



1774

*Ohio Country*

WHATEVER IT WAS THEY WERE GOING TO FIND—whatever it was they would one day be—waited for them below the ice. Tecumseh and his two brothers stood naked, shivering on the riverbank. They huddled together for warmth. Up before dawn, their father had marched them to where Massie's Creek fed the Little Miami River, reminding them the entire way how much had changed since he was a boy.

"Maybe my sons wear trousers and linsey shirts like white children," he said, "but some things remain the same. Now you are six years old, you need to find your pawawka tokens, as I did long ago. Certain things make us Shawnee, and these will never change."

Tecumseh hopped back and forth. Frosted grass crunched beneath his feet. His breath came in short, anxious bursts, visible in the breaking light. His father, draped in heavy bearskin, stood with arms crossed, a switch in hand. Ice lined the bank, and the river current slogged against the freeze.

He was the oldest by minutes, and he was first to feel his father's switch against his back. The pain was brief but amplified by the cold: it stung worse than it should have.

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But he did not wait. He bolted for the water. When his feet hit, he sunk past his ankles through the slush. He plunged on and soon was waist-deep, breaking up the ice with his knees. The frigid slash of the water against his chest emptied his mind and strangled his breath in his throat.

The hope was that the pawawka token would find him, as a kind of sign. The token would be a clue for what his life would be after this. Though he knew that at the bottom of the river lived the Great Horned Snake, he was not afraid. Half the stories about drownings and deathly tides were just tales the older boys made up to frighten children—or so he told himself. He set his teeth and folded his hands above his head and dove.

Underwater was silence. He could see nothing in the darkness. He stretched out his hands to the river bottom, warm and slick. He grabbed two fistfuls of muck and then kicked hard toward the surface. Breeching, he saw the current had carried him downstream. He struggled against it, fists clenched, kicking, and swam back to shore, the jumpy silhouettes of his brothers guiding him in.

On the riverbank again he collapsed and coughed up water. His father draped a blanket over him, but still he could not keep his teeth from chattering. His father knelt and brushed ice slivers from his eyebrows and ran fingers through his straight, dark hair, shaking out the water so it would not harden.

"Show me what you brought up from the river bottom," his father said.

Tecumseh felt his breath draw even. He felt the ground

beneath him and the flat, white sky above, the cold in his limbs and eyes. All were one: he didn't know where his body ended and the sky began. He didn't think he could unpeel his frozen arms from where he kept them clutched at his side for warmth. But he produced two trembling fists. His father uncurled the fingers, one by one, and Tecumseh watched closely because the fingers did not feel like his own.

His right hand held only river crud. But opening his left revealed a marbled stone. Small and square, it radiated heat. He felt its warmth spread from his fingertips past his wrist and up his arm.

"Quartz," his father said.

The mineral's warmth spread as far as his shoulder. His arm tingled and throbbed as feeling returned. He held the quartz to his eye. The stone revealed many colors: blurs of deep red swirled with a color of yellow deeper than the corn at harvest. White flecks sparkled in the sunlight now pouring through the empty trees. The longer he examined the stone, the more colors he saw. And they seemed to shift or trade places with one another, first more red than yellow, then so much yellow he thought it would run from the edges of the stone and soak the earth.

"This is your pawawka token," his father said. "Keep it close. It will protect you."

But the second brother, Rattle, believed in the Great Horned Snake that lived at the bottom of the river. He refused to jump. Even when his father hit him with the switch, and then again, he whimpered and shook his head

and rubbed his eyes with his fists. He said the snake was waiting for him. He said the snake would pull him under and he would drown.

"Where is your pride? Your self-respect?" Their father was furious. "How will you ever take my place as war chief?"

The switch fell, again and again. Its sound was crisp as a shot on the frozen river. Tecumseh flinched each time, wishing his brother would get on with it.

Finally Rattle stumbled knock-kneed toward the water, hands outstretched as if groping against the dark. His eyes were shut and his fleshy mass quivered, mottled by the cold. His back was inflamed by lashes. The fat rolls above his knees smacked together with a kind of wet, mucking sound. He hit the water; he hurled himself into it. But he hadn't forged deep enough. Instead he tumbled in the shallow current, breaking up the slush. On his knees now he tried to plunge his head below water. Then he rolled onto his back to cover himself as bits of river-bottom, the green, oily tendrils of fungus and mire, clung to his arms and back and buttocks. He splashed and thrashed like a netted fish.

