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Chapter 23 - Huitzilopochtli's Night

They had the Huitzilopochtli ceremony at night, in the wide yard in front of the church. The guard of Huitzilopochtli, in serapes of black, red, and yellow stripes, striped like tigers or wasps, stood holding torches of blazing ocote. A tall bonfire was built, but unkindled, in the centre of the yard.

In the towers where the bells had been, fires were blazing and the heavy drum of Huitzilopochtli went rolling its deep, sinister notes. It had been sounding all the while since the sun went down.

The crowd gathered under the trees, outside the gates in front of the church. The church doors were closed.

There was a bang of four firework cannons exploding simultaneously, then four rockets shot up into the sky, leaning in the four directions, and exploding in showers of red, green, white, and yellow.

The church doors opened, and Cipriano appeared, in his brilliant serape of Huitzilopochtli, and with three green parrot feathers erect on his brow. He was carrying a torch. He stooped and lit the big bonfire, then plucked out four blazing brands and tossed them to four of his men, who stood waiting, naked save for their black breech-cloths. The men caught the brands as they flew, and ran in the four directions, to kindle the four bonfires that waited, one in each corner of the yard.

The guard had taken off their blankets and blouses, and were naked to the red sash. The lighter drum began to beat for the dance, and the dance began, the half-naked men throwing their blazing torches whirling in the air, catching them as they came down, dancing all the while. Cipriano, in the centre, threw up brand after brand from the fire.

Now that he was stripped of his blanket, his body was seen painted in horizontal bars of red and black, while from his mouth went a thin green line, and from his eyes a band of yellow.

The five fires, built hollow of little towers of ocote faggots, sent pure flame in a rush up to the dark sky, illuminating the dancing men, who sang in deep voices as they danced.

The fires rushed rapidly upwards in flame. The drum beat without ceasing. And the men of Huitzilopochtli danced on, like demons. Meanwhile the crowd sat in the old Indian silence, their black eyes glittering in the firelight. And gradually the fires began to die down, the white facade of the church, that had danced also to the yellow flames, began to go bluish above, merging into the night, rose-coloured below, behind the dark shapes that danced to the sinking fires.

Suddenly the dance ceased, the men threw their serapes around them, and sat down. Little ocote fires upon the cane tripods flickered here and there, in a silence that lasted for some minutes. Then the drum sounded, and a man began to sing, in a clear, defiant voice, the First Song of Huitzilopochtli:

I am Huitzilopochtli,
The Red Huitzilopochtli,
The blood-red.

I am Huitzilopochtli,
Yellow of the sun,
Sun in the blood.

I am Huitzilopochtli,
White of the bone,
Bone in the blood.

I am Huitzilopochtli,
With a blade of grass between my teeth.

I am Huitzilopochtli, sitting in the dark.
With my redness staining the body of the dark.

I watch by the fire.
I wait behind men.

In the stillness of my night
The cactus sharpens his thorn.
The grass feels with his roots for the other sun.

Deeper than the roots of the mango tree
Down in the centre of the earth
Is the yellow, serpent-yellow shining of my sun.

Oh, beware of him!
Oh, beware of me!
Who runs athwart my serpent-flame
Gets bitten and must die.

I am the sleeping and waking
Of the anger of the manhood of men.
I am the leaping and quaking

The song came to an end. There was a pause. Then all the men of Huitzilopochtli took it up again, changing the 'I' into 'He.'

'He is Huitzilopochtli,
The Red Huitzilopochtli,
The blood-red.

He is Huitzilopochtli,
Yellow of the sun,
Sun in the blood.

He is Huitzilopochtli,
White of the bone,
Bone in the blood.

He is Huitzilopochtli,
With a blade of green grass between his teeth.

He is Huitzilopochtli, sitting in the dark,
With his redness staining the body of the night.

He is watching by the fire.
Waiting behind men.

In the stillness of his night
Cactuses sharpen their thorns.
Grass feels downwards with his roots.

Deeper than the roots of the mango tree
Down in the centre of the earth
Shines the yellow, serpent-yellow shining of the sun.

Oh, men, take care, take care!
Take care of him and it.
Nor run aslant his rays.
Who is bitten, dies.

He is Huitzilopochtli, sleeping or waking
Serpent in the bellies of men.
Huitzilopochtli, leaping and quaking
Fire of the passion of men.'

The big fires had all died down. Only the little flames on the tripods lit up the scene with a ruddy glow. The guard withdrew to the outer wall of the yard, holding bayonets erect. The big drum was going alone, slowly.

