

West Hollywood Reverie (March 2013)

THE CUTEST BRUNETTE in mushroom-coloured hot pants sweeps past me to buy her coffee. Minutes later she swings back out of Nemo Street on to Doheny in a black SUV, Fleetwood Mac's "Everywhere" pumping through her open windows. It's a perfect LA moment – I want to be with her everywhere, at least for an afternoon.

Bang next door is the chic bungalow that once housed Peter Asher's management company and where, twenty not very long years ago, I met his client Joni Mitchell – "Queen Joni Approximately", as a friend once dubbed her, Joni who "couldn't let go of LA" but did let go of its fallen angels. And what I remember is what fun she was, how golden-blond and flirty between the drags on her many cigarettes. Not the sour empress of confessional art that she's become.

The bungalow's now home to a hair salon where ladies of Beverly Hills presumably come to be coiffed. Then it was home to Asher, the charming and clever former British pop invader who'd embedded himself in the early '70s LA of canyon porches and cheesecloth shirts; who loved this place as *I* love it, though he had a copy of Mike Davis' unsparing *City of Quartz* on his desk.

Some years later I went to Peter's dreamy beachside spread in the Malibu Colony, one of the spoils of the points he got on multi-platinum albums by James Taylor and Linda Ronstadt. We talked of canyon porches and cheesecloth shirts, the sweet life before the big money. He was a rich liberal and I liked him. Somewhere in my youth I'd picked up that there was a family connection through my grandfather's stepmother. I mentioned this to Peter, who didn't seem especially interested.

This morning, as I walked south down Doheny in the sparkling light and breathed in the faint perfumes of the flowers, I thought: Yes, the odds are stacked against the many; few get to savour such ease and bliss; but I can't hate the beauty that riches bring. I can't even hate the Hollywood wannabes in this phoney-French café, with their deals and screenplays and their anxious needs. I can't hate the light and the colours and the dark Rousseau fronds of the vegetation. The hissing of Joni's summer lawns.