"Go deeper," Tecumseh called, feeling shame for and because of him. "You haven't gone deep enough."

But Rattle was no kind of swimmer. Their father took two steps into the water and hauled him onto shore. The boy wept and shivered. He coughed and sputtered on his knees, cupping his private parts, the sad mass of him shaking.

"Show me your hands," their father said.

Rattle opened his hands but there was nothing inside them, not even mud. His father put his foot against the boy's flank and kicked him. He groaned and flipped onto his back but he did not rise. He only lay there weeping as their father snapped his fingers and motioned for the third brother to enter the water.

Open Door did not need the switch. Before their father could strike, he walked calmly into the river. Once he was waist-deep, he paused to look back at them. He turned toward his reflection in the broken pieces of ice and then looked back at them again.

"Is this me?" His arms hung at his sides. "Is this really me?"

Tecumseh knew his brother imagined he was like all the other boys. But their mother, Methotaske, had said that in her womb she knew there was a difference among them: that two had moved together while isolating the third. How Tecumseh had come first, then Rattle, bawling, and finally Open Door, small and squirming and silent, his skin so blue they could almost see through him. They had to pinch his toes to make him cry. Even then the sound was pitiful, weaker than a mewling kitten.

"Put your hands in the water," their father told him.

But Open Door was weeping now, chin quivering. Round tears rolled down his face.

"Is this me?" he asked again. "Can this really be me?"

He had never seen himself before. And now he faced his reflection in the ice. Tecumseh knew what the ice revealed: a long, narrow head, his forehead too broad, his

left eye hanging below his right. A clot of spittle clung to the corner of his lip.

The river revealed everyone for who they were. Tecumseh knew this—it was the power of the Great Horned Snake. Some considered it evil, but it had also given the blackest, most potent medicines to the shamans. The river reminded the boy that there was evil in the world, and there always would be. He could either learn to live with it and try to control it, or placate it with offerings. Many things in life were not strictly good or bad, and the river was one.



The brothers could recite the story of their birth. Methotaske had told it to them many times. How on the night a comet appeared, a white flash bridged the southern tree line to the silhouette of the hills. The Shawnee capitol was consumed by light as the first child emerged, barking and gasping, pushing his way out of his mother's womb. And his father, in great excitement, swept the shriveled infant in his arms and swore it was a sign. "We will name him Tecumseh," he said. "The Great Panther Moving across the Sky."

But Tecumseh's birth brought no relief to Methotaske. The labor pains went on. She grimaced and clenched her teeth while the midwife plunged her hands again between the mother's knees. Moments later she resurfaced, clutching a second child, this one rounder and meatier than the

first and louder, too—he had lungs like the whistle of a steam engine. Everyone in Chillicothe heard his cries. Packs of dogs stopped to cower and to howl. The child's face was swallowed by his scream. He held his fists by his ears and shook them. They named him *Tenskwatawa*—the Rattle.

Even as Methotasse's thoughts were absorbed by the wailing infants in her arms, she felt a new stirring below as her muscles clenched, weakly, against a third delivery. The sweat cooled on her arms and legs and she made a small noise and the third child was born—a third boy who emerged silent and nearly still, giving only the smallest, involuntary shiver against the sudden fresh air, shaking out his cramped legs.

The midwife slapped this child's behind and finally it let out a pitiful mew, a helpless sound of surrender. He was half the weight of his brothers and so pale that Methotasse could see his veins and below those his organs and bones as if through a thin sheet of ice. She named him *Sauwaseeku*, the Open Door.

The rhythm of Chillicothe then, the many pots and kettles set boiling outside the wigwams. The impromptu games among the men; a space in the afternoon set aside for tobacco. The brothers swaddled and strapped flat to their boards and carried everywhere Methotasse went—gardening, cooking, washing clothes in the creek. At night, while the town sang and danced, the children were set upright on their boards in a spot away from the fire, where the shadows cast by the dancing men fell across

them, where the thrum of the water drum shook their still-soft bones, while the fire burned and the flames leapt.



Returning from the river, the brothers warmed themselves beneath bearskins. Their father sat shaving the bark from a short, plump stick and working the point of his knife into the wood flesh to hollow out its middle. The boys had sticks of their own, young saplings, and they peeled back the bark and scraped at the green underskin with their fingernails. It was rare for their father to spend so much time with them, but then he was leaving soon.

"Why do you go?" Tecumseh asked.

