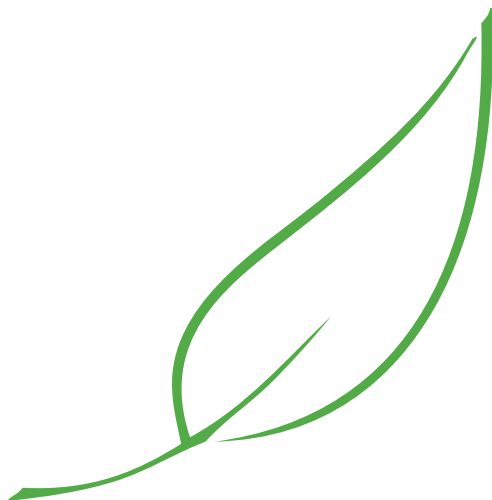


Journey Of The Birds

By K.V. Wilt



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JOURNEY OF THE BIRDS

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SYNOPSIS: A beautifully moving and funny adaptation of attar's "Conference of the birds", this work offers tremendous opportunity for actors, costumers, and makeup artists. This allegorical comedy dramatizes a journey of 30 unhappy and disenchanting american birds to commune with their spiritual forbearer, quetzalcoatl, the feathered prophet of the americas. advised by grandmother crow and led by quetzal and owl, the birds pass through the valleys of hope, understanding, humility, love, and unity, en route to the court of the feathered serpent and the transforming of their hearts.

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(1 female, 32 either)*

NARRATOR (m/f)	(9 lines)
QUETZALCOATL (m/f).....	Ancient prophet/king/lord of the Americas, Feathered Serpent; appears in final scene. (1 line)
PELICAN (m/f)	(32 lines)
FALCON (m/f)	(30 lines)
HAWK (m/f).....	(30 lines)
LARK (m/f)	(30 lines)
EAGLE (m/f)	(28 lines)
CROW (f).....	A Grandmother (26 lines)
FLAMINGO (m/f)	(26 lines)
PHEASANT (m/f)	(26 lines)
QUAIL (m/f).....	(26 lines)
BUZZARD (m/f)	(25 lines)
CARDINAL (m/f).....	(25 lines)
OWL (m/f)	(25 lines)
PEACOCK (m/f).....	(22 lines)
QUETZAL (m/f).....	(22 lines)
PARTRIDGE (m/f).....	(21 lines)
ROADRUNNER (m/f).....	(21 lines)
STORK (m/f)	(21 lines)
WREN (m/f).....	(20 lines)

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PARROT (m/f).....	(19 lines)
GOLDFINCH (m/f)	(18 lines)
KINGFISHER (m/f).....	(18 lines)
NIGHTINGALE (m/f).....	(18 lines)
SPARROW (m/f)	(18 lines)
CANARY (m/f)	(17 lines)
DUCK (m/f)	(16 lines)
ROBIN (m/f).....	(16 lines)
HUMMINGBIRD (m/f).....	(14 lines)
HERON (m/f).....	(13 lines)
ROOSTER (m/f)	(12 lines)
MOCKINGBIRD (m/f).....	(8 lines)
PIGEON (m/f).....	(7 lines)

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

I have suggested various tunes and native chants. These can be eliminated. Or they can be added to. I can provide a tape of the songs indicated, as well as others. Obviously, the play was created for a class, camp, or large group. The parts, with the exception of the Crow, Quetzal, and Owl, are more or less equal in prominence and stage time.

Should you decide to double cast the roles of the thirty birds, you will need to cut or reassign several lines throughout the play. Also, a tape of the native chants is available, should you choose to use it, from the author. You may contact Mr. Wilt at kurt.wilt@saintleo.edu.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *With curtain closed, the voice of the NARRATOR is heard.*

NARRATOR: Once upon a time, birds all over the world worried about the fate of the planet and their species. On every continent their habitats were deteriorating and disappearing. And, despite the fact that some were well off, most were unhappy, unfulfilled, and confused. Having come to the conclusion that they needed help from a power greater than themselves, they chose thirty birds as representatives of their species. These thirty birds met at the abode of the Quetzal, whose ancestors were the companions and confidants of Quetzalcoatl, the 'feathered serpent,' prophet and monarch of the Toltec empire of ancient Mexico during its golden age. *(Curtain opens to reveal a clearing in a jungle habitat.)* So, one by one, they enter the jungle domain of the quetzal before dawn, hoping it can guide them to its namesake, the great, all-powerful and loving, Quetzalcoatl. One by one, the gracious host, Quetzal, greets each visitor: Parrot, Falcon, Quail, Nightingale, Peacock, Roadrunner, Pigeon, Hawk, Goldfinch, Duck, Sparrow, Eagle, Hummingbird, Robin, Mockingbird, Cardinal, Rooster, Pheasant, Buzzard, Partridge, Lark, Heron, Flamingo, Pelican, Canary, Stork, Kingfisher, Owl, and Crow.

