much that he took the day off work. Any tears shed would have been female tears.

This story was so hard for my father to tell that he didn't share it with me until he was in his eighties and I was in my forties.

The Second World War was omnipresent growing up in England in the 1960s. It was this enormous event that had affected everybody. In spite of Dad's reluctance to go there, nobody else could stop talking about it. It dominated TV and the movies.

Mom Jean, born Eugenie, had wartime experiences of her own, working on the Austin automobile assembly lines at Longbridge, which had been converted to manufacture parts for the massive Avro Lancaster bomber planes. Also in her twenties during the 1940s, Mom enjoyed the society and fellowship on the swing shift.

In 1946, the processes of life that had been interrupted by the war began again, and thoughts returned to the normal: jobs, marriage, and starting families. Hope returned. Being neighbors, Mom and Dad had been aware of each other for years, but only on shyly-passing acquaintance terms. Dad was good pals with Mom's brothers, Sid and Alf, and one night, at the Billesley Arms, a plan was hatched by the three of them.

The following bright November Saturday morning, Dad strode down the block to the Harts' house and knocked on the front door. Familiar as he was to the family there, he was immediately invited in. But he was not there this time to ask Sid if he fancied going fishing tomorrow, or to ask Alf if he had a game of bowls lined up later on up at the Billesley. He was there to ask old Joe Hart if he could take his younger daughter, Eugenie, out on a date.

I don't think either of my parents had great expectations about love and marriage. They were both practical people. They each wanted a family and to not grow old alone. They would have both felt enormous gratitude to have been wanted and accepted by the other but would never have expressed it in quite that way.

From the first date, they knew they were a good fit, and all their friends and family knew it too. In their community, their partnership was a symbol of survival in the aftermath of the war: two working-class families giving up their youngest to each other. Their marriage would be a source of great pride to many.

The forty-two guests at the wedding all lived within a few miles of one another. When I was ten almost all of them were in my life; they were the fabric that formed me. They were good, honest, and loving folk. I was raised to love them as they loved me—nonjudgmentally and unconditionally. There is something about my parents' wedding that represents the apogee of English working-class family life.

There was a shortage of new, affordable homes in the 1950s, another legacy of the war, so after Mom and Dad married, they moved in temporarily with Mom's parents.

They would soon become part of the working-class diaspora that was moving out of the inner cities into the new housing estates and "garden cities" that were being built to replace the bombed-out town centers and to accommodate the exploding population. The story would be told many times about how Dad had shown up at the site office of one new development in Hollywood at 7:00 a. m. on a Monday morning in 1954, demanding to be allowed to buy the last house available.

The new house was perfect. It was a two-up, two-down, with a roughcast relief between the ground floor and upstairs bow windows. The living room, where we would eat, watch TV, sit, do just about everything, was 8 by 12 feet. The other room downstairs was known as the "front room," and it was where the wedding gifts and the alcohol were stored. The three of us would have lunch in there every Sunday, and it's where the Christmas tree was put up every year. Other than that, it went unused.

Number 34 Simon Road had its own garage, where my father would spend weekends tinkering with his car. There was a small garden at the front and a slightly larger one at the back.

In June of 1960, Mom gave birth to me at Sorrento Maternity Hospital in Solihull after an easy labor. I was never any trouble, she would tell me. I was soon brought back from the hospital, by which point the house was well lived in and comfortable, perfectly snug for a newborn.

My parents named me Nigel. It was quite an unconventional choice. My second name was John.