"There is a war," he said. "The Shawnee must again choose sides."

He explained how white settlers from Virginia were pushing far down the Ohio River, further and further each year. That together with the Mingos, the Shawnee would try to stop them. That if the settlers came too far downriver, the Shawnee way of life would be no more.

"And our way of life is sacred," Rattle said. It was something they'd heard from their father many times. "The best way of life."

"It's the only way of life," he said. "Or the only way of life I'm interested in, anyway."

He told them how before they were born, there had been a different war. The Shawnee had been on the losing side, not by any fault of their own, but because the French

had not helped as they had promised. The British, as victors, demanded the tribes return all their white prisoners, including the women and children.

"This was very difficult." He put the stick to his mouth and blew. Wood shavings blasted from the other end. "Many of the white women had been with us for years. They had children with Shawnee men. And most of all, they had come to love our way of life. How our women are seen as equals."

The tribes had brought hundreds of white prisoners to the appointed place, where the Tuscarawas met the Muskingum River. So many that the British were overwhelmed. There was much weeping and sadness on the banks that morning as the women said goodbye to their children. As white children, who had been taken by the Shawnee as infants, screamed and fought and had to be carried onto the waiting boats and hauled away.

"I learned our way of life was unique among men." Their father put his lips to the hollow stick. When he covered the bottom hole and then uncovered it, quickly, his hands moving like the slow flapping of wings, there was a low and wavering whistle. "It is worth fighting for."



Springtime. The sense of having put winter behind them. The quality of daylight in the afternoon: the hills ran with it. Something buttery in the air that Tecumseh could sift through his teeth. Everything trembled with life. A feeling

in his heart, swollen and wobbly, like a cup that had been filled to the brim. A slightly sick feeling in his belly. The possibilities of life opening up.

On a nearby hill hung a thick vine that was knotted somewhere far up in the branches, too high to see. But there was slack to the vine, and the brothers could walk it up the hill a ways and then run with it, downhill, and leap, clutching the vine, kicking their legs soaring through the air. Open Door shrieking as he held on, Rattle forgetting to let go and falling back to earth with it and dragging himself through the leaves—all of them laughing and hooting and feeling like this day, this life, would never end.

It was still Shawnee land, all of it, and the brothers believed it belonged to them. Many of the men in their village, including their father and their oldest brother, Chiksika, were away for long stretches at a time, following the Shawnee chief Cornstalk. Leaving the boys unsupervised. Leaving the trees, the river, the sky: leaving all of it to the three brothers who had been born at the same time, under such a fortunate sign.

Tecumseh and Rattle sometimes walked together with Open Door out in front by fifteen paces or more, flushing rabbits from burrows and putting birds to wing as his brothers hurled sticks after them—the boys not yet old enough for real weapons. Open Door scampered through the undergrowth on all fours, barking.

"He thinks he's a dog," Rattle laughed.

Tecumseh snapped a branch and hurled both halves high into the trees. "At least he's being useful."

Since finding his pawawka token, he'd taken to wearing it around his neck on a string. Each night before he fell asleep he squeezed the stone and tried to feel its magic. He did not talk about it with his brothers. The river had not been as generous with them. But there were many ways to discover your purpose. It did not happen the same for everyone.

They came upon a settlement a hard, two-hour walk from their village. This was the furthest they had ever pushed from home. They waited for a time in the underbrush, watching. But there were no voices or animal sounds. Only herb gardens strangled by weeds, and stalks of corn that were far past ripe, bending from their own weight. Having come upon the settlement on the south-east side, they followed the outer wall and found the front gate open. They came racing around, pushing one another and jockeying to be first inside.

"Get out of my way." Tecumseh planted his feet and grabbed hold of Rattle, trying to spin him to the ground.

But his brother fought back. "Why do you get to go first?"

"I'm older."

They could see inside. There were two cabins. They knew the settlement was abandoned because it was cold, the way you could tell something was dead just by touching it.

Rattle freed himself from his brother's grip. "You're only older by a minute."

But, Tecumseh thought, it was a minute that mattered. If Rattle had been first, he would have been named

The Great Panther Crossing the Sky. The thought was so absurd, he punched his brother in the arm.

Rattle plopped down, pulling at the fabric of his shirt to keep it away from his fat. "What happened here, do you think?"

"It could have been our men, or the Delaware," Tecumseh said. "Or they could have decided to move to a larger settlement further east. Closer to people of their own kind."