The yard was now a clear space, with the glowing red heaps of the bonfires, and the ocote flames flapping. And now was seen a platform erected against the white wall of the church.

In the silence the big doors of the church opened, and Cipriano came out, in his bright serape, holding in his hand a bunch of black leaves, or feathers, and with a tuft of scarlet feathers, black-tipped, rising from the back of his head. He mounted the platform and stood facing the crowd, the light of a torch on his face and on the brilliant feathers that rose like flames from the back of his head.

After him came a strange procession: a peon in floppy white clothes, led prisoner between two of the guards of Huitzilopochtli: who wore their serapes with red and black and yellow and white and green stripes: then another peon prisoner: then another: in all, five, the fifth one tall, limping, and with a red cross painted on the breast of his white jacket. Last of all came a woman-prisoner, likewise between two guards, her hair flowing loose, over a red tunic.

They mounted the platform. The peons, prisoners, were placed in a row, their guards behind them. The limping peon was apart, with his two guards behind him: the woman again was apart, her two guards behind her.

The big drum ceased, and a bugle rang out, a long, loud triumphant note, repeated three times. Then the kettle-drums, or the small tom-toms like kettle-drums, rattled fierce as hail.

Cipriano lifted his hand, and there was silence.

Out of the silence he began to speak, in his short, martial sentences:

'Man that is man is more than a man. No man is man till he is more than a man. Till the power is in him Which is not his own.

The power is in me from behind the sun, And from middle earth. I am Huitzilopochtli. I am dark as the sunless under-earth, And yellow as the fire that consumes, And white as bone, And red as blood.

But I touched the hand of Quetzalcoatl. And between our fingers rose a blade of green grass. I touched the hand of Quetzalcoatl. Lo! I am lord of the watches of the night And the dream of the night rises from me like a red feather.

I am the watcher, and master of the dream. In the dream of the night I see the grey dogs prowling. Prowling to devour the dream.

In the night the soul of a coward creeps out of him Like a grey dog whose mouth is foul with rabies, Creeping among the sleeping and the dreaming, who are lapped in my dark, And in whom the dream sits up like a rabbit, lifting long ears tipped with night, On the dream-slopes browsing like a deer in the dusk.

In the night I see the grey dogs creeping, out of the sleeping men Who are cowards, who are liars, who are traitors, who have no dreams That prick their ears like a rabbit, or browse in the dark like deer, But whose dreams are dogs, grey dogs with yellow mouths. From the liars, from the thieves, from the false and treacherous and mean I see the grey dogs creeping out, where my deer are browsing in the dark. Then I take my knife, and throw it upon the grey dog. And lo! it sticks between the ribs of a man! The

house of the grey dog!

Beware! Beware! Of the men and the women who walk among you. You know not how many are houses of grey dogs. Men that seem harmless, women with fair words, Maybe they kennel the grey dog.'

The drums began to beat and the singer began to sing, clear and pure:

THE SONG OF THE GREY DOG

'When you sleep and know it not
The grey dog creeps among you.
In your sleep, you twist, your soul hurts you.
The grey dog is chewing your entrails.

Then call on Huitzilopochtli:
The grey dog caught me at the cross-roads
As I went down the road of sleep
And crossed the road of the uneasy.

The grey dog leapt at my entrails.
Huitzilopochtli, call him off.
Lo! the Great One answers. Track him down!
Kill him in his unclean house.

Down the road of the uneasy
You track the grey dog home
To his house in the heart of a traitor,
A thief, a murderer of dreams.

And you kill him there with one stroke,
Crying: Huitzilopochtli, is this well done?
That your sleep be not as a cemetery
Where dogs creep unclean.'

The song ceased, and there was silence. Then Cipriano beckoned to the men to bring forward the peon with the black cross painted on his front and back. He limped forward.

Cipriano: 'What man is that, limping?'

Guards: 'It is Guillermo, overseer of Don Ramón, who betrayed Don Ramón, his master.'

Cipriano: 'Why does he limp?'

Guards: 'He fell from the window on to the rocks.'

Cipriano: 'What made him wish to betray his master?'

Guards: 'His heart is a grey dog, and a woman, a grey bitch, enticed him forth.'

Cipriano: 'What woman enticed the grey dog forth?'

The guards came forward with the woman.

Guards: 'This woman, Maraca, my Lord, with the grey bitch heart.'

Cipriano: 'Is it she, indeed?'

Guards: 'It is she.'

Cipriano: 'The grey dog, and the grey bitch, we kill, for their mouths are yellow with poison, Is it well, men of Huitzilopochtli?'

