Brighton, 29 July 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 month 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 any more. 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 neighbourhood, 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 Mum 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 Mum'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 rumour.

Cars flash by, at twenty or even thirty miles an hour. We make it to Highter's Heath Lane, another main artery of the neighbourhood, which must be taken if you're visiting the old Birmingham of nans 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. Mum doesn't drive and never will. At first, I'd be in my pushchair, but now I'm old enough, we walk side by side, which must have come as relief to Mum. There's no complaining from me, it just is and ever shall be. Amen.

She's sweating now in her woollen skirt and raincoat, keen to get there. We walk past the Esso filling station where, in 1970, I will complete my set of commemorative football World Cup coins. One last left turn and we are on the paved forecourt, upon which sits, in breeze-block splendour, 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 storey, 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 fundraising 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 redheaded 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 strike 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 Mum, 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.'