Settlements frequently emptied. Most of the time, you never learned why. Men came, built walls, put homes inside the walls, lived for a while. They planted crops. They hunted the woods. And then one day—well, it was different for each.

He put two fingers to his lips and whistled. The tone was piercing and clean. In a moment, their youngest brother came scampering around the east wall. Nettles were in his hair. Faded dandelions clung to his elbows and knees. He wagged his tongue and pretended to rub against Tecumseh, growling a little.

Rattle reached into his pocket and produced a green apple, something their father had brought back from Virginia. He said they were valuable and rare. That Americans had only just started growing them near the great sea. Their father had given them the apples for their eighth birthday and the taste, when Tecumseh bit into one, was fleshy and sour. The fruit made him thirsty.

"Here, boy." Rattle hurled the apple through the open gate. "Fetch."



Open Door took off after it, disappearing inside the compound, still staggering forward like a dog.

“Perfect.” Tecumseh stood, brushing grass from his knees. “I guess one of us better go get him.”

The settlers had lived there a long time. There was a wagon with a harness for the horses. There were hoes and axes. Someone had planted flowers, yellow and blue and white. Blooming without their gardener—whoever it had been. Tecumseh was only a few yards inside before Rattle came up behind him, breathing heavy.

Open Door stopped at the first cabin. He knelt before the shut door, pawing at the seam. He stroked the door with stiff fingers and whimpered like a pup. Rattle went to him.

But there was something vibrating at the base of Tecumseh’s throat, insistent. He clasped the quartzite that hung from his neck. The stone was hot. It felt alive in his hand.

Their father had said the token would protect him—it warned when there was magic nearby. Tecumseh couldn’t get the words out fast enough.

“Wait—”

But Rattle put his shoulder to the door. The door swung open. The stench unleashed itself upon them, having been cooped up long enough for the air inside to take on a physical quality. The smell had a taste—Tecumseh swallowed against it. He covered his nose and mouth and with his brothers tried to see into the blackness of the cabin.

Sunlight revealed debris in bits and pieces. The room

was trashed as if a great, spiraling wind had swept through. Wax candles, tin sconces, straps of woven baskets—all strewn across the floor. A spinning wheel was upside down against the far window. There were smashed kettles and an overturned table with chairs, their legs snapped. There were books and loose pages. Curtains were torn, not rendered in half, but as if someone had taken a knife and drawn it down their lengths. And the smell: it hit Tecumseh high in his nose, a sour and suffocating odor that forced itself onto the back of his tongue and down his throat. Sour, but sweet. It reminded him of something.

Rattle spit. “Smells like piss.”

Tecumseh crossed the threshold. Whatever had befallen this settlement, whatever had caused the people here to flee, had not been peaceful. Open Door pushed past them both into the dim room, having set aside his game of playing dog. He stepped very carefully now, one foot in front of the other, as if balancing on a log above a deep gully.

“Here kitty kitty,” he said. “Here kitty kitty.”

That was it—that was what Tecumseh smelled. The distinct odor of cats. Sometimes his father would bring back a wildcat from a hunt, long and powerful and graceful. Sometimes he was given the task of taking the great cat’s skin. This room, as he walked through it, carried the feline smell of wilderness and night prowls and also, of death.

He paused at the window. He ran his fingers along shreds of curtain, feeling them shift. He traced the upturned

tabletop, along gouges where something had made deep cuts in the surface. It didn't seem possible for a wildcat to have caused all this. But he had never heard of them traveling in packs.

His foot kicked something. His eyes were still adjusting. He reached for what his foot had brushed against and touching it with his fingers knew by its heavy wetness what he held was a heart—and that it was human.

He leapt back, dropping the piece of flesh, stumbling against the cockeyed spinning wheel. He wiped his hands on tendrils of curtain and saw them all then, the many human remains, those glistening and soggy internal masses. What he had mistaken for shadows along the floor became blood stains. He recognized the room then for what it was.

Rattle called to him from the doorway. "What did you find?"

But he couldn't speak. Whatever had done this, whatever was able to murder these settlers was something much more terrible than a wildcat. They were standing in the aftermath of a massacre.

"We need to—"

He had heard Shawnee war cries. He had heard bufaloes moan as wolves dragged them to the ground. He had heard dogs howl, and women wail out of deep mourning, and he had heard feral cats make their low, quavering incantations facing off against one another in the night. But the sound he heard then outside the cabin was something beyond even these. It yanked the air apart and jolted

his bones. Open Door dropped, covering his ears. Rattle dove inside and slammed the door behind him, throwing the latch.