The birds could sing an Amerindian chant, such as the "Gathering Song" of John Standing Eagle. "Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey on-doo-ah / Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey on-doo-ah six times, then Hey on-doo-ah, hey on-doo-ah. Or Rolling Thunder's "Invocation of the Four Doctors." Chants provided upon request.

NIGHTINGALE: I know a beautiful love song. Listen to this. *(Begins to sing to the tune of "Oh What a Beautiful Morning".)* "Oh what a sorrowful (unhappy) morning!" / Oh what a sorrowful day! / I've got a sorrowful feeling! / Love isn't going my way."

ROBIN: It's so sad. I can't stand sad songs. Especially first thing in the morning.

MOCKINGBIRD: (*Mocking the NIGHTINGALE by being melodramatic, crying.*) "Oh what a sorrowful morning...." Boo hoo hoo. "Oh what a sorrowful day...." Boo hoo hoo. Nightingale, always a soap opera. You're killing me.

CANARY: She's overated. Listen to this. "Morning has broken like the first morning."

Traditional English folk song, as sung by C. Stevens.

NIGHTINGALE: Canary, you have a nice voice. But it lacks refinement and feeling.

BUZZARD: Zip it, gals. You both sound like sick mules. The sun will turn around and set.

QUETZAL: "Yet, ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!
That Nightingale that in the branches sang,
Ah, whence, and wither flown again, who knows!"

PELICAN: What's that?

PEACOCK: It's poetry. Don't you know anything?

STORK: But what does it mean?

OWL: Omar Khayyam, wasn't it? (*QUETZAL nods.*) Friends, it means time is precious.

ROOSTER: That's right. Stick with the moon, sisters. Crowing up the sun is a man's job. All creatures rely on me. "Here comes the sun.
/ Here comes the sun. / And I say. / It's all right."

Sings lines from the Beatles'/Harrison song, "Here Comes the Sun," or just crows.

NIGHTINGALE: Rooster, you're loud, but you're tone deaf. Completely off key.

PARROT: He's off key. He's off key. He's off key.

WREN: Are we safe here? I'm not comfortable in the jungle. It's too wild.

FALCON: What a coward. We'll take care of you, helpless one.

LARK: I thought Nightingale and Canary sounded lovely. Besides, they can sing in the jungle if they want. There are no rules out here.

CARDINAL: Wait, what about me? I have an exquisite natural voice: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La Ti, Do. Not to mention my striking color and impressive crest. (*Fusses with his crown feathers.*) And I'm not put in cages.

ROOSTER: Red, red, red, red, bor-ing. Now, I suppose Robin's going to brag about her breast. And you call that little fringe a crest. Get serious.

ROBIN: Why not? I'm known all over the world for my color. And beautiful blue eggs.

FLAMINGO: Eat your hearts out. All your colors are common and dull compared to my pink.

PEACOCK: You're all show-offs, going on about your special voices, combs, and colors. You're just jealous and starved for attention. No wonder. Better to be seen than heard.

HAWK: Look, the pot is calling the kettle black. Vanity himself/herself. Is that your perfume? Give us a break.

PEACOCK: It's Givenchy, I'll have you know. Beau Oiseau.

ROOSTER: Blue Wazoo. Smells like toilet water, all right. Look at his chin in the air.

FALCON: Stop your strutting, fop. This isn't a fashion show. Take a seat.

PARROT: Stop your strutting. Stop your strutting.

BUZZARD: And someone put a cork in that twit. Only humans think repeating is cute. It's an-noy-ing Seed Brain.

GOLDFINCH: Can we get on with this meeting? I have business. Time is money.

EAGLE: Look, I still don't know why we're here. What's wrong with things the way they are? Haven't I done a good job as leader? We're richer than ever. We have beautiful big nests and lots of power and influence.

FALCON: The humans respect us and give us all we need. All we have to do is hunt for them.

BUZZARD: Yeah, but you're not free.

FALCON: Look who's talking, the trash man.

BUZZARD: At least I don't depend on humans.

ROADRUNNER: Buzz, I've never seen you refuse what they hit with their cars. You hep?

QUAIL: Well, I have to struggle every day to find food for my brood. And avoid humans. Why do they shoot us? We're so small. We're hardly a mouthful.

CANARY: We have plenty to eat, but humans lock us in cages. And make us sing. Ask Parrot.

MOCKINGBIRD: Maybe that's why he's lost his mind.

DUCK: It's getting harder and harder to avoid the hunters. Their guns are more powerful. I'm the only one left in my family.

PHEASANT: And our habitat is disappearing. It's hard to find a place to live. Development is all around us. Fire, smoke, machines, exhaust. They only want us in pet shops and zoos. Just like they did with their own natives.

HERON: Amen. So they can sell us. The great wetlands to the south have been replaced by homes. And the swamps are polluted.

PELICAN: The fish we catch are often diseased. And we die caught in their litter.

HUMMINGBIRD: Pesticides poison the nectar we sip.

ROOSTER: The humans lock all the hens in little lit cages. I stay clear of them. I roost in the trees.