Guards: 'It is very well, my Lord.'

The guards stripped the peon Guillermo of his white clothes, leaving him naked, in a grey loin-cloth, with a grey-white cross painted on his naked breast. The woman, too, had a grey-white cross painted on her body. She stood in a short petticoat of grey wool.

Cipriano: 'The grey dog and the grey bitch shall run no more about the world. We will bury their bodies in quick-lime, till their souls are eaten, and their bodies, and nothing is left. For lime is the thirsty bone that swallows even a soul and is not slaked. - Bind them with the grey cords, put ash on their heads.'

The guards quickly obeyed. The prisoners, ash-grey, gazed with black, glittering eyes, making not a sound. A guard stood behind each of them. Cipriano gave a sign, and quick as lightning the guards had got the throats of the two victims in a grey cloth, and with a sharp jerk had broken their necks, lifting them backwards in one movement. The grey cloths they tied hard and tight round the throats, laying the twitching bodies on the floor.

Cipriano turned to the crowd:

'The Lords of Life are the Masters of Death.
Blue is the breath of Quetzalcoatl.
Red is Huitzilopochtli's blood.
But the grey dog belongs to the ash of the world.
The Lords of Life are the Masters of Death.
Dead are the grey dogs.
Living are the Lords of Life.
Blue is the deep sky and the deep water.'

Red is the blood and the fire.
Yellow is the flame.
The bone is white and alive.
The hair of night is dark over our faces.
But the grey dogs are among the ashes.
The Lords of Life are the Masters of Death.'

Then he turned once more, to the other, imprisoned peons.

Cipriano: 'Who are these four?'

Guards: 'Four who came to kill Don Ramón.'

Cipriano: 'Four men, against one man?'

Guards: 'They were more than four, my Lord.'

Cipriano: 'When many men come against one, what is the name of the many?'

Guards: 'Cowards, my Lord.'

Cipriano: 'Cowards it is. They are less than men. Men that are less than men are not good enough for the light of the sun. If men that are men will live, men that are less than men must be put away, lest they multiply too much. Men that are more than men have the judgment of men that are less than men. Shall they die?'

Guards: 'They shall surely die, my Lord.'

Cipriano: 'Yet my hand has touched the hand of Quetzalcoatl, and among the black leaves one sprung green, with the colour of Malintzi.'

An attendant came and lifted Cipriano's serape over his head, leaving his body bare to the waist. The guards likewise took off their serapes.

Cipriano lifted up his fist, in which he held a little tuft of black feathers, or leaves.

Then he said slowly:

Huitzilopochtli gives the black blade of death.
Take it bravely.
Take death bravely.
Go bravely across the border, admitting your mistake.

Determine to go on and on, till you enter the Morning Star.
Quetzalcoatl will show you the way.
Malintzi of the green dress will open the door.

In the fountain you will lie down.
If you reach the fountain, and lie down
And the fountain covers your face, forever,
You will have departed forever from your mistake.

And the man that is more than a man in you
Will wake at last from the clean forgetting
And stand up, and look about him,
Ready again for the business of being a man.

But Huitzilopochtli touched the hand of Quetzalcoatl
And one green leaf sprang among the black.
The green leaf of Malintzi
Who pardons once, and no more.

Cipriano turned to the four peons. He held out his fist with the four black twigs, to the first. This first one, a little man, peered at the leaves curiously.

'There is no green one,' he said sceptically.

'Good!' said Cipriano. 'Then receive a black.'

And he handed him a black leaf.

'I knew it,' said the man, and he threw the leaf away with contempt and defiance.

The second man drew a black leaf. He stood gazing at it, as if fascinated, turning it round.

The third man drew a leaf whose lower half was green.

'See!' said Cipriano. 'The green leaf of Malintzi!'

And he handed the last black leaf to the last man.

'Have I got to die?' said the last man.

'Yes.'

'I don't want to die, Patrón.'

'You played with death, and it has sprung upon you.'

The eyes of the three men were blindfolded with black cloths, their blouses and pantaloons were taken away. Cipriano took a bright, thin dagger.

'The Lords of Life are Masters of Death,' he said in a loud, clear voice.

And swift as lightning he stabbed the blindfolded men to the heart, with three swift, heavy stabs. Then he lifted the red dagger and threw it down.

'The Lords of Life are Masters of Death,' he repeated.

The guards lifted the bleeding bodies one by one, and carried them into the church. There remained only the one prisoner, with the green leaf.

'Put the green leaf of Malintzi between his brows; for Malintzi pardons once, and no more,' said Cipriano.

