

TECUMSEH



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Childhood in the smoke of the Ohio

The Ohio flowed through the land like an eternally drunken serpent, fat, brown, stinking of mud and blood. This was the cradle in which Tecumseh was born. No golden sky, no harmless fairy tale—no, smoke, fires, the smell of sweat, the screams of women pushing children into the world, while somewhere outside some damned gang of white settlers was chopping down trees that were never asked if they wanted to fall down. Tecumseh was born in 1768 or so—chronicles disagree, as they always do when it comes to people who didn't learn Latin in school. "A savage," some said. "A barbarian," others growled. To his people, he was just a boy, Shawnee blood, born amidst the muck of the frontier.

Childhood back then didn't mean playing with wooden horses. Childhood meant: if you're not careful, someone will slit your throat, and if not, it's hunger. The village where he was born—somewhere on the Scioto or maybe the Mad River, no one knows for sure anymore—consisted of huts, smoke, campfires, a pack of dogs with more fleas than flesh on their ribs, and faces as hard as stones that the river repeatedly ground down. His mother, Methoataske, was already semi-legendary before he even opened his eyes. A woman who bore children like arrows from an endless quiver, and yet never broke, even though she knew that some of those arrows would never reach their target and would land somewhere in the dirt.

This was the world Tecumseh breathed: smoke, blood, corn porridge, and the whispers of the elders that the whites were ever closer. The damned whites, they came like rats with guns. They wanted land, land, and more land. Always land. The word "property" was like a rusty nail point pressed into the Shawnee's chest. For some, the river was a friend; for others, a parcel of land. For the Shawnee, it was a lifeline; for the whites, it was a damned property line.

Tecumseh learned to walk among fields of corn already seeping with blood. It was said that his father, Pukeshinwau, was a brave warrior, a man who not only held an axe but also knew when to swing it. The boy absorbed it all like other children absorb milk. He heard the stories: of the settlers who came with whiskey and iron, of the warriors who fell with a final scream, of the elders who said the land speaks to you if you listen. But Tecumseh heard even more: the cracking of branches when a stranger crept through the woods. The greedy tone in the voices of some traders who acted as friendly as a priest secretly sleeping in the confessional.

His childhood offered no peace, no shelter. It was like the whistle of a tomahawk, which you only hear after it's already whizzing past your ear. Any day, it could all be over. An attack, a raid, a fever that burned a body in two days. The village burned often, and if not, at least the eyes of the elders burned when they spoke again of lost land. The boy grew up while his people's land shrank ever smaller, like a piece of game that you cut down on all sides until nothing remained but a damned bone.

And yet, there was also the sound of children's laughter. Amidst all the dirt, the lice, the stench of smoke and fish. He ran through the forest, playing with sticks that he imagined were arrows. He fell, got up again, and somewhere his mother grinned, because she knew: This boy will become something. Maybe not a chief, maybe not a great name, but one who won't perish as quickly as all the others who were buried in infancy.

The whites would later write: "A natural talent." They had no idea. It wasn't talent, it was survival. If you couldn't learn in this world to run fast, jump high, and strike when necessary, you were simply dead. Period. Nature has no compassion, and the border between Indian land and settler land certainly doesn't.

His name—Tecumseh—was said to mean "The Comet That Crosses the Sky." A big deal, an omen. Perhaps his parents hoped this boy would become something special. Perhaps it was just a name someone said while half-drunk. But it stuck, and soon people would truly begin to see him as something like a comet: a light tearing through the sky before crashing down.

The Shawnee were a wandering people because they were repeatedly displaced. Even as a young boy, Tecumseh learned: Here today, there tomorrow, in the smoke the day after. His life was like a campfire that had to be put out quickly before the enemy saw the smoke. His mother would pack the children together like chicks when there was trouble and move on. For Tecumseh, that was normal. Home wasn't a fixed place; home was where no one had ever tried to stab you in the back. A hard gift for a child, but one that shaped him.

Even in his early years, he saw things that would normally make your soul rust. Men slaughtered like cattle, women screaming, children who never grew bigger than an armful of bones. This wasn't some Native American romantic nonsense. This was the bloody reality of the frontier. And in this shit, Tecumseh learned how to survive: by being careful, by not believing too much, and by

learning that white people may laugh in a friendly way, but they always have a knife hidden behind their backs.

The Ohio River witnessed the boy's growth. The river was silent. The river didn't laugh, it didn't sing. It only carried everything away: the corpses, the screams, the hopes, the ashes. And somewhere on the bank, between the mud and the fire, a boy learned that his life would not be a quiet dance, but a damned struggle.

A child on the frontier didn't get lullabies, they got warnings. "Don't sleep too soundly, boy, or a knife might wake you." Tecumseh heard that kind of thing before he even understood all the words. He learned about the world not in stories from the sky, but in screams that rippled through the village whenever another troop of militiamen was spotted somewhere nearby. Childhood? Forget it. There was no childhood. There was only a wait until you were big enough to hold a gun.

The Shawnee had already taken enough beatings before he was born. They were repeatedly chased from their villages, and time and again some chiefs signed those damned treaties, made with ink, but also with lies and whiskey. Tecumseh was still a mere kid, but he heard the whispers. The elders grumbled that the land was being sold off piece by piece. Every new document was a stab in the back. And if you didn't sign it, the guns would come. Simple as that. "Treaty" meant the same thing to the Shawnee as "strangle noose."

For a child, that meant learning to keep your eyes open early on. Tecumseh had those eyes—big, alert, always on the hunt for some kind of sign. Some children played hide-and-seek. Tecumseh played survival. The sounds of the forest were his first school: the cracking, the crunching, the howling of wolves, and the whistle of bullets that whistled through the trees far too often. Growing up like that automatically taught you that fear isn't your enemy, but your damned savior.

His father, Pukeshinwau, was one of those guys who had an aura before the word was even invented. A warrior, sure, but also one who understood that this war was no longer fought with arrows alone. It was a war with treaties, with traders, with poison in bottles. Pukeshinwau fought as long as he could, but he also knew that every day was a damned game of dice. Maybe you'll survive, maybe you'll die. But one thing's for sure—you won't give up fighting, or you'll be dead before then.

Tecumseh saw this, and he absorbed it like a sponge in the dirt. He watched his father, how he spoke, how he fought, how he sat with the men around the fire. Children don't look up because they have to, but because they want to learn. And Tecumseh learned. He learned that respect doesn't come from talking, but from attitude. He learned that you see something through, even if it destroys you. And he learned that the white man always, always wanted more, no matter how much you'd already given them.

The mother, Methoataske, was a woman who couldn't simply be pushed into the shadows. She raised the children while the world outside collapsed. This wasn't a family idyll; it was wartime training. She fed them when she could, and when she couldn't, they simply learned to go to sleep on an empty stomach. The children saw their mother as a rock, but she was more like a stone, repeatedly battered by the rain. Nevertheless, she persisted. Tecumseh learned toughness from her—the kind of toughness that isn't loud, but simply survives.

The boy grew up between two worlds: the tradition of the Shawnee and the dirty, greasy grip of the whites who wanted to take over everything. Sometimes they came with Bibles, sometimes with guns, sometimes with barrels full of whiskey. To a child, it all looked the same: threat. But it burned into his memory—that disgusting mixture of kindness and deceit. Later, when he was called upon to negotiate for himself, he would know exactly: Don't trust a white man when he's smiling. Because that's when he'll stab.

Tecumseh was still small when he truly began to understand the Ohio. This river was more than just water. It was a border, a condemned judge. On one side were the settlers, on the other the tribes. The river saw blood, it saw boats full of goods, full of weapons, full of lies. It heard the chants of the Shawnee, it heard the hammering of the white man's axes. And it was silent. The river had no heart, and Tecumseh understood this early on. The Ohio was like life: beautiful to look at, but deadly if you can't swim.

They say children are innocent. Not Tecumseh. He was curious, yes, but innocence was foreign to him. His first impressions were of death and exile. He saw huts burn down, he saw warriors return, bleeding, sometimes without an arm, sometimes not at all. He heard the women wailing, he heard the old people cursing. All of this was his playground. No wonder he had that fire in his eyes from an early age—that burning that other children develop much later. Tecumseh knew: Life is a struggle, and I must learn to be tougher than the rest.