ROADRUNNER: Yeah, they're nuts, man. They're even destroying deserts. I never thought they'd move there and plant grass. What's with them and grass? Is anybody hep to that?

KINGFISHER: And they clear thousands of acres of rainforest every day. They're dying and killing everyone else. We can't solve these problems alone. We need help from a greater power than Eagle. No offense.

BUZZARD: Yeah, the humans are destroying everything. But what the heck—more food for us buzzards.

PIGEON: I get plenty of their fast food, and I sleep in their concrete buildings. But I'm concerned about the quality of life. We're even losing our instincts. And the young have forgotten the values we were taught.

HAWK: Maybe we have forgotten them.

LARK: What about the spirit of life? The harmony. The bliss of being alive? I was joyful when I was young, but to be honest, I've lost it. What's happened to us?

SPARROW: Yes, we want the good life, not just the rich life or the easy life. All of our people are adapting to the two-leggeds. It's unnatural.

FALCON: Look, happiness is for the young. Adulthood is work, hardship, and misery. Face it.

QUAIL: No, there must be more to life than eating and sleeping and having young. I feel lost, too. Look at us. We're always bickering. We can't even get along. How are we going to stop the humans? How do we reconnect with the Great Spirit?

MOCKINGBIRD: "I feel lost. My life has no meaning." Give me a break. You're born, you mess around, you work, and you die. Cut the soap opera.

HERON: Listen, wise guys. You're getting on my nerves. If you don't have something nice to say, keep quiet or take off. I'm not ashamed to say I'm unhappy. Mother Nature is suffering. Species that need the wild are disappearing. The two-leggeds hate nature, anything wild, even their own instinct. You'd think they didn't have bodies. And we've lost the Spirit. We're becoming as greedy and nasty as the two-leggeds. Let's focus on what we came for. How do we make things better?

OWL: Thank you, Heron. That's the question. We're dissatisfied with ourselves. We see things wrong outside. We feel things wrong inside. But how do we change? How do we reconnect with the Great Spirit? We need help. Quetzal, thank you for hosting us in this unspoiled rain forest. Since the beginning of time, your people have been our sages, priests, and guides. You are the legendary companion and confidant of the holy Quetzalcoatl.

QUETZAL: Not me, my ancestors. That was a thousand years ago. Look, I'm happy you're all here. I never said I had a special connection with Quetzalcoatl. I'm just a poet, a bard. I just know the stories that my parents passed to me.

OWL: We appreciate your humility. But you know much more than we do. Please tell us what you know about Quetzalcoatl.

QUETZAL: In the year 1000 A.D., a thousand years ago, in the Toltec city of Tollan, The Lord of the High Heavens, appeared to three noble sisters in the form of Citlallatonac, the morning. Two of the sisters were frightened, but one, the virgin Chimalman was not. The Holy Presence of the Morning breathed on her, and she later gave birth to a divine son whom she named Quetzalcoatl. Quetzalcoatl could speak when he was born, and he was also endowed with all knowledge and wisdom. When he became a man, he became the priest-king of Tollan, the greatest civilization of the Americas. Most importantly, Quetzalcoatl had the gift of love. He had such pure heart, that the Toltec nation flourished. My ancestors say he was surrounded by light and had a white beard. He wore our feathers, symbolizing he was the caretaker of all that lived. He taught the people of the Americas all the arts of living. He also gave them the calendar and maize. In Tollan, the City of the Sun, he built a grand temple with four radiant wings like the sun's rays: the East was yellow, filled with gold; the South was white, filled with shell and pearls; the West was blue, with turquoise and jade; the North was red, with bloodstone. The peace of his reign extended to the horizon in all directions.

GOLDFINCH: I want to visit the gold rooms. Can you imagine the wealth?

ROADRUNNER: I'll race you there, Daddio.

NIGHTINGALE: You two are crude.

DUCK: How are you going to fly with gold?

EAGLE: I'll lead you there. I'm fearless and mighty.

PARROT: I'm fearless. I'm mighty. I'm fearless. I'm mighty.

LARK: *(Sings a line from the song "Whistle a Happy Tune" from The King and I.)* "Whenever I feel afraid / I hold my beak erect / and whistle a happy tune / and no one ever knows / I'm afraid."

NIGHTINGALE, CANARY, HUMMINGBIRD, SPARROW, WREN, and CARDINAL join for a verse. When DUCK joins, MOCKINGBIRD interrupts.

MOCKINGBIRD: Enough, enough. "Whistle a happy tune / Listen to sappy loons / Blow up some balloons/ behave like stupid goons." Lily-livered idiots.

CARDINAL: We were great until the quacker came in.

WREN: She/he wasn't bad. I liked the earthy quality. Nice counterpoint.

BUZZARD: Just what we need, another bird act. Enough Broadway already.

EAGLE: It's this type of frivolous behavior that gives us a bad name.

LARK: What's wrong with you guys? Lighten up. You're too uptight. And cruel. What do you have against music? We're birds, remember?

HUMMINGBIRD: It was beautiful. I would like to hum along with you more often. We used to sing all the time. The land was alive with song.

