

On a sparkly Sunday afternoon in late May 1973, Zev and I headed east on Sunset in his silver Z. We passed Tower and Licorice Pizza, on opposite sides of the 8800 block. At 8585, diners snacked at Ben Frank's Coffee Shop under its asymmetrical A-frame. Across the street, at 8560, on the west side of the tower that housed *Playboy* magazine, a painted bunny rose toward the sea, fifteen miles away, where the boulevard ends at Pacific Coast Highway.

We listened to FM stations re-re-replay Led Zeppelin's single "Over the Hills and Far Away" from *Houses of the Holy*. I sank into the soft layered guitars that crashed into Robert Plant's wail and faded in and out with the organ at the coda. We hit La Cienega and approached the rock and rollers' favorite playground, the Continental Hyatt House, a.k.a. Riot House, located at 8401, on the left, or north, side.

We found ourselves struck by the least-subtle sign of all time—especially for a band with no need for unwanted attention. That distinction didn't go to the colorful billboard across the street that promoted the group's new album but the loud white marquee at the front of the Riot House. It announced, in black block letters, as casual as if it read American Legion Post 43 Meeting: "Welcome Led Zeppelin."

I marched over the cracked sidewalk ahead of Zev. "They posted a notice for the public to see." I caught my breath. "They want every fine babe in LA to know they're here."

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The lobby bustled with activity. Three men stood by the elevators. We exchanged pleasantries and stepped inside; they pushed six. The door slid open, and I pushed my pal out.

Longhairs milled in rooms with open doors. We ducked into a suite, where ice buckets held beer and champagne. Radios played and everyone smoked cigarettes or weed. A flock of flamingo-legged ladies attracted a crowd. I recognized a burly man in an argument: band manager Peter Grant.

I initiated a conversation with a man in an Atlantic records shirt. “Where’s the boys?”

He pointed upward. “They went for a swim.” Zev and I turned back to the elevator.

Holy House of Whole Lotta Love. The glare on the roof almost made me miss the sight. All four band members—Plant, Jimmy Page, John Paul Jones, and John Bonzo Bonham—loitered around the deck. You couldn’t miss them in the group of two dozen: bushy hair, flowery shirts, ashen not-used-to-the-sun skin. I hit overload when I spotted a group of girls. The knockout with permed curls, wide eyes, and large teeth looked younger than me. I’d seen her at the Rainbow and at last year’s Zeppelin shows wearing a backstage pass. She leaned into an embrace with Page.

Zev’s neck shrank. “We better act cool.”

“Don’t be impressed. We belong. Blend in.”

We gazed down at Kings Road and Laurel Canyon to the east, fourteen stories below. I studied the L-shaped luxury hotel, Chateau Marmont, and Mount Kalmia, a medieval stone castle in a eucalyptus grove, both getaways for celebs. Crystal pools dotted ritzy hills; roofs in myriad designs crammed into crags. We sauntered over to a pair of chairs to view the leisure activities of a band on the run from their cold lives and wives back in chilly ole England.

Bonzo wobbled by. With his thick beard and a drink in each hand, he found refuge under an umbrella. Robert Plant winked, his eyes glossy and jeans not as tight as the ones he wore on stage.

Forty-five minutes later, the alcohol and testosterone kicked in. Plant and Page chased their devotees around the deck. Plant captured his pretty mess and snatched her blouse and tossed it into the pool. She removed her bra and threw it into the deep end and then took a leap. Page caught his frizzy-haired siren and pushed her in. In the shallow end, she went topless. It was no big deal—except to the men, who hollered and whooped. The pale Brits’ faces radiated bright pink.

Zev smiled, his big lips tight.

I plucked a hair out of my forearm to maintain my composure. “Act cool, Zev.”

Peter Grant heaved a string of lassies into the water. The ladies in the pool rubbed the goosebumps on their shoulders, climbed out, and laid chase to their lovers. The band escaped into the elevator. We’d crashed a debauch, rated R. Even Peter Grant smiled.

Half-naked girls dressed and disappeared, and we moved to the lobby. I saw another group of pasty Englishmen. No one paid them any mind. Except me. I took stock of their rock and roll vibe. I motioned to Zev to join me.

A heavily bearded dude, the ringleader, lifted his glass. “To Chuck Berry.”

I noticed the man’s sunglasses and profuse hair. “Why toast Chuck?”

“Without him,” the shaggy man said, “we wouldn’t stand atop the charts.”

“Charts, as in a song on the *Billboard* charts?”

“Charts, as in our first hit single.”

“I listen to the radio all day. What’s it called?”

“Roll Over Beethoven.”

“Cheers, you’re the guys in Electric Light Orchestra. That eight-minute version rocks.”

Zev and I took in Zep at the Forum twice, on May 31 and June 3. At our first concert, we got treated to what Plant called “Bonzo’s Birthday Party,” an energetic performance in honor of John Bonham’s

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twenty-fifth. After the drum solo, the band broke into “Happy Birthday.” Yes, Zep concerts digressed into interminable jams, but they built bridges between audience members. We shared joints with strangers, rushed the stage, and exulted in the communal atmosphere. When the mirror ball lit up for “Stairway to Heaven,” a spiritual presence hovered in the heavy cloud of shlue. The Shema Yisrael, the most important chant in Judaism, translates to “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.” At the end of “Stairway,” when Plant sang the end of the bridge, it brought prayers into our lives on a parallel level. It echoed a recent Zep sentiment, “The Song Remains the Same.”