'Yes, my Lord!' replied the guard.

And they led the man away into the church.

Cipriano followed, the last of his guard after him.

In a few minutes the drums began to beat and men came slowly streaming into the church. Women were not admitted. All the interior was hung with red and black banners. At the side of the chancel was a new idol: a heavy, seated figure of Huitzilopochtli, done in black lava stone. And round him burned twelve red candles. The idol held the bunch of black strips, or leaves, in his hand. And at his feet lay the five dead bodies.

The fire on the altar was flickering high, to the dark statue of Quetzalcoatl. On his little throne Ramón sat, wearing his blue and white colours of Quetzalcoatl. There was another corresponding throne next him, but it was empty. Six of the guard of Quetzalcoatl stood by Ramón: but Huitzilopochtli's side of the chancel was empty save for the dead.

The hard drums of Huitzilopochtli were beating incessantly outside, with a noise like madness. Inside was the soft roll of the drum of Quetzalcoatl. And the men from the crowd outside thronged slowly in, between the guard of Quetzalcoatl.

A flute sounded the summons to close the doors. The drums of Quetzalcoatl ceased, and from the towers was heard again the wild bugle of Huitzilopochtli.

Then down the centre of the church, in silence, barefoot, came the procession of Huitzilopochtli, naked save for the black loin-cloths and the paint, and the scarlet feathers of the head-dresses. Cipriano had his face painted with a white jaw, a thin band of green stretched from his mouth, a band of black across his nose, yellow from his eyes, and scarlet on his brow. One green feather rose from his forehead, and behind his head a beautiful head-dress of scarlet feathers. A band of red was painted round his breast, yellow round his middle. The rest was ash-grey.

After him came his guard, their faces red, black, and white, their bodies painted as Cipriano's, and a scarlet feather rising from the back of their head. The hard, dry drum of Huitzilopochtli beat monotonously.

As the Living Huitzilopochtli came near the altar steps, the Living Quetzalcoatl rose and came to meet him. The two saluted, each covering his eyes with his left hand for a moment, then touching fingers with the right hand.

Cipriano stood before the statue of Huitzilopochtli, dipped his hand in a stone bowl, and giving the loud cry or whoop of Huitzilopochtli, lifted up his red hand. His guard uttered the loud cry, and quickly filed past, each man dipping his hand and raising his wet, red fist. The hard drums of Huitzilopochtli rattled like madness in the church, then fell suddenly silent.

Ramón: 'Why is your hand red, Huitzilopochtli, my brother?'

Cipriano: 'It is the blood of the treacherous, Oh Quetzalcoatl.'

Ramón: 'What have they betrayed?'

Cipriano: 'The yellow sun and the heart of darkness; the hearts of men, and the buds of women. While they lived, the Morning Star could not be seen.'

Ramón: 'And are they verily dead?'

Cipriano: 'Verily dead, my Lord.'

Ramón: 'Their blood is shed?'

Cipriano: 'Yes, my Lord, save that the grey dogs shed no blood. Two died the bloodless death of the grey dogs, three died in blood.'

Ramón: 'Give me the blood of the three, my brother Huitzilopochtli, to sprinkle the fire.'

Cipriano brought the stone bowl, and the little bunch of black leaves from Huitzilopochtli's idol. Ramón slowly, gently, sprinkled a little blood on the fire, with the black leaves.

Ramón: 'Darkness, drink the blood of expiation. Sun, swallow up the blood of expiation. Rise, Morning Star, between the divided sea.'

He gave back the bowl and the leaves to Huitzilopochtli, who placed them by the black idol.

Ramón: 'Thou who didst take the lives of the three, Huitzilopochtli, my brother, what wilt thou do with the souls?'

Cipriano: 'Even give them to thee, my Lord, Quetzalcoatl, my Lord of the Morning Star.'

Ramón: 'Yea, give them to me and I will wrap them in my breath and send them the longest journey, to the sleep and the far awakening.'

Cipriano: 'My Lord is lord of two ways.'

The naked, painted guard of Huitzilopochtli came and carried the dead bodies of the three stabbed men, carried them on red biers, and laid them at the foot of the Quetzalcoatl statue.

Ramón: 'So, there is a long way to go, past the sun to the gate of the Morning Star. And if the sun is angry he strikes swifter than a jaguar, and the whirr of the winds is like an angry eagle, and the upper waters strike in wrath like silver-coloured snakes. Ah, three souls, make peace now with the sun and winds and waters, and go in courage, with the breath of Quetzalcoatl around you like a cloak. Fear not and shrink not and fail not; but come to the end of the longest journey, and let the fountain cover your face. So shall all at length be made new.'