FLAMINGO: I can dance along with you.

FLAMINGO moves a little. The birds hum a little Latin melody.

STORK: Hum. You've got something there, Pink. Not bad. Ruffle those feathers. I like it Latin.

PELICAN: What's happening? Did we come to make a musical, or what?

PIGEON: Why not? I've heard a lot worse from those boom boxes.

CANARY: Or those ridiculous cell phones they carry around, with their silly beeps.

QUAIL: I won't complain about those. They give the hunters away.

PEACOCK: Talk about ridiculous. Have you seen their camouflage? Hideous, really.

GOLDFINCH: Hey, listen, I liked the music and dance bit. Let me know if you guys need an agent.

ROADRUNNER: Yo, I'm getting stiff sitting around here. It's square, man. Anybody wanna hit the road? You know, get scarce? Yo, Peacock? Sprint? I got you right. Chicken.

HAWK: Fowl, fowl. Let's get on task. If Quetzalcoatl is the one we need, do we go to Quetzalcoatl, or does he come to us? What's the next step?

ROBIN: I'm busy. I still have plenty of worms to find. Quetzal, ask him to come to us.

PARROT: Ask him to come. Ask him to come.

PARTRIDGE: I agree with Robin. Bring Quetzalcoatl here. I don't like long flights. Besides he's one, and we are many.

SPARROW: Yes, we're many, but Quetzalcoatl is the Son of the Lord of the High Heavens, the one of pure heart, and we are his children. We should go to him.

PHEASANT: But, don't parents serve and sacrifice for their children? Surely, he'll come here to us.

OWL: Fellow winged ones, pardon me. Let's hear more from Quetzal. Quetzal, how do we get there? Where is the City of the Sun? How do we meet Quetzalcoatl?

QUETZAL: He died. The City of the Sun is gone. Sorry. I'm really sorry. I let you down.

QUAIL: We're lost. It's a myth. What will we do?

EAGLE: See, I told you it was a hoax! And we all came like little hatchlings. Fools!

QUETZAL: But, according to the story, he will come again. When he knew the end was near, he departed to the East where the sky, land, and sea come together. He sailed away on a raft made of serpents. When he died, his heart left and appeared four days later as Venus, the morning star. Our forebears believed that he would return again to rule with goodness and love. Some say he left his light in our hearts. But if he did, we lost it.

OWL: Just as our Hopi brothers and sisters say.

MOCKINGBIRD: Sure, sailed away on a raft of serpents. And became the morning star. Ah ha. Tell us another one. We're not all Canaries, Hummingbirds, and Nightingales, you know.

BUZZARD: Come on. What are we, a bunch of suckers? This is a myth. A fairy tale. Kids' stuff.

FALCON: Look, I don't have any complaints. I don't need freedom. The humans scratch my back; I scratch theirs. They give me everything I want. Shelter, food, prestige.

EAGLE: I'm going home. Is anybody coming with me?

EAGLE rises, and some birds start to follow. CROW rises.

CROW: It's true. Everything Quetzal said.

OWL: Sit down. Listen everybody. What did you say, Crow?

PEACOCK: Crow, ha. That disgusting fleabag. Who cares? Let's go.

CARDINAL: What could she know? She spends all her time in that daycare with kids and misfits.

ROADRUNNER: Cats, I'm cutting out, making myself scarce.

WREN: Don't mention felines, please.

HAWK: Sit down, all of you. Close your wings and listen. I was one of those misfits whom Crow took in. And Nightingale, she took you in as an orphan. Hummingbird, she brought you up too. Eagle, she took you in and educated your beautiful wife. Didn't she?

EAGLE: Yes, Grandmother was her only mother and protector.

HAWK: And Cardinal, Pheasant, have you forgotten? You were in Crow's care.

CARDINAL: No, I haven't, though I often don't show it. Grandmother Crow sacrificed everything for us. Many of us would have died or been unloved. She challenged the law of the jungle.

HUMMINGBIRD: Yes, she is my godmother. I owe her my life.

KINGFISHER: We trust her with our most precious gift, our children. Yet we belittle her. We take her goodness for granted. Speak, Grandmother.

CROW: My young friends, Quetzalcoatl lives as the morning star. But he doesn't have to come back; his presence is still here. And you can meet him. If you really want.

FALCON: You're only a dirty old crow. How would you know? Look at her. She's nothing.

PARROT: You're only a crow. How would you know? You're only a crow.

FLAMINGO: Yes, and a very mangy black crow at that. And look at that beat-up beak.

OWL: All of us, all species, equally embody the wonder of the Creator.

CROW stands and opens her wings to reveal a radiant yellow heart with wings over her heart. The birds are astonished.

PARTRIDGE: Oh my gosh, what's that!

PIGEON: It's so bright. It's like a star.

GOLDFINCH: Looks like a neon light gadget to me. It's rigged.

GOLDFINCH goes up to examine it and has to shield his/her eyes.