He was no miracle worker, no superchild, no "born leader" as historians would later write. That's all romanticized nonsense. He was simply a boy born into a

world that either broke you or made you of steel. And Tecumseh didn't break. He took every blow, every loss, every damned suffering and turned it into something that would someday be called "character." But back then, it was just survival.

In the evenings, when the fires were burning and the dogs barked, Tecumseh heard the old men talking. About the ghosts, about the future, about the White Death creeping ever closer. He didn't understand every word, but he felt the anger. And somewhere inside him, that same anger was growing. Perhaps not consciously, not with plans or speeches, but as embers. Those embers would flare up later, but at the time, it was just the feeling that this world was going damn wrong and that one couldn't just accept it.

Childhood in the smoke of the Ohio River meant smelling the stink of burnt flesh from an early age. You saw what tears looked like when they fell on dust. You heard the sound of bullets as they pierced wood. That was Tecumseh's cradle. No gods, no angels. Just smoke, blood, and the question: Who will survive until tomorrow?

When you grew up on the Ohio River, you had two teachers: Hunger and Fear. And both were assholes. They never left you alone, they gnawed at you until you either died or learned to bite back harder. Tecumseh grew up right between those two teachers. And, damn it, he passed the test.

Hunger was always there. Corn porridge, beans, sometimes a little game. But often it wasn't enough. A child quickly learned that a stomach growled like a wolf, and that you couldn't feed it with stories. Methoataske, his mother, stuffed what little there was into the children's mouths and pretended she was full. A lie every mother on the frontier knew. But Tecumseh saw the truth in her eyes. He knew she was starving so he could live. And that was a damn hard lesson for a boy: Someone always has to go without so you can still breathe.

And then there was the fear. Not that childish fear of monsters in the dark. No, the real fear. The fear that sits at your back when you hear branches breaking somewhere and you don't know if it's a deer or a squad of militiamen about to burn down your village. The fear when you look at your brothers and sisters and think: Maybe I won't see you tomorrow. That fear became normal. It was like a shadow that always followed Tecumseh, whether the sun was shining or not.

His father, Pukeshinwau, tried to show the children strength. He wasn't a man of many words, but when he spoke, his sentences rang like stones. "Stay alert.

Stay upright. Trust your people, not the stranger." Tecumseh listened. He took every word as if it were a knife handed to him. One day he would use them, these knives of words. But first, he had to survive.

Some evenings were quieter. Then the children sat by the fire, listening to the stories of the elders. Of great hunts, of ancient wars, of heroes who could do more than die. For a moment, you could believe the world wasn't quite so crappy. But there was always a hint of bitterness in the voices. Because even the stories were poisonous: Again and again, the conversation turned to the white people, their treaties, their roads, their settlements. Even when you wanted to laugh, someone would remind you that out there, someone was already running through the woods with a yardstick, measuring land that was never for sale.

For Tecumseh, it was like a constant pressure on his neck: The world wasn't yours, even if you were born into it. Every morning could be the day they drove you away again. So you better get used to the smoke, boy, because you'll smell it all your life.

The Shawnee weren't a people who stood still. They moved when they had to. They repeatedly rebuilt villages, repeatedly planted fields, as if hoping that this time everything would last. Tecumseh learned early on: Home isn't permanent. Home is just the place you defend as long as you can. And if you lose, you move on. No sentimental bullshit, no tears. Pack your bags, carry the children, go.

But that's exactly what made him tough. He learned that nothing was guaranteed. No dinner, no bed, no tomorrow. Those who didn't understand that died young. And many died young. Diseases, bullets, knives. The frontier was a slaughterhouse. Sometimes a child would scream in the night, and the next morning it would be silent—forever. Tecumseh saw that; he smelled death before he was even old enough to shave.

The whites, those greedy bastards, were like ants. One on their own was harmless. But they never came alone. They came in droves, with wagons, with cows, with Bibles, with bottles. And they always took. They never gave. Tecumseh learned to hate them even before he had really seen one of them. It wasn't blind hatred. It was clear as water: They took your land, your food, your future. What is there to love?

Once, the old men told the tale, a trader came to the village. With cloth, with iron, with that sticky sweetness called sugar. The children stared; they had hardly ever known such a thing. But the price was always the same: land,

freedom, pride. Tecumseh understood this. Even as a boy, he sensed the trick: The white man gives you something in your hand, but he takes everything from under your feet.

And the Ohio remained silent. The river saw everything, carried everything away. It saw the Shawnee moving from bank to bank, always displaced, always beginning anew. It saw children being born and dying before they became men. Tecumseh learned on the riverbank that life isn't fair. The river was beautiful, yes. But it was also merciless. And it reflected the world Tecumseh was born into: full of promise, but deadly at its core.

What Tecumseh truly learned during these years was silence. He wasn't a chatterer. He listened more than he spoke. He absorbed the world like a sponge, and he only spoke when necessary. Perhaps that was his greatest gift: He could observe. And observers eventually become leaders because they know when to speak and when to keep quiet.

But at that time, he was just a boy. One who ran through forests, fought with sticks, annoyed dogs, laughed, fell, got up. And yet, there was already that spark in him. You could see it in his eyes, some later said. Those damned eyes. As if they always knew: There's a war waiting out there, and I'm going to fight it.

Childhood in the smoke of the Ohio River. No fairy tale, no song. Just smoke, fear, hunger, and the beginning of a life that was never meant to be easy.

Some children remember the smell of cake or their mother's laughter. Tecumseh remembered smoke. Always that smoke—from fires, from burning huts, from damp branches that wouldn't burn properly. Smoke that stung your eyes and turned the sky gray. Smoke that meant: We're still alive, we're still cooking, we haven't given up yet. But also smoke that meant: There's a fire somewhere, and maybe we'll be next. That was his childhood, an endless smoke that ate into his lungs.

The Shawnee had no peace. The colonists pressed on from the east, as if they had an insatiable hunger in their bellies. Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Ohio—no matter how many treaties were signed, how many border lines were drawn, it was never enough. For the settlers, land was like whiskey—one sip was never enough, the bottle had to be finished. And just when you thought the bottle was empty, someone came along with another barrel.

Tecumseh was still a child when he understood: For white people, land is not a home, not a breath, not a mother. For them, it is a commodity. A damned piece of meat to be cut up and sold. But for the Shawnee, land was everything. You couldn't just say, "This is mine now." It was like saying, "The sun is mine." The thought was so absurd it hurt. And yet, that's exactly what happened, every day.

His father explained to him early on that the world was a playing field where cheating had long been practiced. Pukeshinwau was no fool. He knew the future would be tough. And he knew his sons would have to bear it. Tecumseh saw the seriousness in his father's face when he spoke of the whites. He saw the contempt, but also a hint of fear. For even the strongest warriors could not fight against rifles and endless columns of settlers. A war against a tide—that's what he called it. You can fight, you can kill, but you cannot win against a tide.

But that's exactly what Tecumseh shaped. For him, there was no "going back." No "maybe things will get better." He saw that the world was becoming increasingly smaller. Forests that were once teeming with animals were being clear-cut. Trails once known only to the Shawnee were suddenly roads for wagon wheels. Rivers that knew only canoes had boats full of traders bringing with them everything they didn't really need—except bullets.

Childhood meant observing everything in silence. No room for childish illusions. Tecumseh learned that laughter was dangerous. If you laughed too hard, you wouldn't hear the footsteps outside. If you played too loudly, someone might come and smash your head in. Fun was a luxury you could only afford if you got serious again damn fast.

But of course, he was just a boy. He ran through the woods with his brothers and sisters, playing war with branches as if they were muskets. He imagined himself a great warrior, a hero. Children always play, even in adversity. But beneath the play, there was always seriousness. Everyone knew: Soon it won't be a game anymore. Soon you'll be holding a real weapon. Soon someone will be bleeding, and it won't be funny anymore.

