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## [The Plumed Serpent](#)

[D. H. Lawrence](#)

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### Chapter 15 - The Written Hymns Of Quetzalcoatl

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The electric light in Sayula was as inconstant as everything else. It would come on at half-past six in the evening, and it MIGHT bravely burn till ten at night, when the village went dark with a click. But usually it did no such thing. Often it refused to sputter into being till seven, or half-past, or even eight o'clock. But its worst trick was that of popping out just in the middle of supper, or just when you were writing a letter. All of a sudden, the black Mexican night came down on you with a thud. And then everybody running blindly for matches and candles, with a calling of frightened voices. Why were they always frightened? Then the electric light, like a wounded thing, would try to revive, and a red glow would burn in the bulbs, sinister. All held their breath - was it coming or not? Sometimes it expired for good, sometimes it got its breath back and shone, rather dully, but better than nothing.

Once the rainy season had set in, it was hopeless. Night after night it collapsed. And Kate would sit with her weary, fluttering candle, while blue lightning revealed the dark shapes of things in the patio. And half-seen people went swiftly down to Juana's end of the patio, secretly.

On such a night Kate sat on her veranda facing the deepness of the black night. A candle shone in her desert salon. Now and again she saw the oleanders and the papaya in the patio garden, by the blue gleam of lightning that fell with a noiseless splash into the pitch darkness. There was a distant noise of thunder, several storms prowling round like hungry jaguars, above the lake.

And several times the gate clicked, and crunching steps came along the gravel, someone passed on the gravel walk, saluting her, going down to Juana's quarters, where the dull light of a floating oil-wick shone through the grated window-hole. Then there was a low, monotonous sound of a voice, reciting or reading. And as the wind blew and the lightning alighted again like a blue bird among the plants, there would come the sharp noise of the round cuentas falling from the cuenta-tree.

Kate was uneasy and a bit forlorn. She felt something was happening down in the servants' corner, something secret in the dark. And she was stranded in her isolation on her terrace.

But, after all, it was her house, and she had a right to know what her own people were up to. She rose from her rocking-chair and walked down the veranda and round the dining-room bay. The dining-room, which had its own two doors on the patio, was already locked up.

In the far corner beyond the well she saw a group sitting on the ground, outside the doorway of Juana's kitchen-hole. Out of this little kitchen-shed shone the light of the floating-wick lamp, and a voice was slowly intoning, all the faces were looking into the dim light, the women dark-hooded in rebozos, the men with their hats on, their serapes over their shoulders.

When they heard Kate's footsteps, the faces looked her way, and a voice murmured in warning. Juana struggled to her feet.

'It is the Niña!' she said. 'Come, then, Niña, you poor innocent all alone in the evening.'

The men in the group rose to their feet - she recognized the young Ezequiel, taking his hat off to her. And there was Maria del Carmen, the bride. And inside the little shed, with the wick lamp on the floor, was Julio, the bridegroom of a few weeks ago. Concha and little Maria were there, and a couple of strangers.

'I could hear the voice - ' said Kate. 'I didn't know it was you, Julio. How do you do? - And I wondered so much what it was.'

There was a moment's dead silence. Then Juana plunged in.

'Yes, Niña! Come! It's very nice that you come. Concha, the chair for the Niña!'

Concha got up rather unwillingly, and fetched the little low chair which formed Juana's sole article of furniture, save the one bed.

'I don't disturb you?' said Kate.

'No, Niña, you are a friend of Don Ramón, verdad?'

'Yes,' said Kate.

'And we - we are reading the Hymns.'

'Yes?' said Kate.

'The Hymns of Quetzalcoatl,' said Ezequiel, in his barking young voice, with sudden bravado.

'Do go on! May I listen!'

'You hear! The Niña wants to listen. Read, Julio, read! Read then.'

They all sat down once more on the ground, and Julio sat down by the lamp, but he hung his head, hiding his face in the shadow of his big hat.

'Entonces! - Read then,' said Juana.