QUETZAL: It's the sign. Just like the old ones said. Quetzalcoatl's heart with wings. The heart free of hate and filled with love soars. It's the presence of the All-Loving One.

PEACOCK: If you've seen Quetzalcoatl, why didn't you tell us?

DUCK: Why didn't you help us? Why did you wait so long?

CROW: None of you asked. You weren't ready. You didn't miss the spirit of life. You were satisfied with things. You were competing with each other.

PARTRIDGE: What's wrong with things? Beautiful things. They enhance life.

GOLDFINCH: Precious, expensive things. Like my diamond watch.

ROBIN: If you met the Son of the Lord of the High Heavens, you could have anything you want. Why are you so poor and shabby?

EAGLE: Yes, why aren't you rich and famous? How come he didn't give you everything you want? You still live out in that skinny pine tree. And look at your wrinkled skin and ugly feathers. You can hardly fly. And you probably have bugs.

CROW: Quetzalcoatl gave me everything I wished for. I am content to care for your little ones, your orphans, your unwanted. What do you want? If you want pretty or expensive things, or power, or position, don't bother. You won't survive the journey.

OWL: Tell us about the journey. Please, Grandmother.

CROW: When I was young, I was unhappy and bewildered. I flew around the entire world searching for happiness. One night when I roosted on the Quetzalcoatl temple in Teotihuacan, Mexico, I had a dream. I saw Quetzalcoatl, and he showed me the way.

HAWK: Show us the way. Lead us.

CROW: I'm too old. I will tell you the way.

EAGLE: Just tell us, and I'll lead the flock.

CROW: You must lead each other, supporting one another all the way. Those of you who choose to make this difficult journey must continue until you arrive at the goal. You must journey on foot, as pilgrims with nothing but the feathers on your backs. Together, as one, you must traverse five valleys. One for each of the elements: earth, water, fire, air, space.

OWL: Tell us, Grandmother. I'll write everything down.

CROW: On the eve of the Winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, you must gather at the Quetzalcoatl temple in Teotihuacan.

PARTRIDGE: I can't leave all my pretty things. Especially my gem collection. Someone may take them.

NIGHTINGALE: Too far if you ask me.

PARROT: Too far if you ask me. Too far if you ask me.

PELICAN: And very far from the sea.

FLAMINGO: What about shrimp? What will I eat?

STORK: I've got plenty of newborns to deliver.

HAWK: Stop the silly excuses. You're wasting time. Please continue, Crow.

CROW: At midnight the first of five valleys will appear: the Valley of Hope.

FALCON: What is that gobbley gook supposed to mean? This is what you get from a crow. If we know the place and time, we can get there ourselves.

CROW: It means that you are tested with doubt, despair, self-pity. If you pass the Valley of Hope, you enter the Valley of Understanding.

BUZZARD: Heck, we've got Owl. He/she knows about everything.

OWL: I don't think she means facts and ideas, Buzzard. I think she means what we do and why we do it. What comes next, Grandmother Crow?

CROW: The Valley of Humility.

STORK: How are we going to make it through with Peacock?

PEACOCK: Look who's talking. We see you spreading your feathers. Who are you kidding? You and that prissy pink friend of yours. Prima donnas.

FLAMINGO: You're just jealous. Perfect Pink is the one color you don't have. So there.

CANARY: We'll have no problem with humility, will we Hummingbird? We're sweet and unassuming. Right, Sparrow?

EAGLE: This is a test. It's survival of the fittest. You frail birds should stay.

SPARROW: We're small, but we've survived many cold winters up north.

CROW: This is a quest, not a competition. You will fail or succeed together. As a flock. As a species. Humility is seeing how we all have flaws, are foolish, and need to feel special. We fight rather than admit our vulnerability.

STORK: That's pretty deep.

PARROT: That's pretty deep. Pretty deep. Pretty deep.

PELICAN: You're not kidding, Stork. I would like to understand that.

MOCKINGBIRD: You're all like Parrot. You believe everything you're told. What a bunch of suckers.

HAWK: Can you all control yourselves a little longer? That's three. Isn't it, Crow?

CROW: Yes, the fourth valley is the Valley of Love where you're challenged with desire.

KINGFISHER: Tell us about the Valley of Love.

CROW: It's about discovering what you really want.

CANARY: You mean like "Love your neighbor as your self."

CROW: But it's more like loving so much you forget your self. We become what we love.

ROADRUNNER: Grandma, cool it with the riddles.

PARROT: Cool it with the riddles. Cool it with the riddles.

MOCKINGBIRD: I've had it with the moron. I'm not going anywhere with Parrot.

FALCON: Me neither.

BUZZARD: Me neither, Bro.

PEACOCK: Look at you guys. Now who's a copycat.

OWL: Speaking of love. That will be a challenge. What happens next, Grandmother?

CROW: The Valley of Oneness, of Unity.

STORK: That's way over my head. I don't get it.

WREN: I'm confused.

FALCON: That's what she trying to do confuse us. It's a bunch of worthless philosophy.