And always that damned river. The Ohio was like a mirror for all of that. One day it glittered in the sun, calm, beautiful. The next day a corpse floated by. A warrior, a woman, sometimes a child. The river took everything and gave nothing back. For Tecumseh, it became a symbol: beautiful and deadly, mercilessly honest.

The elders often said that a child should listen to the spirits. That there were voices in the smoke and the wind that showed you the way. Perhaps Tecumseh heard them, perhaps it was only his own anger speaking to him. The fact was: he was observant. He listened more than he spoke. An observer. Someone who looked at the world before judging. Not like his brother, who would later become known as a prophet and constantly had visions. Tecumseh was more sober. More of a wolf than a shaman.

Sometimes travelers came to the village—traders, ambassadors from other tribes, scouts. Tecumseh watched them walk, how they spoke. He absorbed everything. Like a little sponge full of suspicion. Early on, he understood that words were weapons. That one wrong sentence could kill just as much as a knife. This made him quieter. More cautious. He wasn't a braggart. This made him different from many other boys.

The militiamen from Kentucky and Virginia were constantly on the move during these years. Small groups burning villages, shooting men, kidnapping women. Tecumseh heard these stories even before he could hold a sword himself. They were like ghosts that came at night. No safe sleep. Always the feeling: They could be here tonight. Sometimes it was. Then it was time to flee, pack, run, hope. A childhood that took place more on one's feet than in any hut.

Tecumseh learned a lesson that never left him: Trust is foolish. Rely on yourself, on your family, on your people—and even then, you must be vigilant. The world was full of lies, and most of them had white faces.

And yet, through all the misery, there was this glow inside him. This damned spark. As if he knew he wasn't just some boy who would simply vanish into smoke. He didn't just play war—he practiced. He didn't talk much—he planned. He didn't just hate—he molded that hatred into something sharper. A boy was slowly becoming a comet.

Childhood in the smoke of the Ohio River. Not a place for dreams. Not a place for peace. But exactly the place where Tecumseh learned what he needed: toughness, anger, silence, and the knowledge that this world doesn't spare you. And that you only had two options: become a victim or a warrior.

"Eat, boy," said his mother, pushing a bowl of cornmeal toward him. Tecumseh stared into it. Thin porridge, more water than grain. He pushed his spoon through the broth and muttered, "This isn't food, this is a bad joke." Methoataske growled back, "Be glad you have anything in your mouth at all. Some children only have their fingers to chew with."

This is what childhood on the Ohio River sounded like. No honey, no fairy tales, just sayings like rusty nails. People talked hard because life had made them hard. Those who spoke softly died softly. And Tecumseh listened. Every remark, every curse, every laugh—everything was a lesson.

When the men sat around the fire, they talked about the whites. "They draw up treaties like they're bird droppings on paper. And we're supposed to act like it's holy." One laughed harshly. "The only holy writ I recognize is a knife stuck deep enough." Pukeshinwau, his father, grumbled, "Don't talk so loudly. Words are cheap, blood is expensive."

Tecumseh absorbed this. He understood: Big talk won't do you any good if you don't actually wield the knife. It was a world where every sentence was weighed. One wrong word could turn you into a clown—or dead.

The children played nearby. With sticks that they pretended to be guns. "Bang!" one shouted. "You're dead!" Tecumseh grimaced. "No, I'll get back up. You won't hit me." "Yes!" - "No!" - "Yes!" In the end, they chased each other through the dirt, laughing, fighting, and constantly hearing the adults talking about real dead people. The play was just a thin veil over a damned serious stage.

Sometimes a white merchant came through the village. With blankets, with mirrors, with sugar. The children stared as if they were miracles. But the old people almost spat when they saw him. "Whiskey merchant," one whispered. "The devil with a friendly face." Tecumseh saw the man smiling, holding out small candies to the children. And he saw his mother pull him back by the arm. "Don't take anything from him," she hissed. "Everything that looks sweet has poison in its belly."

This lesson stuck. It wasn't just a piece of candy. It was a symbol. Tecumseh understood: The white people will give you a little something to talk you out of your soul. A deal that always works against you. He vowed never to greedily fall into such hands.

The years flowed like dirty water in a river. Tecumseh grew taller, his eyes sharper. He heard more, spoke less. When the men made plans, he often sat nearby. Not conspicuous, just listening. One of the warriors once said, "That boy there—he listens like a fox. Watch out when he's old enough."

His brother Tenskwatawa was different. Even as a child, he seemed fidgety, always preoccupied with some kind of nonsense. The other children laughed at

him. Tecumseh sometimes defended him, but often he thought, "He's crazy. What will become of him?" No one would have believed back then that this fool would one day emerge as a prophet. But that was another story, still far away.

Childhood meant knowing no security. Sometimes the village slept peacefully, sometimes screams tore you awake in the middle of the night. Tecumseh remembered nights when dogs barked, women screamed, and men rushed outside with guns. He was small, but he felt the panic like a knife to his throat. "Grab the children!" one yelled. "Get out of here, now!" Then they ran, stumbled, fell, gasped. The smoke of their own huts behind them, the whistling of bullets in the trees. This wasn't a nightmare; this was Tuesday night.

And yet: He lived. Again and again. Every morning was a victory. And every victory made him stronger.

The elders said, "The white men have firearms. We have the spirits." Tecumseh thought, "The spirits are terrible at stopping bullets." He never said it out loud, but even as a boy he knew: If you want to win, you need more than prayers. You need courage, intelligence, and a lot of anger.

Sometimes he stood by the river and threw stones into it. Every stone was a thought. Every splash an unspoken curse. "Damned bastards," he muttered when no one was around. "Come on. I'll show you how hard a Shawnee can fight back." It was a big pose for a boy. But somewhere, deep down, it was more. A promise.

The village continued to live in the rhythm of hunting, farming, and fear. Women plowed fields, men hunted, children ran barefoot through the dirt. Everything seemed like normal life—but underneath it all, there was a constant tension. Everyone knew: tomorrow, it could all be over.

An old warrior once recounted an encounter with settlers. "They stole a piece of land from us. With paper. Paper, damn it! As if such a damned piece of paper could take possession of the forest. I almost peed on it, just to show what I thought." The men laughed harshly, dryly, like stones against each other. Tecumseh listened and thought, "Paper. A piece of animal hide, painted with ink. And we're giving up forests for that?" He understood that a war was being waged here that arrows alone couldn't win.

The years in the smoke shaped him. Not with gentle hands, but with fists. He learned mistrust, toughness, silence, but also to watch, listen, and be patient.

He wasn't a screamer, not a clown. He was the boy who later spoke up when it mattered – and then everyone listened.

And while other children died or disappeared, he stayed. Not because he was born stronger. But because he became harder the more the world tried to kick him.

A childhood spent in the smoke of the Ohio River—that wasn't preparation. That was already the first war.

It was a constant movement, as if the Shawnee were cursed. Hardly any village stood for long. You built a hut, hoed a field, planted corn – and before you could say "harvest," some white commander came along with his gang, set fire to it, and said, "This belongs to us." Then you were back on the road, or rather, in the woods, barefoot, with children on your back and only as much as you could carry. For a child like Tecumseh, that meant: home wasn't a place. Home was movement.

"Why are we moving again?" he once asked. His mother stared at him as if he'd just asked why water is wet. "Because the white people never get enough." "But they have land. So much you can't even count it." "Greed has no base, boy."

That stuck. No ground for greed. It was as if the earth itself had a hole that was eating deeper and deeper.

The Shawnee were good hunters, skilled warriors, but they couldn't stem a tide. And the white people were like a tide. You might drown a few, yes. But the tide still came. More and more boats, more and more roads, more and more huts. And then there were those damned treaties, where every sentence was a stab in the back.

Tecumseh heard the men cursing around the fire. "They want to take everything from us. Not just the land. Our souls too." "Screw the soul. I just want my forest back." "The soul is the forest, you idiot." That's how the conversations went. Words like arrows, but rarely accurate.

Tecumseh sat beside him, silent. He was too young to join in the conversation, but old enough to understand: Every man here felt the same pressure. Everyone knew: We're cornered. And when you're cornered, there are only two options: you perish or you fight back.