His eyes were full of tears. "What is it?"

Tecumseh reached for his brothers and they came to him and waited, listening. The scream sounded again, higher in pitch now, and below the scream was a throaty, inhuman rumble that he could only describe as that of a cat in rut—a very large, very terrifying kind of cat.

The door shook as something slammed against it. The cabin too. The brothers shouted out, clinging to one another. This something threw itself against the door again. The latch held. And then the beast began to circle. They could tell where it was by the way it hurled itself against the wall and by the sound of its claws rattling against the wood. Tecumseh thought that whatever had eaten the people who used to live here was now just outside—it had come for them.

The creature caterwauled. The floor seemed to shudder. The quartzite around his neck was standing straight out now as if upheld by a strong wind. As the creature clawed and shrieked, the quartzite spun, lassoed only by the string that held it. Responding to whatever terrible magic was trying to get in.

He could see its shadow slip past the slits in the logs. He could smell it: the deep, dark scent of animal blood.

"Here, kitty kitty. Here, kitty kitty."

Open Door was crawling for the entrance, his face radiant. The beast outside dragged its claws along the



length of the north wall. Their youngest brother reached the door and threw back the latch.

“Get him,” Rattle begged.

“No.” Tecumseh couldn’t feel his hands. “You.”

Both of them were too afraid to move. And then Open Door was outside, the cabin door thrown wide. A rush of air; the live and horrible smell of the creature; Open Door then standing in the front yard, arms outstretched.

“Here, kitty kitty.”

Tecumseh scrambled to the threshold but no further, stayed by a shadow falling across the yard, originating someplace he couldn’t see, casting Open Door in darkness off the blind corner of the cabin.

“No,” Rattle said from behind him.

A change came over Rattle then. He sucked in his belly. His hands were fists at his side. His chin did not quiver. Only his nostrils, a slight flaring, the breath moving in and out. On the floor was a black book. The words *Holy Bible* were written across the front in gold font—Tecumseh had seen this book before in the hands of surveyors and other whites. Now Rattle picked up the volume and held it to his chest. He went to the door, took a deep breath, and stepped into the yard.

Tecumseh lunged after him, to pull him back. He wanted to save his brothers, but he was also afraid to die. He wanted the beast outside to quiet and wished they’d never come into this settlement—but he also wanted to sacrifice himself for them. He felt all of these things as he groped for the door, determining finally to shut it and save

himself. But he could only watch as Rattle strode into the yard, stopped, and held up the book.

The creature came around the side of the cabin faster than he had seen anything move—faster than any wildcat, faster than a horse at full gallop. It was upon Rattle then or almost: his brother did not flinch but held the book up to it. The creature reared back. The two stood facing one another, Rattle extending the book toward it, his shirt riding up to show the flabby swell of his belly, and the creature pulling itself to full height and unleashing a roar. Open Door was on his knees, mouth caught in a stupid half-smile, paralyzed by fear.

The beast was taller than any man—taller than the cabin. Its lower half, its back legs and feet, were feline. Its fur was long and black and crusted, its claws curving blades. But its upper half was female. Smooth, brown skin along her back, her breasts caked with mud and the ravages of her slaughter. She circled Rattle, sometimes bending low to snap at him, showing her fangs. Her face was part cat, the mouth and nose, but her eyes were human, and her black hair was matted to her head like fur, with coils ensnaring her face as she circled, unwilling to come closer so long as Rattle held the book.

“Be gone with you.” Rattle’s voice did not waver, his hands did not shake. “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*”

The creature shrieked, and cowered, and covered her cat ears with hands that were also claws, her nails long

and sharp. Rattle spoke again, louder now—he seemed to be quoting something in a language Tecumseh did not know. His brother gestured with the book and the creature seemed to fear it, recoiling, hissing at the black book and shuddering at the words until, finally, she screamed, swiped once at the boys, and sped away through the settlement gate into the night.

Tecumseh went to them. “It’s okay. It’s gone.”

Rattle lowered the book and, taking one last glance at it, tossed it to the ground. “It was the Wampus Cat.”

“I know.”

“It actually exists.”

He rubbed his brother’s arms: his skin was cold. “What were you quoting there?”

