1990

Tampa Theatre

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A faint 20s overture emits from red brick around the ticket booth under the old marquee, up to the highest seat in the balcony where a star-lit ceiling blinks and a cloud machine filters a blue view.

From a lion’s mouth, in this pirate’s dream, coral-castle, sea remnant palace, performers’ eyes gleam deep into footlights.

Deco lamps cast emerald light on carved fruit growing into men, and a stone priest stares at sideshow banter, maligning possible falls.

Gryphon storms hover over French doors leading nowhere. Lobster crowns circle the proscenium and seahorse ribbons roll from saintly knees.

By the stage, a chipped scholar studies a naked youth’s flute. Shells enclose orators at stone windows as the velvet curtain slowly hushes.

Operatic voices died here where athletes fall from the frieze. Eagles fly by cupid’s eyes. Fellini phones. Garbo sinks. Gato salves. Orson, in a film noir (Rita blonde as an angel) makes sharks poetic, in silhouette.

In the lobby cherubim assuage thirst in child-sized shells. Wide twin stairs invite grand strides amid marbled shuffling. Tulip and heart-lit art transpires.

Clouds in the ceiling, angels in flight, Mighty Wurlitzer rolling on stage, built for the evening when movies were new, a projection of city’s pride.