The women were tougher than many men. Methoataske, his mother, carried children and burdens as if she had iron bones. Sometimes she laughed bitterly. "You men talk a lot about war. But who carries the war? We do. On our backs." Tecumseh realized she was right. While the men fought, the women made sure there was still something left to fight for.

At night, the elders told stories of ghosts, of the old days when the tribes were free. Tecumseh listened, but he didn't believe everything. Even then, he had this skepticism in his eyes. For him, ghosts were perhaps real, perhaps just smoke. But the white men—they were damned real. Their roads, their guns, their axes. Not a dream, but a nightmare of flesh and iron.

Sometimes, when the village was quiet for a moment, you could hear the Ohio rushing. The river was like a giant beast, taking everything with it: timber, corpses, hope. Tecumseh often stood on the bank, throwing stones and muttering under his breath, "One day, you damned bastards. One day you'll realize we're still here." No one heard him. But he heard himself, and that was enough.

The children were playing war, as always. One pretended to be a white settler. "I'll take your land!" he yelled. Tecumseh didn't laugh. He jumped on the boy, threw him to the ground, and snarled, "Not with me." The other howled. The adults scolded, "It's just a game!" But for Tecumseh, it wasn't a game. He already knew that what was happening outside was no fun. It was what would determine his life.

Sometimes messengers came from other tribes. They told of battles, of defeats, of chiefs who had signed things they should never have signed. Tecumseh heard and felt something building inside him—not anger, but a kind of clear burning. As if he knew: If the others screw up, someone has to step up.

But he was still just a boy. A boy learning how to hunt, how to read tracks, how to stay silent when the woods were full of danger. He practiced throwing spears, shooting with bow and arrow. And again and again, he heard about the guns. Those damned guns, faster and louder. He hated them even before he saw one himself.

"One day, Tecumseh," his father said, "you'll understand that the greatest weapon isn't a rifle. It's what sits here." He tapped his head. Tecumseh nodded. He didn't quite understand yet, but he remembered it. The head was the weapon. Not just the knife, not just the muscles.

The nights were cold. The children huddled together, hearing wolves outside, sometimes gunshots. The smoke crept into the tents, into the blankets, into their lungs. There was no place without smoke. And at some point, you couldn't smell it anymore. It was simply a part of life.

Childhood in the smoke of the Ohio River – that meant your first lullaby was the howling of wolves and the crack of guns. Your first prayer was a curse. And your first smile was always accompanied by the fear that it would disappear again.

Tecumseh learned to bear it all without breaking. And that made him different from many other children who grew up in the smoke and simply disappeared—in the river, in the fever, in the war. He stayed. For now.

The years crawled by like a wounded dog, and yet every day was a survival exercise. Tecumseh grew taller, his gaze harder, his muscles tensed as if to say, "I'm not some pathetic chicken bone to throw into the fire." But he was still a boy. A boy who understood the world before he was supposed to.

The Ohio River was the heart, constantly beating. In the mornings, it steamed in the mist; in the evenings, it reflected the fires of the cabins. Sometimes it was friendly, sometimes a pallbearer. Tecumseh often stood there, his feet in the mud, his gaze directed westward. Somewhere out there, he knew, they were coming. More and more. And he thought, "How much smoke do you have to swallow before you yourself become fire?"

The adults talked of treaties, of land losses, of wars. The children played beside them. But Tecumseh was never quite a child. He laughed, yes. He hunted with the others, ran, fell, got up. But he always had that glimmer in his eyes. The old people noticed it. "The boy carries more burden than his age," one murmured. Another laughed dryly. "Perhaps he'll carry us all someday."

It was a harsh world, but in that harshness lay a kind of beauty. No excess, no frills. Everything was real. Every bite of food you got was fought for. Every day you lived was stolen. Nothing came for free. And Tecumseh absorbed just that. He learned that nothing was certain. That you could lose everything—except your pride. And he held onto that like a dog holds onto a bone.

One evening, as the men were once again grumbling about the whites, Tecumseh asked, "Why do we always let ourselves be driven away? Why don't we fight back so they'll finally leave us alone?" An old warrior spat into the fire. "Because there are more of them. More men, more weapons, more hunger."

"Then there must be more of us."

The men laughed. Not maliciously, more like people who know a child is telling the truth, a truth they themselves can no longer believe.

His brother Tenskwatawa, then still called Lalawethika, often chuckled when the men argued. "The spirits will save us," he murmured. Tecumseh grimaced. "The spirits don't save anyone. If you don't fight, you die." "You're too serious," his brother laughed. "And you're too stupid," Tecumseh retorted. They argued as brothers argue, but deep down, Tecumseh knew: He couldn't rely on that fool. He had to go his own way.

The nights were the worst. Silence that was never silent. A crack in the woods – deer or enemy? A cry in the distance – animal or human? Children snuggled closer, mothers hummed songs that feigned more comfort than they gave. Tecumseh lay awake, his eyes open, his heart like a drumbeat. Even then, he could hardly sleep. Too many thoughts. Too much anger.

Once, he overheard his mother arguing with his father. "Our children grow up in fear. How can they become men if all they do is flee?" Pukeshinwau calmly replied, "They grow stronger. Fear makes them tougher. Those who survive here become indestructible." Tecumseh heard this and thought, "Then I'm already on my way."

Childhood wasn't a safe haven. Childhood was a training camp. And the smoke from the Ohio River was the teacher who never gave you praise, but constantly beat you. But every blow made you more resilient.

Tecumseh learned early on that you owe nothing to anyone in life except yourself and your people. Everything else was a blur. And he learned that the only respect that matters is the respect you earn with blood.

The children's games became increasingly serious. Sticks became spears, fists became weapons. Those who fell stayed down longer. Tecumseh always got back up. No matter how many times he fell, no matter how hard he was hit, he got back up. And eventually, the other children saw that and knew: This boy isn't going to stay down.

The adults knew it too. Pukeshinwau once said quietly, "My son is like a comet. When he truly burns, he'll tear the sky apart."

And so his childhood ended not in a bed, not with a kiss on the forehead, but with smoke in his lungs, dirt on his feet and a fist that already knew how to strike.

Tecumseh was no longer a boy. He was a comet in the making. And the smoke of the Ohio River was his first tail.

Blood in the Forest – the Death of the Father

For a boy like Tecumseh, a father isn't a nice picture on the wall, not a guy who reads you fairy tales before you fall asleep. A father was a shield, a hunter, a man who wielded an axe when necessary. Pukeshinwau was just that. A warrior, Shawnee to the core. And as it goes on the frontier, it's precisely such men who die young.

The forest smelled of blood long before Tecumseh understood why. He was not yet ten when life showed him that even the strongest father is not immortal. It was 1774, and tensions were boiling over. The settlers wanted land, as always, and the Shawnee wanted to live. A simple misunderstanding that always ended in the same result: death.

The whites called it Lord Dunmore's War, as if it were a damned parlor game. For the Shawnee, it was simply another slap in the face. The colonists pushed across the Ohio, and the tribes held out as best they could. Tecumseh heard the men cursing, plotting, applying war paint. And he sensed something brewing in the village. Like a storm already laughing on the horizon.

Pukeshinwau went along. Of course he went along. What else could he have done? Sit at home and count corn cobs? No, a warrior fights, and a father fights twice as hard because he knows: Behind him are children who have no one else.

"Take care of your mother," he said to Tecumseh before setting off. The boy nodded, but deep down he thought, "How am I supposed to do this? I'm only a child." He didn't say it. He remained silent, as he had been trained to do. But the words burned inside him like hot coals.

The battle came as it always did—in the woods, in the smoke, in the chaos. Point Pleasant, the whites later called it. Sounds almost like a picnic. But there

was nothing pleasant there. Only trees that splintered, bullets that whistled, men who screamed. A river that bore more corpses than fish.

Tecumseh wasn't there. He was in the village, only hearing the stories that came back. Men who limped, men who didn't even limp anymore because they stayed in the dirt. And the news that broke his heart: Pukeshinwau was dead. Not immediately, no. Badly wounded, they said. He fought as long as he could, bleeding like a damn waterfall, until he fell.