When he had spoken to the dead, Ramón took incense and threw it on the fire, so clouds of blue smoke arose. Then with a censer he swung the blue smoke over the dead. Then he unfolded three blue cloths and covered the dead. Then the guards of Quetzalcoatl lifted the biers, and the flute of Quetzalcoatl sounded.

'Salute the Morning Star!' cried Ramón, turning to the light beyond the statue of Quetzalcoatl, and throwing up his right arm in the Quetzalcoatl prayer. Every man turned to the light and threw up his arm in the passion. And the silence of the Morning Star filled the church.

The drum of Quetzalcoatl sounded: the guards slowly moved away with the three blue-wrapped dead.

Then came the voice of the Living Huitzilopochtli:

'Upon the dead grey dogs the face of Quetzalcoatl cannot look. Upon the corpses of grey dogs rises no Morning Star. But the fire of corpses shall consume them.'

There was a sharp rattle of the dry drums of Huitzilopochtli. Ramón remained with his back to the church, his arm upraised to the Morning Star. And the guard of Huitzilopochtli lifted the strangled bodies, laid them on biers, covered them with grey cloths, and bore them away.

The bugle of Huitzilopochtli sounded.

Cipriano: 'The dead are on their way. Quetzalcoatl helps them on the longest journey. - But the grey dogs sleep within the quick- lime, in the slow corpse-fire. - It is finished.'

Ramón dropped his arm and turned to the church. All men dropped their hands. The soft drums of Quetzalcoatl sounded, mingling with the hard drums of Huitzilopochtli. Then both guards began to sing together:

HUITZILOPOCHTLI'S WATCH

Red Huitzilopochtli
Keeps day and night apart.

Huitzilopochtli the golden
Guards life from death, and death from life.

No grey-dogs, cowards, pass him.
No spotted traitors crawl by,
False fair ones cannot slip through
Past him, from the one to the other.

Brave men have peace at nightfall,
True men look up at the dawn,
Men in their manhood walk out
Into blue day, past Huitzilopochtli.

Red Huitzilopochtli
Is the purifier.

Black Huitzilopochtli
Is doom.

Huitzilopochtli golden
Is the liberating fire.

White Huitzilopochtli
Is washed bone.

Green Huitzilopochtli
Is Malintzi's blade of grass.'

At the beginning of each stanza, the Guard of Huitzilopochtli struck their left palm with their scarlet right fist, and the drums gave a great crash, a terrific splash of noise. When the song ended, the drums gradually died down, like subsiding thunder, leaving the hearts of men re-echoing.

Ramón: 'Why is your hand so red, Huitzilopochtli?'

Cipriano: 'With the blood of slain men, Brother.'

Ramón: 'Must it always be red?'

Cipriano: 'Till green-robed Malintzi brings her water-bowl.'

The bugle and the flute both sounded. The guard of Huitzilopochtli put out the red candles, one by one, the guard of Quetzalcoatl extinguished the blue candles. The church was dark, save for the small but fierce blue-white light beyond the Quetzalcoatl statue, and the red smouldering on the altar.

Ramón began slowly to speak:

'The dead are on their journey, the way is dark.
There is only the Morning Star.
Beyond the white of whiteness,
Beyond the blackness of black,
Beyond spoken day,
Beyond the unspoken passion of night,
The light which is fed from two vessels
From the black oil and the white
Shines at the gate.

A gate to the innermost place
Where the Breath and the Fountains commingle,
Where the dead are living, and the living are dead.
The deeps that life cannot fathom,
The Source and the End, of which we know
Only that it is, and its life is our life and our death.
All men cover their eyes
Before the unseen.
All men be lost in silence,
Within the noiseless.'

The church was utterly still, all men standing with a hand pressed over their eyes.

Till there was one note of a silver gong, and the green candles of Malintzi were being lighted in the altar place. - Ramón's voice was heard again:

'Like the green candles of Malintzi
Like a tree in new leaf.
The rain of blood is fallen, is gone into the earth.

The dead have gone the long journey
Beyond the star.
Huitzilopochtli has thrown his black mantle
To those who would sleep.
When the blue wind of Quetzalcoatl
Waves softly,
When the water of Malintzi falls
Making a greenness:

Count the red grains of the Huitzilopochtli
Fire in your hearts, O men.
And blow the ash away.

For the living live,
And the dead die.
But the fingers of all touch the fingers of all
In the Morning Star.'