CROW: Let's say Quetzalcoatl is the light of sun, the rays of the Lord of Heaven. That would mean he was the same as the sun, one with the sun, and yet different from the sun. I'm afraid explanations won't help.

PELICAN: Wait a minute. You mean like we can see the ocean as one or a collection of waves.

ROADRUNNER: I dig it. Far out. It's like the dunes in the desert.

CROW: Yes.

HERON: I know what you're talking about. I've seen that. It's a shift in focus.

QUETZAL: And if we see Quetzalcoatl as the sun, we could be his light, his rays. And we could be seen as one with him.

OWL: Should we know anything else?

CROW: If you experience Unity, you enter the Abode of Abundance, the court of the Feathered Serpent.

FLAMINGO: Abundance. Like stars in the universe.

NIGHTINGALE: And all these treasures are the abundance. All the waves of the ocean and all the stars of the heavens. Infinite. Is this the Great Spirit?

CROW: Yes, that which bore all suns and all beings.

PARTRIDGE: Great, free stuff. We'll have everything, as much as we want? Sign me up.

DUCK: It's not stuff; it's spiritual treasure, Greedy. Metaphors.

MOCKINGBIRD: Look who's talking bread belly. You're so stuck on stuff, you can't walk straight. You mean, "Give me more. Give me more." When did you get spiritual?

HAWK: Fowl!

CROW: At dawn on the day of the returning sun, Quetzalcoatl will appear. You will emerge just south of Chapultepec.

LARK: Wow, I've always dreamed of going there. I've read about the holy sites since I was a fledgling.

CROW: You have a little time to decide who wants to go.

OWL: Yes, it's already mid-December.

HAWK: The doubters and complainers can go home and roost with the humans.

SPARROW: I can see us now, all colors, sizes, and shapes, flying across the sky. Incredible.

HUMMINGBIRD: Like a magic carpet.

DUCK: Or a quilt, or a cloak made of many different patches!

ROADRUNNER: Hey, like can one of you cats give me a ride? I don't dig flying.

BUZZARD: Stop whining. Suck it up, Weirdo.

OWL: Yes, and you, Quetzal, should lead us, following the directions of Crow.

QUETZAL: I don't want to lead. Choose Hawk or Eagle. They are much stronger.

EAGLE: I'm ready.

CROW: Quetzal, you will be a good leader because you do not want to lead. It is your path. Your ancestors have kept the dream alive. Owl will guide you, and Hawk will protect you. Each bird will contribute his/her special gift to the caravan of wings. I shall support you from here. And look for you in dreams. Remember, brothers and sisters, be sincere. You have nothing to prove to each other. You can inspire each other, but you can't do the work of another. You are traveling alone together. But you must arrive at the temple by midnight on the eve of the solstice. Find yourselves, find each other in yourselves, and find the Feathered One of Pure Heart that never really left.

FALCON: Doesn't anyone understand that? How can we follow that?

ROADRUNNER: Yeah, I still don't dig it, ol' lady. No disrespect.

GOLDFINCH: I'm with Falcon and Buzzard. How much does it cost? What is a pure heart worth? You're all ready to run off on a wild-goose chase. Anybody wanna make a wager?

PIGEON: Right. It sounds noble, but are we risking our lives on poetry? Does anyone have a pretzel? Popcorn? Some fries. I love fast food. At least I admit it. A candy bar?

NIGHTINGALE: Crow, it's beautiful. Romantic. Paradoxical. Idealistic. I'll follow you, Quetzal.

KINGFISHER: Some of you have been around humans too much. You've lost your intuition. Some of you, even your instinct. You're stuck in your brains like the two-leggeds.

LARK: It's the language of the heart. I'm ready to find out for myself. I've been waiting my whole life for a real adventure that stirs every part of me. I'd rather die seeking truth than go on following the flock. I'm with you.

QUETZAL: Well comrades, with your support, I accept. Let's eat and rest. Then those who believe Grandmother Crow and need Quetzalcoatl will fly to the temple at Teotihuacan as a flock of many species. Or as our poetic friends said, a magic carpet or patched cloak. *(Sees CROW leaving the circle and calls to her.)* Grandmother, you're leaving.

CROW: I must return to the little ones. The thunderbird's coming from the west; the smell is in the air. You must leave before it gets here.

QUETZAL: Grandmother, we honor you and thank you. Can you tell us more before you go? Is there something else we should know?

CROW: Maybe, my children. You won't be able to fly once you enter the first valley. Not until you reach Chapultepec.

PARTRIDGE: If we reach it.

PIGEON: My legs are too short.

ROBIN: Look who's talking.

Small birds compare their short legs. Others grumble.

NIGHTINGALE: I'll never make it.

EAGLE: You've sure changed your tune quick.

OWL: Quiet, friends. We have to walk all the way like two-leggeds? Grandmother, this is quite a handicap.

QUETZAL: It's our gift from the Great Spirit?

CROW: True. Sometimes our greatest gift is our greatest handicap. Maybe it's because of what we do, fly from our problems. Escape what we don't want to take responsibility for. I must go. Good luck children. May the Great Spirit bless you all. For the sake of our species and all our relatives. Even the two-leggeds.