'He is afraid,' murmured Maria del Carmen, laying her hand on the young man's knee. 'However, read, Julio! Because the Niña wants to hear.'

And after a moment's struggle, Julio said in a muffled voice:

'Do I begin from the beginning.'

'Yes, from the beginning! Read!' said Juana.

The young man took a sheet of paper, like an advertisement leaflet, from under his blanket. At the top it had the Quetzalcoatl symbol, called the Eye, the ring with the bird-shape standing in the middle.

He began to read in a rather muffled voice:

'I am Quetzalcoatl with the dark face, who lived in Mexico in other days.

'Till there came a stranger from over the seas, and his face was white, and he spoke with strange words. He showed his hands and his feet, that in both there were holes. And he said: "My name is Jesus, and they called me Christ. Men crucified me on a Cross till I died. But I rose up out of the place where they put me, and I went up to heaven to my Father. Now my Father has told me to come to Mexico."

'Quetzalcoatl said: You alone?

'Jesus said: My mother is here. She shed many tears for me, seeing me crucify. So she will hold the Sons of Mexico on her lap, and soothe them when they suffer, and when the women of Mexico weep, she will take them on her bosom and comfort them. And when she cries to the Father for her people, He will make everything well.

'Quetzalcoatl said: That is well. And Brother with the name Jesus, what will you do in Mexico?

'Jesus said: I will bring peace into Mexico. And on the naked I will put clothes, and food between the lips of the hungry, and gifts in all men's hands, and peace and love in their hearts.

'Quetzalcoatl said: It is very good. I am old. I could not do so much. I must go now. Farewell, people of Mexico. Farewell, strange brother called Jesus. Farewell, woman called Mary. It is time for me to go.

'So Quetzalcoatl looked at his people; and he embraced Jesus, the Son of Heaven; and he embraced Maria, the Blessed Virgin, the Holy Mother of Jesus, and he turned away. Slowly he went. But in his ears was the sound of the tearing down of his temples in Mexico. Nevertheless he went on slowly, being old, and weary with much living. He climbed the steep of the mountain, and over the white snow of the volcano. As he went, behind him rose a cry of people dying, and a flame of places burning. He said to himself: Surely those are Mexicans crying! Yet I must not hear, for Jesus has come to the land, and he will wipe the tears from all eyes, and his Mother will make them all glad.

'He also said: Surely that is Mexico burning. But I must not look, for all men will be brothers, now Jesus has come to the land, and the women will sit by the blue skirts of Mary, smiling with peace and with love.

'So the old god reached the top of the mountain, and looked up into the blue of heaven. And through a door in the blue wall he saw a great darkness, and stars and a moon shining. And beyond the darkness he saw one great star, like a bright gateway.

'Then fire rose from the volcano around the old Quetzalcoatl, in wings and glittering feathers. And with the wings of fire and the glitter of sparks Quetzalcoatl flew up, up, like a wafting fire, like a glittering bird, up, into the space, and away to the white steps of heaven, that lead to the blue walls, where is the door to the dark. So he entered in and was gone.

'Night fell, and Quetzalcoatl was gone, and men in the world saw only a star travelling back into heaven, departing under the low branches of darkness.

'Then men in Mexico said: Quetzalcoatl has gone. Even his star has departed. We must listen to this Jesus, who speaks in a foreign tongue.

'So they learned a new speech from the priests that came from upon the great waters to the east. And they became Christians.'

Julio, who had become absorbed, ended abruptly, as the tale of the leaflet was ended.

'It is beautiful,' said Kate.

'And it is true!' cried the sceptical Juana.

'It seems to me true,' said Kate.

'Señora!' yelled Concha. 'Is it true that heaven is up there, and you come down steps like clouds to the edge of the sky, like the steps from the mole into the lake? Is it true that El Señor comes and stands on the steps and looks down at us like we look down into the lake to see the charales?'

Concha shoved up her fierce swarthy face, and shook her masses of hair, glaring at Kate, waiting for an answer.

'I don't know everything,' laughed Kate. 'But it seems to me true.'

'She believes it,' said Concha, turning her face to her mother.