For Tecumseh, it was as if someone had torn open the ground beneath him. His father, the rock, the man who had shown him how to stand, was simply gone. The forest had swallowed him.

The men said he had fallen bravely. That he fought until his last breath. Fine words, harsh words. But to a boy, that was just noise. For Tecumseh, all that remained was: My father isn't coming back. Period.

Methoataske, his mother, didn't cry aloud. She sat still, her eyes red, her face like stone. But Tecumseh saw it. He saw the crack in her. And he knew: everything is different now.

The death of a father in the frontier was not an isolated incident. Men died like flies. But when it's your father, it feels like the world itself is collapsing. Tecumseh ran through the village, clenching his fists, wanting to scream, wanting to hit someone. But he did nothing. He remained silent. That was his thing. Silence and remember.

The stories of the battle painted images in his mind. Bullets whistling through the undergrowth. Men lashing out at each other with knives. Blood in the grass, screams that no longer sounded human. He imagined his father falling. Trying to get up. Drawing his last breaths as the earth swallowed him.

The old men said, "He's with the spirits." Tecumseh thought, "Screw the spirits. I want my father back." But he didn't say it. He kept it to himself.

From that day on, something was different inside him. Not just grief. Anger. An anger that didn't scream, but burned quietly. An anger that took root and wouldn't go away. He knew who was to blame. Not the forest, not the spirits, not chance. It was the whites. Always the whites. With their guns, their treaties, their greed. They had taken his father away from him. And someday, he swore to himself, he would pay them back.

The village sank into grief, but also into routine. Life had to go on. Feed the children, cultivate the fields, and tend to wounds. In the border region, there was no time for prolonged crying. Life went on, whether you wanted it to or not.

But for Tecumseh, the chapter of his childhood was finally closed. He was a boy without a father, in a world without mercy. And he knew that from now on, he had to become a warrior himself. Whether he wanted to or not.

Blood in the forest – that's how his youth began. With death, with loss, with a hole that would never be fully filled.

When a father falls, it's not just a man who dies. An entire damned structure collapses. Tecumseh was old enough to sense that, young enough that it hit him like a punch in the balls. Pukeshinwau was no saint, no fairytale hero, but he was the damned anchor. Now he was gone, and all that remained was emptiness.

The village talked about the war as if it were an old acquaintance who kept coming back to visit and kicked down the door. Lord Dunmore's War, the whites said. As if a Scottish lord truly understood the dirt in the forest. For the Shawnee, it was the war in which fathers disappeared and sons were forced to become men faster than they would have liked.

Tecumseh heard the stories, again and again. Men spoke with pride: "He fought bravely." Others with bitterness: "In vain. There are too many of them." And then there were the silent ones, who just stared into the fire and said nothing because words weren't enough. Tecumseh absorbed everything. Every story, every face, every pause when no one wanted to speak.

His mother, Methoataske, bore the pain silently. No grand gestures, no endless complaints. She had children to feed, fields to tend, a daily routine to manage, which was enough even without the war. But there was this crack in her eyes, as if someone had broken a piece of glass. Tecumseh saw it, and he swore never to see anything like that in his mother's eyes again.

The brothers reacted differently. Some screamed, some ran away, some pretended they didn't care. Tenskwatawa, then still Lalawethika, was the clown. He made jokes, laughed, and drank whenever he could. Tecumseh hated it. "Stop laughing, you idiot. Father is dead." "And now I'm supposed to cry for the rest of my life?" his brother retorted. "Better than pretending nothing

happened." It was a never-ending argument. Two paths with the same pain: one that consumed him, and one that masked it.

Tecumseh began training like a maniac. He ran through the woods, hunted, practiced throwing spears, drawing bows. Every hit, every sweat, was a silent conversation with his dead father. "You see, I'll be ready. I won't fall like you. Or if I fall, I'll take more of them with me."

The elders watched him. One said, "The boy is on fire. He wants to be a warrior faster than his shadow grows." Another nodded. "Perhaps he needs this. Perhaps the whole people needs this."

The mourning in the village didn't last long. Not because the people were heartless, but because the frontier didn't allow you to mourn. You didn't have time for prolonged crying. The next attack, the next hunt, the next winter were already waiting. Tecumseh learned that grief is something you put in your pocket like a stone. Heavy, but you simply carry it around with you.

One evening, he sat by the fire with his mother. "He fought to the end," she said. "But he's dead." "That's the fate of a warrior." "Then I don't want to be a warrior." She looked at him, hard, almost angrily. "You have no choice, boy."

That was the truth. No choice. His father's death wasn't a door that could be closed. It was a tunnel that Tecumseh now had to go through. Whether he wanted to or not.

The men told of the Battle of Point Pleasant. How the Shawnee and Mingo encountered the colonists, how the forest itself trembled with the noise of the muskets. They said that Pukeshinwau was one of the last to fall. That he held his ground while others fled. That he fell like a tree, with a crash that everyone heard.

Tecumseh imagined this again and again. He imagined his father fighting, bleeding but unbroken. He imagined him murmuring his last words, perhaps to his children, perhaps to the spirits. No one knew for sure. The stories grew larger, more colorful, with each telling. But for Tecumseh, the core was the same: The man was gone, and he wasn't coming back.

At night he lay awake, his eyes open, his heart a stone. He spoke to the smoke as if it were his father. "I will avenge you," he whispered. "One day they will know who we are. They will no longer overrun us."

He didn't yet know how, he didn't yet know when. But anger was born. An anger that would carry him through life.

His father's death turned the boy into a warrior waiting in the wings. No more games, no more waiting. From now on, everything was preparation. Every step, every breath, every damned piece of cornbread was training. And in the background, the river, taking everything with it: blood, tears, hopes.

Tecumseh learned that blood doesn't disappear in the forest. It seeps into the earth, and the earth remembers. And he swore that one day the earth would taste his blood too—but only after he had given enough back.

They say anger is a fire that consumes you. For Tecumseh, it was more like a cold knife that was always stuck in his chest. His father's death had flipped something inside him, a switch that never went back on. He was still a boy, yes, but now a boy with a score to settle. And scores were the one thing you didn't forget on the frontier.

He heard the men talking, always the same sayings: "We must stay strong." - "We must stick together." - "We must wait until the opportunity arises." Tecumseh thought: *Fucking waiting*. The whites never waited. They came, took, and shot. It was like an endless stream of ants, growing in number. Waiting was another word for losing.

The nights were even darker now. He used to be afraid of noises in the forest. Now he almost hoped they were militiamen. So he could see them, hate them, and remember what they looked like. He wanted faces for his anger. Not abstract enemies, but real bastards with eyes he could memorize.

His brother Tenskwatawa was still laughing, making jokes, talking about ghosts. Tecumseh had no patience for them anymore. "Laugh all you want," he growled. "But when the next ones come, your laughter won't help you either." "You take everything too seriously." "Perhaps you're not serious enough."

The mother tried to calm the argument. "Everyone deals with pain differently. Stop tearing each other apart." But it was too late. Tecumseh felt he couldn't rely on his brother. If things got serious, he would be on his own.

His father's death made him an observer. He looked more closely. When traders came to the village, he stared at them as if he wanted to burn every feature onto their faces. Friendly smiles, hands full of glass beads or whiskey. For the other children, this was exciting. For Tecumseh, it was poison. "Why do

we even let them in?" he once asked. The older children were silent. One murmured, "Sometimes we need what they bring." "And what do they bring? Lies and barrels?" No answer. Only silence.

He understood that silence was worse than any answer. People knew he was right, but they didn't want to say it. Because it meant they'd already half-given up.

The forest itself became a teacher. Tecumseh crept, listened, observed. Every sound was a message, every animal a reminder: vigilance is everything. He hunted with a patience other children didn't have. He waited until the game itself became almost curious. One blow, one throw—and he had meat. Not always, but often. It was as if anger sharpened him.

The elders noticed this. "The boy is different," they said. "Different in what way?" "Differently dangerous."

Tecumseh heard it. And he took it not as an insult, but as a promise.