Rattle shook his head. “I once saw a man reading from a black book like that. Just something I memorized somehow. I guess I liked the way it sounded.”

“How did you know it would work?”

“The white man brought the Wampus Cat here. It fears their god.”

The brothers made their way to the gate. They held Open Door’s hands between them. They were still hours from home.

“The white men have a saying about that beast.” Rattle whispered so that Open Door would not hear. “They say that when the Wampus Cat screams, in three days, someone will die.”



They told their mother about the Wampus Cat. She was laughing before they finished. She threw her head back and roared and fell off the stump she was sitting on.

“You were never in any danger,” she said, breathless.

“But the Wampus Cat killed those settlers,” Rattle said. “She would have killed us.”

“You acted bravely.” She petted Rattle and pulled him close. “But you are Shawnee. We are not afraid of these monsters.”

They were eager to make her love them. Fair but demanding, she kept careful watch over them and pushed, sometimes mercilessly, if they were lazy, or if she felt they were somehow not living up to their birthright. They wanted only her approval, to fulfill whatever vision she had for them. They weren’t the only ones: many in their village felt the same.

She had flawless skin—that was the first thing anyone said about her. Smooth and unblemished, despite how hard she worked. Her hands, small and quick, flashed as she peeled and chopped, mashed and wove. She was, as a young woman, or so their father told them, the most beautiful girl in Chillicothe.

Of all the brothers, Tecumseh looked most like her. How her eyes and nose seemed to have been coaxed from the soft clay of her face, little by little, so as not to overpower the rest. How her lips, set tight, tugged a little at their corners as if, at any moment, she might smile. And yet the way her eyes were set a bit too close together, the pronounced V of her brow, made it also seem as if her

smile, given quickly and freely, almost perfunctorily, to set her audience at ease, might be a precursor to some intelligent, insightful, and sometimes cutting remark. Hers was a face that deserved to be gazed on and was, but not as one admired the moon or a budding flower, in appreciation of their symmetrical beauty. Her charm lay in the animation of these features. Her good looks—and by extension Tecumseh's—could disarm her listener, and secure another's trust instantly. The heavy-lidded eyes that were also a bit sleepy—again, just another way to set her listener at ease, unassuming, unthreatening—would suddenly focus as if expecting something more from her sons than they were even sure they had the ability to offer. A question, or two, that cut to the heart of whatever issue was being discussed and then, a solution. Or at least, action. The girls of the village, and many young women too, would sit and hold her hands and braid her hair, which had remained full and black and hung to her waist. They would gossip, and seek advice, and share secrets. She was still beautiful, even after bearing so many children.

She led her boys to the outskirts of the village, not far from where the horses were kept. There, in a faded cabin, lived a medicine man named Knotted Pine. Tecumseh knew of this man and had watched him cross their village with his hesitant, shuffling steps. It seemed he covered no distance at all until he suddenly arrived. Everyone saw he had great power.

Methotaske dragged her sons inside without knocking. Tecumseh could not settle his eyes: there was a small

cooking fire in the center of the room and on the walls were pelts and the blanched skeletons of woodland creatures, jackrabbits and groundhogs and buffalo horns like daggered scythes. There were baskets stacked high against the wall. There were painted turtle shells. There were small dishes of herbs and powders and vials of bright liquid set in rows along the floor. Knotted Pine sat among these things—he was part of them. His hair was white, his face creased and folded. He wore only a bearskin. His skinny legs and arms jutted out from beneath the fur. He worked his jaw and looked at them. Tecumseh swore his eyes changed colors, green to yellow to black as he looked at them all in turn. "I've been expecting you."

"My sons have had a run-in with the Wampus Cat," Methotaske said.

Knotted Pine worked his lips as if to spit, then swallowed instead.

"I thought we might show them why they should not be afraid."

"One should always be afraid." The old man rocked himself to standing. He shuffled to the doorway and parted the curtain. "Not to fear, to assume these new monsters are like the old, is foolish."

They followed him into a space the size of a corn crib. They crowded into the small room, two adults and the triplets. They stood so their elbows touched. Their mother put her arms around her sons to make sure they were listening.

"What do you see?" she asked.

An object hung from the ceiling, suspended by a string. The boys had to stand on tiptoes to peer at it from above. A hollow stone, about the size of a bread loaf, hung wrapped in deerskin and buffalo hide. In the bowl of the stone was a steady flame.

"There's no kindling," Rattle said.