'And is it true,' asked Juana, 'that El Señor, El Cristo del Mundo, is a gringo, and that He comes from your country, with His Holy Mother?'

'Not from my country, but from a country near.'

'Listen!' exclaimed Juana, awestruck. 'El Señor is a gringuito, and His Holy Mother is a gringuita. Yes, one really knows. Look! Look at the feet of the Niña! Pure feet of the Santísima! Look! Kate was barefoot, wearing sandals with a simple strap across the foot. Juana touched one of the Niña's white feet, fascinated. 'Feet of the Santísima. And She, the Holy Mary, is a gringuita. She came over the sea, like you, Niña?'

'Yes, she came over the sea!'

'Ah! You know it?'

'Yes. We know that.'

'Think of it! The Santísima is a gringuita, and She came over the Sea like the Niña, from the countries of the Niña!' Juana spoke in a wicked wonder, horrified, delighted, mocking.

'And the Lord is a Gringuito - pure Gringuito?' barked Concha.

'And Niña - it was the gringos who killed El Señor? It wasn't the Mexicans? It was those other gringos who put Him on the Cross?'

'Yes!' said Kate. 'It wasn't the Mexicans.'

'The gringos?'

'Yes, the gringos.'

'And He Himself was a Gringo?'

'Yes!' said Kate, not knowing what else to say.

'Look!' said Juana, in her hushed, awed, malevolent voice. 'He was a Gringo, and the gringos put him on the Cross.'

'But a long time ago,' said Kate hastily.

'A long time ago, says the Niña,' echoed Juana, in her awed voice.

There was a moment of silence. The dark faces of the girls and men seated on the ground were turned up to Kate, watching her fixedly, in the half light, counting every word. In the outer air, thunder muttered in different places.

'And now, Niña,' came the cool, clear voice of María del Carmen, 'El Señor is going back again to His Father, and our Quetzalcoatl is coming back to us?'

'And the Santísima is leaving us?' put in the hurried voice of Juana. 'Think of it! The Santísima is leaving us, and this Quetzalcoatl is coming! He has no mother, he!'

'Perhaps he has a wife,' said Kate.

'Quién sabe!' murmured Juana.

'They say,' said the bold Concha, 'that in Paradise he has grown young.'

'Who?' asked Juana.

'I don't know how they call him,' muttered Concha, ashamed to say the word.

'Quetzalcoatl!' said Ezequiel, in his barking strong young voice. 'Yes, he is young. He is a god in the flower of life, and finely built.'

'They say so! They say so!' murmured Juana. 'Think of it!'

'Here it says so!' cried Ezequiel. 'Here it is written. In the second Hymn.'

'Read it then, Julio.'

And Julio, now nothing loth, took out a second paper.

'I, Quetzalcoatl, of Mexico, I travelled the longest journey.

'Beyond the blue outer wall of heaven, beyond the bright place of the Sun, across the plains of darkness where the stars spread out like trees, like trees and bushes, far away to the heart of all the worlds, low down like the Morning Star.

'And at the heart of all the worlds those were waiting whose faces I could not see. And in voices like bees they murmured among themselves: This is Quetzalcoatl whose hair is white with fanning the fires of life. He comes alone, and slowly.

'Then with hands I could not see, they took my hands, and in their arms that I could not see, at last I died.

'But when I was dead, and bone, they cast not my bones away, they did not give me up to the four winds, nor to the six. No, not even to the wind that blows down to the middle of earth, nor to him that blows upward like a finger pointing, did they give me.

'He is dead, they said, but unrelinquished.

'So they took the oil of the darkness, and laid it on my brow and my eyes, they put it in my ears and nostrils and my mouth, they put it on the two-fold silence of my breasts, and on my sunken navel, and on my secret places, before and behind: and in the palms of my hands, and on the mounds of my knees, and under the tread of my feet.

'Lastly, they anointed all my head with the oil that comes out of the darkness. They they said: He is sealed up. Lay him away.