His father's death wasn't the end. It was a beginning. Tecumseh felt he could no longer play. The children's games, the laughter in the dust—that was over. Now, all that mattered was preparation. Every blow against a tree trunk was training. Every run through the woods was a rehearsal for what was to come.

In the evenings, as the fire crackled, he sometimes spoke to himself. "They took him. They humiliated us. And we sit here and wait. Not with me. I won't just sit." Other children would have lost themselves in dreams. Tecumseh was already building plans in his head. Still raw, still without form, but they were there. An alliance, a return, a strike back.

Sometimes the old men asked questions. "What do you want, boy?" "Revenge." "Revenge is easy to say." "Then I won't say it easily."

They laughed, but they laughed differently than other children. Not mockingly. But almost worriedly.

His father's death also brought him a new role in the family. He felt the responsibility, even as a young child. He saw his mother carrying burdens, trying to hold everything together. And he swore to himself: *I'll take her burden off her shoulders. One day.*

But deep down, the driving force was anger. Not just against the militiamen who had shot his father, but against everything that came from the east. Every

boat on the river was an enemy to him. Every axe that drove into a tree was an attack. Every merchant's smile was a knife.

And so he grew, tougher than most, quieter, but more dangerous. A boy with a shadow that already seemed like a man.

Blood in the forest – that was no longer a story for him. It was the ground he stood on. And he knew: if he fell one day, it wouldn't be quiet.

A child is supposed to play. Laugh. Stumble, and get back up again. But Tecumseh was no longer a child. His father's death stripped him of the last thin blanket under which he could still hide. Now he stood there, naked in the wind, and the wind stank of smoke, sweat, and blood.

"You're too young to be a warrior," said an older man. Tecumseh narrowed his eyes. "Too young to be fatherless, too." The old man remained silent. No saying would fit.

This is how it began: Tecumseh crept up to the men as they cleaned weapons, drew bows, and sharpened knives. He sat quietly by, asking no questions, simply observing. Some laughed: "The boy thinks he's already one of us." Pukeshinwau was dead, but his shadow still sat in the circle. And Tecumseh was that shadow.

He took sticks, carved them, and practiced throwing them until his fingers bled. Every time the stick stuck, he imagined it was the chest of a militiaman. He didn't talk about it, he didn't grin, he didn't make a joke of it. He practiced, quietly, doggedly, with a seriousness that was almost uncanny to the adults.

The mother sometimes scolded him: "You're a child. Stop acting like an old man." "An old man is dead," he muttered. Then she slapped him. Not out of hatred, but because she couldn't bear that her boy already spoke like that. But he didn't say anything back. He took the blow like a training exercise, as if life itself had struck him.

He wasn't alone. Many sons lost their fathers. But most continued to play as long as they could. They sought distraction, ran through the woods, pretending everything was normal. Not Tecumseh. He withdrew, building an armor of silence within himself.

The elders noticed. One said, "The boy is like a dog whose bone has been taken away. He won't let anyone in who can steal from him again." Another nodded, "Or he'll bite. Hard."

During this time, he also began to interfere. Not much, not boastfully. But when the men talked about attacks, he sometimes said a word. "Not from the front, from the side." Or: "Wait until they cross the river." The men laughed at first. But then they realized the boy wasn't stupid. His suggestions made sense. He saw things others overlooked. He observed patterns, movements, gaps. Even as a child, he had the eye of a strategist.

His brother Tenskwatawa mocked him. "You talk like an old general. Soon you'll be making lists." Tecumseh just looked at him. A look so sharp that his brother fell silent.

The mother held the family together, but everyone felt: It wasn't the same anymore. Without his father, it was harder, colder. And Tecumseh resolved to bear this hardship himself. He helped with the hunt, even though he was young. He hauled water, chopped wood, did things that men usually did. No one had to push him. He did it because he felt: It's my damn job now.

But it wasn't just duty. It was rage that drove him. Every piece of wood he split was a blow against those who had taken his father. Every mile he ran was a preparation for the day he could strike back.

The adults didn't know whether to be proud or worried. One said, "If he keeps going like this, he'll be older than all of us by the time he's fifteen." Another muttered, "Or dead by the time he's fifteen."

But Tecumseh didn't hear that. Or he pretended not to. He went on his way, step by step, with a face too young for such harshness.

Sometimes he sat by the river and spoke softly to the water. "You took him. But I take him back." It sounded crazy, but to him it was real. The river, the forest, the earth—they were witnesses to his vow.

It was during this time that the other boys began to look at him differently. They followed him without his wanting it. When he went into the forest, they went with him. When he said something, they listened. He wasn't a leader, not yet. But he was the one who did things while others just talked.

And he was the one who didn't break. Other children wept secretly for their fathers. Tecumseh wept too—but only once, and then never again. Not because he had no more tears, but because he decided: tears are wasted water.

Thus, he grew faster than a boy should. His father's death turned him not into a victim, but into an apprentice of war. And this apprentice took every day seriously, as if he were already in the field.

Childhood was over. And the forest knew it.

When a tribe loses a father, it loses a warrior. But when it loses many fathers, it loses backbone. And that's exactly what happened during those years. Too many men lay in the dirt, too many never returned from those damned skirmishes along the Ohio. The children became fathers before they knew how to hold a knife properly. And the elders watched as their world crumbled like rotten wood.

The whites kept coming closer. Not just with muskets, but with parchments. They called them treaties, and they waved them around as if they were magic tricks. For the colonists, a treaty was a bloodless victory. For the Shawnee, it was a quill stab.

Tecumseh heard the old men cursing. "They put their names on paper, and suddenly the land belongs to them." "Since when does land belong to anyone?" "Since those bastards decided it."

Some chiefs signed because they saw no other choice. They hoped to save one piece by selling another. Hope like a band-aid on a gaping wound. It never stuck. No sooner had the ink dried than the settlers moved on.

Tecumseh understood this even as a boy. He listened to men with serious faces talking about treaties. And he thought: *You're not selling land. You're selling us.*

He didn't say it out loud, not yet. But the anger was gnawing at him. It wasn't the hot anger that screams and rages. It was the cold, clear kind that eats into your bones. The kind of anger that lasts a long time and one day explodes.

The mother was too busy to worry about tribal politics. She fought for survival, day after day. But Tecumseh saw the men discussing things around the fire in the evenings. And he noticed: Many were tired. Weary of war, tired of life, hopeless.

"We can't stop them all," one said. "We have to be smart. Sometimes give, sometimes take." "Give? What's left then?" "Maybe enough for us to survive."

Tecumseh heard the word "survive" and hated it. Survival meant crawling, begging, taking the scraps. He didn't want to survive. He wanted to live. And not in a corner, but in the whole damned forest.

He began asking questions that were outrageous for a boy. "Why are you signing? Why are you giving them what isn't yours, but all of ours?" The men shook their heads. "You don't understand, boy." "Then explain it to me." "It's complicated." "Complicated means you're afraid."

That hit home. The men grumbled, some became angry. But no one had a better answer.

This is how his image developed: The whites were greedy, but worse were his own people who gave in. He began to hate not only the foreigners, but also the weakness within his own tribe. And that was perhaps even more dangerous.

The elders often spoke of the spirits, of the will of the gods. Tecumseh listened, but he didn't believe any spirit would tear up these treaties. It was clear to him: only men who stood together could do it. And he noticed that no one was uttering those words. So he kept them to himself—for now.

The mood in the village fluctuated constantly. One day of hope, the next of despair. A victory in the forest, and the men laughed. A lost field, and they remained silent for days. Tecumseh stood in the middle of it all, like a sponge, absorbing everything. He was young, but he understood: We fluctuate because we have no fixed goal. We are like a boat in a river without oars.

His father's death was the first blow. The treaties were the second. And the resignation of his people was the third. Everything gnawed at him, everything shaped him.

One evening, he heard one of the men say, "Perhaps it's better if we retreat to the mountains. Let them have the land. We'll find peace elsewhere." Tecumseh spat in the dust. "Peace in the dirt? If you run, they'll take the mountains too. And then? Do you want to escape to the clouds?"

The man stared at him as if possessed by a demon. But no one objected.