Lights dim. Curtain closes.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO, SCENE 1

NARRATOR: After the birds share food, talk, and rest, all decide to follow Quetzal. Together they fly to the ancient temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan in search of the spirit of life. A week later they arrive, tired, excited, and anxious, on the darkest and longest night of the year. On the advice of Crow, Quetzal asks the birds to form five smaller groups in case they are separated in the forthcoming darkness. Quetzal asks Hawk, Kingfisher, Lark, and Pheasant to lead the other groups. Quetzal will lead the fifth.

QUETZAL: Well, comrades we made it this far. It's almost midnight.

OWL: Great Grandmother moon is so bright.

HAWK: Maybe too bright. Chirp softly. We can't let the guards find us.

QUETZAL: Crow said we should form smaller groups in case we become lost and separated. If we do get separated, make sure you stay with your groups. I would like Hawk, Kingfisher, Lark, and Pheasant to be the other four leaders. We need five birds with each of the other leaders. And three birds to join Owl and I. We're saving a spot for Grandmother Crow. She's traveling with us in spirit. That's all I know. We have no map.

HAWK: If you want to be with Hawk, hop over here.

KINGFISHER: Kingfisher's over here.

LARK: If you want to group with me, I'm here.

PHEASANT: Well guys, it can't be this hard. Who else wants to go with me?

SPARROW: It's like we're fledglings again.

WREN: Yes, it's like summer camp.

EAGLE: I should be a leader. Why am I not a leader? Everybody knows I'm a leader. This is ridiculous.

The sky/set gradually darkens.

WREN: What's happening?

PARTRIDGE: Where's the moon going? What's going on, Quetzal?

PIGEON: We're going to die. We're going to die.

FALCON: It's cloud cover, scaredy cats.

PARROT: We're going to die; it's cloud cover. Scaredy cats. Scaredy cats.

QUAIL: Cats? Where? I can hardly see. I don't go out at night.

SPARROW: Don't listen to Parrot. They're not any cats up on the temple.

EAGLE: Sure, I can see them roaming all over the temple. Would you like a snack?

PIGEON: Carnivore.

FALCON: You're lucky we don't eat you.

PARTRIDGE: Disgusting raptors.

EAGLE: Nobody would notice in the dark.

FLAMINGO: Funny. Bullies. Heron are you here?

HERON: Right behind you. They have a sick sense of humor. They're immature.

FLAMINGO: I don't trust them. I've never seen it so dark before.

QUETZAL: Just stay together. It's an eclipse.

GOLDFINCH: It's a bad omen.

CARDINAL: I told you we should have flown home.

OWL: The earth is blocking the light of the sun. Just stay with your groups.

WREN: Quetzalcoatl is going to kill us all. It's the end of time.

PELICAN: Nonsense. Who told you that? He's all-loving. Just like the Lord of the High Heavens.

QUAIL: I'm holding somebody's wing. Who is it?

STORK: It's me dear, Stork. I'm right behind Hawk. Is this the group you want?

HAWK: I've never seen the night so dark. Those with me, take each other's wing.

QUETZAL: Don't panic everyone. This too will pass. Stay close together but relax. Look how beautiful the stars are!

NIGHTINGALE: They're so close I can touch them.

SPARROW: Look. Did you see it? A falling star.

Darkness falls. Curtain closes. HAWK, SPARROW, GOLDFINCH, PELICAN, NIGHTINGALE, and ROAD RUNNER return to stage.

END OF SCENE.

ACT TWO, SCENE 2

NARRATOR: The birds become separated in the darkness. The birds in Hawk's group, Sparrow, Goldfinch, Pelican, Nightingale, and Road Runner, find themselves in the Valley of Hope, in a maze of caves underneath the earth.

NIGHTINGALE: Where are we? The stars are gone. I will die without my soul mate.

HAWK: Remember how inspired you were--we all were. It's just the unknown. Sparrow, Goldfinch, Pelican, Nightingale, and Road Runner. Are we all here? *(They all answer.)* Good.

ROADRUNNER: This is no valley, man. Smell that? Dig it, we're underground.

PELICAN: Oh, no. I love underwater. But I've never been underground.

HAWK: We're in a cave, maybe several caves. Do you see any openings?

SPARROW: Sort of. Maybe. What do we do? Where do we go? We can't just perch here. We were supposed to be in a valley.

NIGHTINGALE: Maybe the valleys aren't literal. What's that sound? You don't think rats are down here. I hate rats.

SPARROW: Or bats. They give me the creeps.

PELICAN: Something went wrong. I don't like it down here. How do we get back?

HAWK: Where's Goldfinch? Goldfinch!

ROADRUNNER: Like, that's probably Finch rustling over there, man. Unless it's Godzilla rat.

HAWK: Goldfinch, is that you? Please come back with us. What are you doing?