'So they laid me in the fountain that bubbles darkly at the heart of the worlds, far, far behind the sun, and there lay I, Quetzalcoatl, in warm oblivion.

'I slept the great sleep, and dreamed not.

'Till a voice was calling: Quetzalcoat!!

'I said: Who is that?

'No one answered, but the voice said: Quetzalcoat!!

'I said: Where art thou?

'So! he said. I am neither here nor there. I am thyself. Get up.

'Now all was very heavy upon me, like a tomb-stone of darkness.

'I said: Am I not old? How shall I roll this stone away?

'How art thou old, when I am new man? I will roll away the stone. Sit up!

'I sat up, and the stone went rolling, crashing down the gulfs of space.

'I said to myself: I am new man. I am younger than the young and older than the old. Lo! I am unfolded on the stem of time like a flower, I am at the midst of the flower of my manhood. Neither do I ache with desire, to tear, to burst the bud; neither do I yearn away like a seed that floats into heaven. The cup of my flowering is unfolded, in its middle the stars float balanced with array. My stem is in the air, my roots are in all the dark, the sun is no more than a cupful within me.

'Lo! I am neither young nor old, I am the flower unfolded, I am new.

'So I rose and stretched my limbs and looked around. The sun was below me in a daze of heat, like a hot humming-bird hovering at mid-day over the worlds. And his beak was long and very sharp, he was like a dragon.

'And a faint star was hesitating wearily, waiting to pass.

'I called aloud, saying: "Who is that?"

My name is Jesus, I am Mary's son.  
I am coming home.  
My mother the Moon is dark.

Brother, Quetzalcoat!,  
Hold back the wild hot sun.  
Bind him with shadow while I pass.  
Let me come home.

'I caught the sun and held him, and in my shade the faint star slipped past, going slowly into the dark reaches beyond the burning of the sun. Then on the slope of silence he sat down and took off his sandals, and I put them on.

"How do they wear the wings of love, Jesus, the Mexican people?"

"The souls of the Mexican people are heavy for the wings of love, they have swallowed the stone of despair."

"Where is your Lady Mother in the mantle of blue, she with comfort in her lap?"

"Her mantle faded in the dust of the world, she was weary without sleep, for the voices of people cried night and day, and the knives of the Mexican people were sharper than the pinions of love, and their stubbornness was stronger than hope. Lo! the fountain of tears dries up in the eyes of the old, and the lap of the aged is comfortless, they look for rest. Quetzalcoat!, Sir, my mother went even before me, to her still white bed in the moon."

"She is gone, and thou art gone, Jesus, the Crucified. Then what of Mexico?"

"The images stand in their churches, Oh Quetzalcoat!, they don't know that I and my Mother have departed. They are angry souls, Brother, my Lord! They vent their anger. They broke my Churches, they stole my strength, they withered the lips of the Virgin. They drove us away, and we crept away like a tottering old man and a woman, tearless and bent double with age. So we fled while they were not looking. And we seek but rest, to forget forever the children of men who have swallowed the stone of despair."

'Then said I: It is good, pass on. I, Quetzalcoat!, will go down. Sleep thou the sleep without dreams. Farewell at the cross-roads, Brother Jesus.

'He said: Oh, Quetzalcoat!! They have forgotten thee. The feathered snake! The serpent - silent bird! They are asking for none of thee.

'I said: Go thy way, for the dust of earth is in thy eyes and on thy lips. For me the serpent of middle-earth sleeps in my loins and my belly, the bird of the outer air perches on my brow and sweeps her bill across my breast. But I, I am lord of two ways. I am master of up and down. I am as a man who is a new man, with new limbs and life, and the light of the Morning Star in his eyes. Lo! I am !! The lord of both ways. Thou wert lord of the one way. Now it leads thee to the sleep. Farewell!

'So Jesus went on towards the sleep. And Mary the Mother of Sorrows lay down on the bed of the white moon, weary beyond any more tears.

'And I, I am on the threshold. I am stepping across the border. I am Quetzalcoat!, lord of both ways, star between day and the dark.'

There was silence as the young man finished reading.