Tecumseh saw his mother and Knotted Pine exchange an impressed look. He felt a flash of jealousy and studied the fire more closely. It was true—the blue flame danced and flickered but there was nothing beneath it, and no smoke.

"Very good." Knotted Pine examined the light. "This is the sacred fire. Chalaakaatha carried it across the sea, on his back. This flame is eternal. It prays to Our Grandmother on our behalf. It keeps us safe so that the lesser gods—and these monsters, such as your Wampus Cat—cannot harm us."

Rattle stepped forward and touched the base of the stone. "But how does it burn without fuel?"

"This fire does not require wood, but is everlasting."

Methotaske explained how the skin surrounding the stone had been renewed three times since it was brought to the Shawnee. The flame itself was very, very old. There were always two men to keep the flame, one—Knotted Pine—who lived with the flame and another who lived close by. These keepers of the flame did not travel with the war party but kept the sacred fire burning. One day the flame would save the Shawnee from their enemies and renew the world with its heat.

"You are not, then, the strongest or the fastest?" Rattle said.

The shaman seemed surprised by the question. "No. I am an old man."

"Knotted Pine has always been an old man, even when he was young," their mother laughed.

"It is true." He snorted, clearing some kind of blockage behind his nose. "But I've kept this flame burning for over a generation."

"Perhaps one day I will keep the flame," Rattle said. "Perhaps one day Open Door and I will be the two who keep the flame and save our people from our enemies."



But Open Door was often sick. Many mornings he stayed in bed while his brothers went off to do their chores. He spent afternoons in the shade, watching his mother shuck corn and dig in the dirt with her fingers. It seemed he was not born with enough strength to last each day.

Other times, he was left to lie with his eyes closed. Tecumseh would stand over him then, waiting for him to breathe, holding his finger beneath his brother's nose until he felt the slightest breath on his skin. To make sure Open Door was still alive. Sometimes it was hard to tell otherwise. His skin could be so much lighter: sometimes he looked like a smudge mark, as if he weren't there at all. His chest did not rise and fall like most boys sleeping. He took sips of breath and then a wisp of air drifted out, disturbing nothing.



"Let me read your fortune."

Rattle wouldn't sleep. He wouldn't let Open Door sleep either. He explored his brother's wide forehead with his fingertips. "Come on, dummy. Let me read your mind."

The nights were growing cool. The brothers slept wrapped in deerskins, Tecumseh and Rattle with Open Door between them.

Rattle, fingers outstretched, probed his younger brother's cheeks and ears. He threatened to slide one thick finger up his nose and then laughed and slapped him lightly on the head. Open Door whimpered, twisting side to side, craving but also resenting the attention. Rattle waved his fingers and hummed.

"It's very faint, your mind." Rattle closed his eyes. "I sense almost nothing."

"Go to sleep," Tecumseh urged them both.

"Wait." Rattle rolled himself into a sitting position and clamped the palms of his hands over Open Door's face. "I see an ugly wife. Fat, covered with warts. She will bear you six ugly children, each one uglier than the last. And one day, your fat wife will be so tired of looking at all your ugly faces, she'll leave you."

Tecumseh laughed and pulled his blanket up over his head. He could picture them all, twenty years in the future—a plump wife who bossed his brother around and six runt kids with heads like gnarly carrots.

Rattle's eyes glistened in the dark. "But somehow, you

won't mind. The seven of you then, you and your six ugly kids, will travel west. Somewhere far away—Dumb Canyon. Perfect for dummies like you."

When he took his hands away from Open Door's face, they saw their youngest brother was crying. A snot-bubble balanced in his left nostril.

"Don't cry, dummy." Rattle stroked his hair.

"I don't want to move away from you," he said. "I won't."



Tecumseh found a snail. It clung to the village well. The shell was deep red and curled in on itself in a tight coil. He tried to touch the snail's purplish body and felt, for an instant, the rough texture of the skin. But the soggy foot vanished. He wanted to keep it for a pet and peeled the snail from the stone.

He sprinted home, cupping the creature in his hand. He would show his mother. He would raise the snail. He would feed it grass and dandelions, moss and twigs. Once, as he ran, the snail stuck out its head and looked at him with tentacle-eyes. Tecumseh felt the cool slime of its body on his fingers. Surprised, he dropped the snail, and when he picked it up again he saw that luckily the shell had not cracked. But the snail did not stick out its head again.