That was the moment he realized: He could speak. Not much, not for long, but sharply. Words like arrows. They were still just splinters, but one day they would be whole speeches that struck like axes.

For now, he remained a boy with a face that was too serious. But the other children sensed it, and so did the adults. Tecumseh wasn't one to simply give up. He was one who prepared.

And the thought slowly formed in his mind: If we all stood together, all the tribes, then maybe we could stop them. A vague dream, still without a plan. But it was there. Like a comet gathering itself before tearing the sky apart.

A ten-year-old child was supposed to catch fish, wrestle with others, gather wood, and at most, go on a little hunt. But Tecumseh had no time for childish nonsense. His father's death had forced him into a different league. Suddenly, he was no longer just one of those boys rolling around in the dust. He was the one who was quiet, who watched, who remained serious when the others grinned.

The men noticed. At first they laughed at him, then they gave him small tasks. "Run to the river, look for tracks." - "Walk along the trail, tell us if there's any smoke." Scouting for children. But Tecumseh took it seriously. No games, no half measures. He crept like a wolf, eyes open, ears alert. He came back, gave a brief report. No exaggerations, no heroic talk. Just facts. And the men realized: The boy could be relied upon.

That's how it began: small jobs that seemed insignificant. But in a world where every rustle in the forest could be dangerous, every job was important. Tecumseh learned responsibility before he even knew what growing a beard felt like.

It was similar during the hunt. Other boys shot into the blue, laughing when they missed. Tecumseh aimed, waited, and breathed. And when he hit, he didn't grin. He only saw the animal fall and thought: *This is how men fall too.* That sounded cold, but it was normal for him. His father's death had trained him to look like that.

Once, he was asked to act as a messenger. A neighboring village had to be warned because they'd seen militiamen. Normally, they send men, but this time no one was free. So they sent him. A child, barefoot, with a small knife. He ran through the woods, his heart pounding like a drum, but he ran as if his own life depended on it. And somehow, he did. He arrived, gasped out the message, and ran back again. No glory, no applause. But in the village, a quiet voice said: "The boy did it."

That was the beginning. He proved himself in small things, but those small things were big on the frontier. Every messenger who didn't return meant a dead village. Every scout who missed a trail of smoke meant a raid. Tecumseh understood this and made no mistakes.

The other boys saw him differently now. Some admired him, others envied him. "You act like you're already a man," one said mockingly. Tecumseh looked at him and growled, "I don't act like that. I am one." That hit home. No laughter, just silence.

The mother worried. "You're too young. Look at you—thin arms, no hair on your face yet. They're using you." "Then let them. Better to be used than useless." She put her hands over her face. Not because he was wrong, but because he spoke like a man, and she wished he were still a child.

The men continued to test him. He was supposed to keep watch at night, with other boys. Many nodded off. Tecumseh didn't. He stood there, staring into the darkness, listening to the forest as if he were counting every branch individually. When something rustled, he immediately tensed. Once it was just a raccoon, another time a deer. But each time he was awake, ready. The men noticed.

And then came the first real moment. A small group of militiamen crept along the river. Tecumseh was a scout that day. He saw them, counted them, ran back, and reported succinctly: "Six men. Muskets. Coming from the south." No panic, no exaggeration. Simply said coldly. The men were able to react, set a trap, and struck. And it worked. Without the boy, they would have been surprised.

After that, the way he was viewed changed forever. He was no longer a child, at least not to the men. One patted him on the shoulder and said, "You're like your father. Early in life." Tecumseh just nodded. Words were unnecessary.

But inside he burned. He had seen blood. He had heard men dying, screaming for their lives. And inside him there was no longer any fear, but a strange calm. *So it is*, he thought. *This is what death sounds like.*

He didn't talk about it. Other children would have had nightmares. Tecumseh had no time for nightmares. He just continued to build his inner fortress.

The old men said, "He is like a stone. But stones can also break." But Tecumseh didn't break. Not then, not in those years.

He took on every small role given to him: scout, messenger, hunter, guard. And he performed it as if the world depended on it. Perhaps it did.

And so the fatherless man became a warrior long before he officially was one. Not with feathers in his hair, not with a grand dance, but quietly, stealthily, through a thousand small assignments that he took seriously, like an oath.

The blood in the forest was no longer just his father's. It was the blood he now saw, heard, and smelled himself. And he knew: One day, mine too would flow. But if it did, it wouldn't be in vain.

A child can only hide from seriousness for so long before seriousness kicks in the door. For Tecumseh, that finally happened after his father's death. There was no going back. No going back to playing, no going back to laughing without bitterness. The emptiness in the village, the harshness in the faces of the adults, the whispers of new raids—all of it gnawed at him until he knew: childhood was over, forever.

The forest was his classroom. And the lessons were brutal. He learned how to be silent, how to hold his breath when the enemy was near. He learned what blood smells like, how long it stays fresh before it turns sweet. He learned that the earth swallows sounds, but never secrets.

The men began to take him seriously. No longer playing childish roles, but real ones. Not in the front row, but close enough to see everything. He watched how they moved, how they disappeared into the forest, how they struck. Every move, every movement burned itself into his memory. It was as if he were putting on the skin of a warrior, piece by piece, until the old childish skin was no longer visible.

The other boys followed his example. Some joined in, some didn't. But everyone knew: Tecumseh was different. When he spoke, they listened. When he walked, they walked. Without him ever saying, "Follow me." It just happened.

One evening, after a reconnaissance mission, he sat by the fire. The men talked about the dead, as always. One said, "We're losing too many. Soon we'll just be stories." Tecumseh raised his head and said, "Then make stories worth telling." The men stared at him. A child speaking like that. But they remained silent because they knew: He was right.

His mother watched him with mixed feelings. On the one hand, proud, on the other, full of concern. "You burn too soon," she once said. "Better to burn than to rot," he retorted. She didn't hit him again; she just shook her head.

During these years, his gaze developed. Sharp, dark, unwavering. A look that said, "I see right through you." Some adults avoided him because they couldn't bear to be looked at like that—by a boy.

He spoke little, but when he did, his words hit home like arrows. No long speeches, just sentences that stung. "Why are you signing?" "Why are you giving land that doesn't belong to you, but to everyone?" "Why are you running instead of standing still?" Questions like knives.

The old people said, "He's too young to talk like that." But deep down they knew: That's exactly how someone had to talk if there was to be any hope.

Tecumseh now knew that he would not dedicate his life to hunting, farming, or trade. He knew his life would be a struggle. Not because he wanted it, but because there was no other choice. His father had shown it with blood.

He began to memorize stories. Not the beautiful ones, not the old myths. But the stories of the dead. He memorized names, places, faces. Every defeat, every massacre, every piece of land lost was not a mere fact to him—it was a notch on his own body. And he swore that one day these notches would be repaid.

The Ohio flowed on, indifferent, silent. It took blood, it took corpses, it took tears. But Tecumseh no longer saw only indifference in the river. He saw a reflection of himself: still, deep, sometimes calm, but underneath a current that could sweep anything away.

The adults no longer treated him like a child. Some gave him tasks like a man's. Others avoided him because he reminded them of their own weakness. But that didn't matter to Tecumseh. He knew his path was set.

The nights by the fire, the conversations, the endless lamentations about lost land—they were just background noise for him. He listened, yes. But he was already thinking further. Not: *How do we survive tomorrow?* Rather: *How do we fight back?*

So it was that he finally crossed the threshold. No longer a boy, not yet a fully-fledged warrior, but something in between—a shadow that was already more of a man than half of those sitting in the circle.

His father's death had shaped him. But not just in anger. Also in clarity. He knew now that his life wouldn't be easy. He knew that every day was a struggle. But he had decided: He wouldn't just be a victim. He would be the blow that came back.

