

## **Bird of Power Intertribal**

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**Narrator I**

**Narrator II**

**Helen (dying mom)**

**John (oldest son)**

**Ernest (youngest son)**

**Uncle**

**Uncle's Wife**

**Uncle's Daughter**

**Narrator I:** Getting Helen to the hospital had not been easy. She was a big hard woman and a stubborn one, and she did not want to go. In the second place, since she lived in the city and not on the lands allotted to her by the government, she was not qualified to enter a United States Public Health hospital. She ordered her sons to leave her at home to die.

**Narrator II:** But when the intervals of consciousness grew shorter, Helen's sons decided to defy her, and to move her to the city hospital. They had never defied their mother before in their lives.

**Helen:** Don't move me, John. You're my first born. Listen to your mother. Let me stay at home. Get the peyote doctor for me. Only my own religion can make me well again.

**John:** No, mom. You need to be in the hospital. Let us take you there; they'll take care of you.

**Helen:** I won't go! You don't dare to move me! Get me the peyote doctor or I'll put a curse on you – I'll curse you and your wife and children. None of you will ever know what peace is again. Get me the peyote doctor, or that's what I'll do!

**Narrator I:** But she was unconscious again the next second, and the brothers, standing beside her bed, looked at each other questioningly.

**Ernest:** Perhaps we should do what she says.

**John:** No. That's superstition, that talk about peyote and curses and witching. The one thing they tell us over and over again at Government school is that those old ways are gone. They don't mean anything anymore. What counts is if you can fix a television set.

**Ernest:** Let's do what she says. I don't want to disobey her.

**John:** I'm the one she said she'd put the curse on. I say we ought to put her in the station wagon now, while she doesn't know what's happening, and take her to the hospital.

**Narrator II:** On the trip Helen wakened, and when she realized where she was and where they were taking her, the two strong men could hardly hold her in the car.

Helen: Curse you! You'll be sorry for this! I'll make you sorry – I'll make you wish you'd done as I said.

Narrator I: Once she was at the hospital, Helen quieted down. Perhaps it was the shots the nurses gave her to ease her pain. She even thanked the nurses and doctors for taking care of her, and smiled forgiveness at her sons. They began to think they'd done the right thing.

Narrator II: One of them was with her at all times. As Helen grew, the nurses put a cot in the room, and whichever brother was staying that night slept in her room.

Narrator I: One morning Helen opened her eyes, and looked directly at Ernest.

Helen: You thought you all fooled me, that last night at home. You thought I was sleeping and didn't know what you said. Maybe the things I believe in *are* superstition. Maybe all that counts is fixing television sets. But hear what I tell you. When I am dead, *never* use my tipi again. Give away my ceremonial things – feathers and beads and scissortail fan I use when I pray – everything – to your uncle. And burn my tipi. You won't mind doing it. It's all just superstition to you. The old ways don't mean anything as far as you're concerned. Do as I say. Don't disobey me again.

Narrator II: That night Helen died. Her sons placed her gently in the car again, and took her home, so the women of the clan could prepare her for burial.

Narrator I: When the women were busy and the men had gathered in the yard of the house, Ernest went indoors, and when he came out he was carrying Helen's fan and beads. He held them out to his uncle.

Ernest: Here, uncle, she wanted you to have these.

Uncle: Thank you. What did she want us to do about her tipi?

Ernest: She told me to burn that. She said no other woman should own it. A tipi always belongs to a woman.

Uncle's Wife: That's a good tipi. It's a shame to burn it. I wouldn't mind having it myself.

Uncle: Leave it alone. She said she would burn it so no other woman should have it. People die the way they live. She would have burned it if she were living, and we should burn it now that she's dead.

Narrator II: But his wife didn't give up easily. She had her heart set on owning Helen's fine white canvas tipi, and that was that. In the end she had her way.

Uncle: We can use the tipi for the funeral service. After that we can decide what to do about it.

Ernest: She told me to burn it.

Uncle: We'll hold the funeral service in it and then we can make up our minds.

**Narrator I:** John agreed to the plan. At last Ernest gave up and went along with his uncle and brother. He didn't want any quarreling in the family.

**Narrator II:** It took all day to send word to the other members of the Native American Church to come to the all-night funeral service and the feast that would follow. Everybody came. Few people had really liked Helen, but in their own ways they had respected and feared her. They would not stay away from a ceremony given in her honor.

**Narrator I:** The next day dawned and the morning water needed to be brought into the peyote tipi by a woman. The uncle's wife rose and her daughter followed her out, for it was the young woman who would carry the bucket. All of a sudden there was a whir of wings and moving air brushed their faces as a bird flew between them.

**Daughter (fearfully):** What was that?

**Uncle's Wife:** Don't be afraid, daughter. You haven't done anything wrong. It won't hurt you.

**Daughter:** It's Aunt Helen's spirit!

**Uncle's Wife:** Aunt Helen wouldn't hurt you. You were always nice to her, and she was nice to you. She could be mean; she was as wild as a scissortail. But she wouldn't hurt you.

**Daughter:** Look!

**Narrator II:** A bird was flying around the tipi, as if seeking a way in. It was a scissor-tailed flycatcher, beating its head and wings against the canvas.

**Uncle's Wife:** That's where Ernest is sitting. She's hitting Ernest's back!

**Daughter:** Ernest promised his mother he'd burn her tipi. She wants to punish him.

**Uncle's Wife:** Maybe. We can't be sure.

**Narrator I:** Later that day, the men came out of the tipi, throwing the door flaps wide.

**Ernest:** Look at my back, auntie.

**Uncle's Wife:** It's all black and blue! Look! There's that bird again!

**Narrator II:** They all looked as the bird flew into the open tipi and out again.

**Uncle:** Perhaps she's satisfied now. Put the food on the tables. We'll all feel better when we've had something to eat.

**Narrator I:** The women served the food, and the men filled their plates. At first eating was difficult, but presently they began to taste the food, and then to enjoy it. For a moment companionship wiped away fear and sorrow.

**Narrator II: But suddenly, a bowl of chicken stew from the niece's hands as she stared at the tipi.**

**Daughter: Fire! Fire!**

**Narrator II: By the time they reached the tipi, it was gone. Only a huddle of blazing tipi poles piled across the altar and the fireplace remained. The scissortail shot upward before their eyes.**