Methotaske was not in their wigwam, but the cooking fire still smoldered. Tecumseh saw the rabbit she had skinned and butchered. But his brothers were not in bed where he left them.

Outside again he saw a woman he knew hurrying toward the Great Council House. He followed. The House was long and tall and built with straight planks of board. There was one large door and no windows. He and his brothers were never allowed inside—not until they were older. How much older, no one ever said.

He found his mother there, and his brothers, and most of the village. They stood outside. He tugged at his mother's leggings, at the fringe there, which he sometimes ran his fingers through and which he liked to feel brush against his face. He held the snail up for her. She would think the snail was funny, as he did.

But his mother did not laugh. She did not take the snail; he did not think she saw it. Instead, she grabbed his hands and pulled him close.

There were horses approaching. He felt the ground tremble and heard the thunder of hooves: Shawnee braves returning. They had been gone a long time, fighting a war. His oldest brother Chiksika. His father.

He couldn't help grinning. Whenever warriors came home there was much dancing and food and laughter. But he looked around and saw that no one was smiling. He glanced up at his mother and saw an empty expression that was the opposite of joy. His brothers were rubbing sleep from their eyes and also clinging to her.

The warriors came out of the woods, one by one. The air was heavy with the night's rain. A low fog clung to the ground. Emerging from the trees, the men seemed to float and hover on the haze. Their faces were painted with

smears of red and black. They were bare but for their loin cloths, and they cradled their rifles in their arms.

Tecumseh saw Chiksika then. He and his father rode the same horse. Steam rose from the horse's flanks. His father rode in front. His father's legs were tied beneath the horse's belly. His hands were knotted to a rope slung around the horse's neck. He leaned back against Chiksika and bounced and swayed with the horse's cadence.

Their mother let out a long wail. Tecumseh felt hot tears on his cheeks although he didn't know why—something about the sound his mother made.

Behind Chiksika came more horses, and warriors lay draped across the rumps like sacks of grain.

"Mother," Rattle asked, "why are all the men asleep?"

Tecumseh saw that his father's eyes were closed. And that he was not sleeping—his father was dead.



The brothers trembled beneath their blankets. Sleep refused them. It hung about, declining to settle, charged with the anguish of that night. Outside the wigwam, their mother shouted at Chiksika. Tecumseh felt Rattle find his hand in the dark and they breathed together, listening. They had never heard their mother raise her voice—she never needed to. People did whatever she asked.

"If you sign the treaty," she said, "your father will have died for nothing."

Chiksika was not the sharpest mind, and he was not



the most accurate archer, and he did not speak as smoothly as many of the other men, but there was something about him, Tecumseh saw, which people wanted to be near. He was strong, for one. But it was more than that. When Chiksika was around, flashing his smile and sometimes shaking out his long, black hair—which he was unreasonably vain about—everyone felt safe.

“I do not want to sign the treaty.” His voice broke with exhaustion and, Tecumseh thought, sorrow. “But there is no fight left in the other men.”

The elders had gathered in the Great Council House. They argued for a long time. Tecumseh tried to listen from outside. Some of the men wanted to continue fighting a man named Dunmore. Others said more fighting would only lead to more dying. Tecumseh had been turning that name over in his brain and whispering it to himself, just to hear how it sounded: Dunmore. Was this the man who had killed his father? He did not know what he looked like, but he could picture him well enough: a white devil. With flowing blonde hair and crisp blue eyes and skin pale as snow. With red lips and a tongue forked like a serpent’s.

He said it now again, as an incantation against his mother’s anger. “Dunmore.” He crept to the opening in the wall and peered out. He could see the shape of her against the cooking fire. Chiksika stood with his back to the wigwam, huddling against a stack of woven baskets, as if wanting to crawl beneath them and disappear. Their mother set her shoulders and lowered her head like a buffalo about to charge.

“The whites want only to swallow our land,” she said. “They are a hungry beast whose appetite is never satisfied. Your father knew this.”

Near the fire was her hominy block. She took up the pestle, club-like, and swung it against the hollowed log. The block flew. The pestle split in her hands. She used the largest shard to pound other things then—her best skillet, the stack of woven baskets, scattering both the baskets and her oldest son, the neat row of gardening tools. Everything was clattering and flailing as her grief consumed her.

Chiksika reached for his mother and tried to gather her in his arms, cooing to her the way Tecumseh had seen him coax a spooked horse. When finally she collapsed against him, spent, he said, “I will care for this family now.”