GOLDFINCH: Hunting for treasure. Thieves always hide treasure in caves. I have a real beak for riches. Heck, there might be a gold mine down here. I don't know about you, but this picnic is costing me big bucks.

HAWK: That's not what we're looking for.

ROADRUNNER: Like, what are we looking for, cats?

NIGHTINGALE: Crow said, "Find Yourselves." We're looking for ourselves.

GOLDFINCH: That makes no sense. We all know ourselves. Besides, how does that get us out of here? Or do we just sit like vegetables? Some valley. I told you not to believe that old bag of feathers.

ROADRUNNER: Chill out, Finchie. Let me just zip down around and tell you what's out there. Cats, I'll be back in no time.

HAWK: Whatever we do, we must do together. Besides we can't see past our wings.

GOLDFINCH: We're not lost. We just don't know where we are. I'm going to prospect around.

SPARROW: All I know is that this is not a valley.

HAWK: Let's go with Nightingale's suggestion. She's the artist among us. The intuitive one. What Goldfinch said was interesting. We're not lost. We just don't know where we are. Let's assume we are where we are supposed to be. We have no choice. This is the valley, the challenge.

PELICAN: Okay. But how do we get out?

ROADRUNNER: Can I just zip around? Like, maybe there's some grub, Daddios.

SPARROW: What if we don't have to go anywhere?

GOLDFINCH: What? Idiotic.

PELICAN: We're lost. I don't get it. I'm going to die down here, with these subterranean creatures. Me, a water fowl, a creature of the sea.

ROADRUNNER: I'm with you, Big Bill. I dig what you're putting down. I give up. My stomach's in knots. I'm not dying lying down, eaten by rats and bats.

SPARROW: Don't talk about those beasts. Will you please? I've had bad experiences.

HAWK: Maybe Sparrow's got something. Let's think out of the box. The solution's always in the problem. This I know. The problem will suggest the answer.

GOLDFINCH: Now you're talking like those flaky poets. Why should we follow you, Hawk? Because you're bigger? I'm worth twice as much as you are.

NIGHTINGALE: Because he's concerned about us. Not money. Not bats. Not food. Not rats. Not death. The answer is in the question.

ROADRUNNER: Did you lift that from some poem, Soprano? Sorry, I'm cool. I'm cool. What's next?

HAWK: Let's stop thinking and chatting. Let's follow up on what Finch said. Let's sit down together and get to know this place we don't know. Let's cool it, as Roadrunner would say. We have nothing to lose.

NIGHTINGALE: What appears to be a damp, dirty, dark cave could be something else. A garden. Poetically speaking.

SPARROW: You mean the way. The passage through the valley. Like a fairy tale. Life's tough, but magic happens.

GOLDFINCH: Like when Jack meets the funny man with the magic beans, climbs the stalk, and takes back the goose that lays the golden eggs.

HAWK: Okay, let's relax, stop thinking, and listen to our instincts.

SPARROW: Stop tickling, Roadrunner.

Time passes in silence as they concentrate on their senses.

HAWK: What did you pick up?

NIGHTINGALE: A waterfall just came to me in my mind's eye. And a stream. And marshes.

ROADRUNNER: Cats, I'm hip. I'm feeling vibes on the ground.

SPARROW: I heard the faint twittering of wings. Like waves. Unless I'm imagining.

PELICAN: Salt. There's salt somewhere. Maybe it's a salt mine.

GOLDFINCH: That has possibilities.

NIGHTINGALE: But did you notice anything?

GOLDFINCH: A chill. There's a draft.

HAWK: Hmm. Okay, so does it tell us anything? We have some water images.

GOLDFINCH: We're nuts.

ROADRUNNER: No, cool your jets, man. This is cool.

SPARROW: The sounds seem to be over there, behind you and Finch.

HAWK: Okay, let's send our radar over there.

PELICAN: I think I feel that draft Finch was talking about.

HAWK: Let's move over there slowly.

GOLDFINCH: I can hear that twittering. Maybe it's the bats.

NIGHTINGALE: It's definitely cooler over here.

HAWK: And a subtle change of light. Do you see it?

SPARROW: Maybe. Does anybody else smell salt?

ROADRUNNER: Definitely, dudes. Like the Salt Flats or the Great Salt Lake from far away.

PELICAN: Now I see. Look at all those bats! My god, they're like waves!

HAWK: In and out. In and out. Is that the pounding of a waterfall?

PELICAN: Oh, that's a wonderful sound for a sailor. I see shadows.

The group approaches an opening.

ROADRUNNER: Man, look, a sunset's out there. Like, the bats are passing overhead into the sky.

SPARROW: And what a sky. I love the sky. They led us out. And I was so scared of them.

NIGHTINGALE: Wow, what a waterfall. And the last light of the sun. So beautiful.

GOLDFINCH: Yeah, and look at all the ponds, rivers, and swamps stretching to the horizon.

ROADRUNNER: It's pretty, but I don't do well with water.

HAWK: Thank you, friends. Let's rest here by the waterfall.

Light fades out. HAWK group exits. KINGFISHER group assembles.

END OF SCENE.



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