

T H E N I G H T ' S C A S C A D E



G A R R E T T H O N G O

Lunch breaks, summer I was 20 clerking for the City, I'd sit on
marble benches
across from the glass palace of DWP, over at the Mark Taper,
a theater-in-the-round, eat my sack lunch of sandwich and chips,
and read a book – *Leaves of Grass, The Voice That Is Great
Within Us* . . .

It was hot, upper 80s, the air particled with smog that made an
opaque scrim
if you gazed down Dewap and Fig to the hills of Chavez Ravine
in the distance.

I'd lie down and feel the marble under me, let angers drain from
my body
as the stone lifted its arms and cold thighs, wresting anguish
away.

Once, after a long time lying still as a cadaver, diffuse sun
washing over me,
I thought back a half-dozen years to the first time I'd been there,
taken
with other boys my age, me alone Japanese, and first heard a
magisterial language:

*Sirs, I am sixty years old. I have lived all my life
Like a wild beast in hiding. Without child, without wife
People forget me like the mist on Monkey Mountain.*

“Bring two dollars and a sack lunch,” Quincy said through his
missing front teeth,
dreadlocks dangling to frame his face. “We goin’ to see a play by a
Caribbean brother.”

About twelve of us, bloods and a Buddhahead at the Watts
 Writers' Workshop,
 were carted by bus, 103rd St. to downtown, Four Tops on our
 transistors –
 “Baby, I *need* your loving . . .” as we swayed and rolled our hands,
 mimicking
 moves the Tops made as they crooned “*Got to have all . . . Oowhoo*
ooo. . .”

We made it to the Music Center, filed out, \$2 matinee, got second
 row seats;
 lights going dim, then dark, and a spot fell on the white disc of an
 African drum,
 then a luminous moon floated over a volcano, soft CO₂ fog
 creeping onto the stage.
 A dancer. Then a tall man in a top hat and frock coat, his face
 half-white with makeup.

They gyrated, then spider danced, weaving their hands, and a
 voice rose,
 the rich Caribbean patois, a creole of English I'd never heard,
 and yet understood. It was chanting, chanting . . .

Ooo, it's the Uncola Man! The Uncola Man!

someone down the row whispered and was shushed, then a soft
 billow of light
 tumbled its fingers through a cataract of glitter across the rise of
 voices and the moon.

*Sirs, make a white mist
 In the mind; make that mist hang like a cloth
 From the dress of a woman, on prickles on branches,
 Make it rise from the earth, like the breath of the dead
 On resurrection morning, and I walking through it . . .*

It was a dream and I was in it, back as a boy in fields of cane by
 the sea again,
 weeping for that memory at fourteen, the sound and strophes of
 my own desmesne

reaching, even now, through tides and shallows glittering with
the night's cascade
I still wear as a mantle of stars and warm rain dancing me into
the next silver decade.

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Image: Mischa Askenazy (1888-1961), Chavez Ravine, c. 1940