

**Sacrifice**  
**(Or, How The Bird Queen was Born)**

**Place:** Cherokee territory in what is now Georgia in the United States.

*Unole (“Ooo-no-lay”) and her father Askai are Cherokees running from a tribe of Birdmen. Askai has just killed one of the Birdmen, Suli, in order to get Unole back (she was unhappily married to Suli). Suli’s tribe saw the crime and are pursuing the pair. At lights up, Unole and Askai run into a forest clearing in what is otherwise a dense and disorienting forest. We hear birds screeching and the cracking of branches.*

Askai

Come over here, Unole! Over here!

Unole

Yes, Father.

*Askai and Unole, breathless, crouch near a tree, looking off from where they entered. She has the cat-like agility of someone who lives in the forest; he is more like a wild dog, a hunter. Askai creeps forward, his hackles up and his muscles bulging; he’s holding a knife.*

Askai

They are caught near the gulch. We have time to breathe here for a little while. Breathe, Unole.

Unole

Yes, Father. We mustn’t stay too long. They will find us soon...

Askai

Silence!

*Unole rushes over to him and desperately hugs his arm.*

Unole

Thank you, Father! Thank you for saving me!

*Askai sheaths his knife, and turns on her, raging and growling.*

Askai

Thank you? Why are you thanking me, child? Why did you drive me to that when you know how careful I have been?

Unole

I... drove you to...?

Askai

Yes! You forced me to kill your husband *who was a Birdman!* I have killed a member of the

*Birdman tribe, you stupid child!*

Unole

The Birdmen are not the bird god that was in the prophecy...

Askai

How do you know that, Unole? Spirit works in ways we cannot imagine!

Unole

They are men! My husband was in the tribe of Birdmen, yes, but he was only a man! The prophecy foretold *the god of the birds* spilling your blood... not a man!

Askai

How can you be so foolish, Unole? These men are the birds in the prophecy; I can feel it... The prophecy has been set in motion... and as of today, no one in our tribe is safe.

Unole

Well then, let's go. We will run home faster than we have ever run, and we will make sure no one is hurt, as we have for all these years. Our tribe will be safe! Please! Let's go home to Mother! Let's run!

*Music begins.*

Askai

IF WE RUN, IF WE MAKE IT HOME, DO YOU THINK THEY'LL ALL JUST FORGET?  
THEY WON'T REST 'TIL THEIR KNIVES ARE DRIPPING WET.

Unole

FATHER, YOU'RE SCARING ME!

Askai

TWENTY YEARS, I HAVE RUN FROM DEATH, FROM A SPIRIT LONG OVERDUE...  
WE CAN'T REST TIL THE PROPHECY COMES TRUE.

Unole

FATHER, YOU ARE AFRAID.  
I'M YOUR CHILD, YOUR BLOOD.  
FATHER, THINK HOW WE'VE PRAYED,  
IF WE PRAY NOW... WE'D--

Askai

*You are my blood?* The prophecy said I must face my blood spilling... But perhaps it meant my blood in you... you have committed an unforgivable act, Unole...

*Askai focuses with the eyes of a hunter on Unole. Unole begins backing away.*

Unole

Father. No.

Askai

YOU, UNOLE, IT'S YOU THEY WANT NOW, THE WIFE WHO DARED DISOBEY.  
YOU'RE THE REASON HE'S DEAD! NOW, YOU'RE THE PREY.

*She breaks away.*

Unole  
Please!  
Askai  
ALL THESE YEARS, WE'VE BEEN SO AFRAID OF THIS BIRD GOD WE COULDN'T SEE...  
ALL THESE YEARS, HE'S BEEN HUNTING YOU, NOT ME!  
Unole  
PLEASE, DON'T TALK THIS WAY!  
Askai  
SACRIFICE!  
Unole  
NO!  
Askai  
SACRIFICE!  
Unole  
LISTEN TO YOURSELF!  
Askai  
FOR THE GOOD OF OUR PEOPLE, YES! YOU MUST MAKE THIS SACRIFICE!

*Another crack of branches. Askai flinches and unsheathes his knife. They are facing each other, even circling each other.*

Unole  
THIS IS NOT FOR THE GOOD OF OUR PEOPLE.  
Askai  
THE PROPHECY FORETOLD SPILLING MY BLOOD...  
Unole  
THIS IS NOT FOR THE GOOD OF OUR PEOPLE, FATHER.  
Askai  
YOU ARE MY BLOOD, UNOLE. YOU ARE MY BLOOD.

Unole  
I DON'T RECOGNIZE YOU, FATHER!  
Askai  
SACRIFICE!  
MY HEART'S POUNDING IN MY CHEST.  
WE MUST GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT.  
I CANNOT OUTFRAN YOU, FATHER

THEY WILL HUNT US...

WHEN IT SEEMS YOU ARE POSSESSED

THEY WILL KILL US,

BY THIS NEED TO...

AND I NEED TO...

SACRI--

SACRI--

*Loud bird sound. Unole goes to flee, but Askai is too quick. He physically pins Unole down, and hacks off her arms. Then, he stabs her in the chest to kill her. He lets out a guttural, barking sob as she crumples. He looks to where the Birdmen are coming fast.*

Askai

There! There's my sacrifice! My blood is spilled, God of the Birds! The prophecy is fulfilled!

*He runs wildly off stage. Music continues. Lights close in on Unole's body. Bird sound becomes more peaceful. Three Birdmen enter, weapons drawn. They see Unole and approach her. They surround her. The lights fade to blue as they carefully create wings where Unole's arms were. They lift her to standing as bird sound and music swell. Suddenly, they thrust her upward and the lighting wipes quickly up to black out. Bird sound overwhelms the stage. In blackout:*

Unole (V.O. in a birdlike voice)

Father!