And so Tecumseh's childhood ended definitively. Not with a celebration, not with a ritual. But with a grave in the woods, smoke in his lungs, and a vow he never told anyone, but which he carried with him every day: *I will fight. Until the end.*

Shawnee on the Run

When you say "on the run," you think of fast legs, sweat, and heart palpitations. But for the Shawnee, flight wasn't a single moment—it was their damned permanent state. For years, they had been moved around like chess pieces on a board that didn't even belong to them. Pukeshinwau's death was just another chapter in this endless drama of relocation. No sooner had they built a village somewhere, planted fields, and planted corn, than the next gang of settlers, soldiers, or militiamen arrived, declaring: "Nice land, we'll take it."

Tecumseh was now old enough to see through the game. For him, home didn't mean huts or fields. Home meant staying until they drove you away again. The mother gathered the children together like chicks, and off they went. A new village, a new fire, the same old fears.

"Why don't we stay and fight?" he once asked. An old warrior sighed. "Because you don't fight the tide, boy. You save yourself until you find something better." "Then I'll be the tide," murmured Tecumseh. The old man laughed, but it was a toothless laugh.

So they moved on, ever on. The Ohio River bore witness as they wandered along the banks like stray dogs. No roots, no security. For the children, this was normal. For the adults, it was a constant giving up. Every move was a small death.

Village life on the run was miserable. Huts that were barely standing. Fields that were too small. Dogs that were even skinnier than the people. And always the smoke. Smoke from their own fires, smoke from the burning villages behind them. The smoke was like a constant companion, telling them: "You don't belong here. You don't belong anywhere."

Tecumseh hated this life. Not the filth, not the hunger—he was used to that. But the feeling of constantly being at the back of the world because others had decided he had no place. This feeling gnawed at him more than the hunger in his stomach.

The whites talked about "pioneers," about "civilization." For the Shawnee, it meant another piece of land lost. And every piece that was gone never came back. It was like flesh being cut from the body until nothing remained.

The mother did what she could. She carried children, blankets, and baskets. She held the family together like a hen in a storm trying to catch all her chicks under her wing. But Tecumseh saw how difficult it was. He vowed to take this burden off her one day.

The brothers reacted differently. Some became silent, some wildly. Tenskwatawa, the jester, still laughed, sometimes too loudly. But no one laughed back. The smoke stifled any laughter.

For Tecumseh, escape wasn't a weakness. He saw it as preparation. Every move was like drawing a bow—at some point, a shot would follow. He hated it, but he took it as training. Every new place was a test: Can you adapt? Can you survive? Yes? Then wait until the next move comes along.

The men cursed around the fire. "We are no longer men. We are shadows." Tecumseh heard this and thought: *Maybe. But I'm a shadow with teeth.*

Sometimes he saw white people taking over the abandoned villages. They continued building, cutting down trees, erecting fences. As if they had always been there. Tecumseh swore that one day he would tear down those fences again. Every post was an insult to him.

The flight transformed children into adults. They learned to carry, to hunger, to remain silent. They learned that one owns nothing but what one holds in one's arms. Tecumseh learned that home is not a place, but resistance.

And so the Shawnee trudged on, through forests, across rivers, always in the smoke, always in the shadow of the next danger. For the whites, it was expansion. For the Shawnee, it was expulsion. For Tecumseh, it was the beginning of a dream greater than any village: a place they no longer had to leave because they could defend it.

Escape stank. Not just of sweat, smoke, and dirt, but also of despair. Anyone who has never been driven through the undergrowth with an entire tribe has

no idea how miserable life can become. The Shawnee were practiced at it—they'd done it often enough—but routine doesn't lessen the pain. Every step was a reminder that you had nothing but what you could carry.

The children carried blankets, the women baskets, the men weapons. Dogs trotted behind, ribs like almost empty barrels. Sometimes the little ones cried, and their mothers hissed at them: "Quiet, or they'll hear us." Fear was as common as hunger.

And hunger was a damned constant friend. There were no fields left, not enough time to cultivate. The flight left no room for harvests. So they lived on what they found: a rabbit here, a few berries there, sometimes fish if luck was kind. But mostly it wasn't kind. Children went to bed hungry, and not all of them woke up again.

Diseases were worse than bullets. A cold was enough to bring half a camp to its knees. Fever crept through the huts like a thief. Tecumseh saw brothers, sisters, and cousins die, not from gunfire, but from a damned cough. The smoke from the fires, permeating everything, didn't help. It irritated the lungs, making breathing difficult. Every day was a test of whether your body would hold up or collapse.

And always the raids. Small groups of militiamen bursting out of the woods like rats. Not many, but enough to sow terror. They yelled, shot, and burned. The Shawnee ran, again and again. Tecumseh learned that flight had to be faster than fear. When the dogs barked, when the women screamed, you grabbed what you could and ran. Those who were too slow were left behind—in the smoke or in the blood.

Once, when he was barely twelve, he heard the screams of a woman who wasn't running fast enough. He tried to run back, but his mother grabbed his arm and yelled, "No!" She pulled him on, while behind them the screaming abruptly stopped. The sound that came next stuck in his head: muffled, like splitting a piece of wood. He swore he'd never forget that sound.

The men talked about revenge around the fire that evening. Big talk, harsh words. But the next morning they packed up and moved on. Revenge remained in the smoke, and Tecumseh hated that. Words without actions were nothing but empty shells to him.

Despite everything, he grew tougher. Every step, every loss burned him away like wood thrown into a fire again and again, until only coal remains. And that

coal glowed. Not loudly, not noticeably, but hotly. He spoke little, and when he did, it was coldly. "We're always running. Maybe they should run sometime." The men looked at him, said nothing. But they knew the boy had a point.

His mother carried on, pushed on, fought on. She was the heart that still beat, even as it burned. But Tecumseh saw the weariness in her face, the lines deepening. He swore that one day he would be the one to carry her, not the other way around.

His flight made him a beast of the forest. He knew how to walk quietly, how to read tracks, how to distinguish sounds: wind or footsteps, animal or human, friend or foe. Every day was a drill, every mistake could be his last. And Tecumseh made fewer mistakes than others. Not because he was smarter, but because he was more alert. He had no choice.

The other children grumbled, sometimes even laughed. Not Tecumseh. For him, the escape wasn't a transition, but a damned endurance training. He hated it, but he used it. Every mile he ran was a mile that made him stronger. Every hungry belly was a reminder that he could survive where others died.

Sometimes they stood by the river and looked across. There, settlers were again building huts, chopping down trees, erecting fences. Tecumseh gritted his teeth until they ground. "Everything we leave behind, they take. Everything." An old man nodded. "That's right." "Then we must stop leaving behind."

But they couldn't stop. Not yet. So they moved on, shadows in the smoke, ghosts in their own land.

For the whites, the Shawnee were merely obstacles. For Tecumseh, the whites were a curse. He didn't yet know how to break it, but he swore he would learn. Every escape, every tear, every starved brother was another stone in his inner structure. And someday, that structure would no longer be a hut, but a fortress.

Fleeing didn't make him smaller. It made him bigger, tougher, more dangerous. The child who ran became a boy who, with every step, was already planning how one day he wouldn't have to run anymore.

Escape had no seasons. Escape was an endless cycle: setting up camp, dismantling camp, running, running, hiding, hoping. For the Shawnee, it had become everyday life; for Tecumseh, it was a constant drill.

The years passed, and each year was a carbon copy of the last. Spring: They planted as much as they could, always in a hurry because no one knew when another troop of white men would come and burn everything down. Summer: They ran through the forest, hunting, fighting for survival. Autumn: They harvested what little they could, only to lose it again on their next escape. Winter: They froze, starved, and prayed that the little ones would survive.

Tecumseh grew up in this rhythm. For him, it wasn't an exceptional situation. This was the world. A world in which you were always on the edge, always in the smoke, never safe.

And with each move, he became tougher. He learned how to walk at night without breaking a branch. He learned how to choose a camp site: never too close to the river, never too close to open paths. He learned that a village wasn't a home, but a trap if you built it wrong.

The adults began to take him seriously. When it came to choosing a spot, he was sometimes asked, "What do you see?" He answered succinctly, but his eyes saw more than many older men. He saw tracks in the grass, smoke in the distance, water levels that others missed. He was still a boy, but he had the eye of a warrior.

The other children sensed this. They gathered around him when they played—and "play" was a big word. Their games were miniature wars: sticks as spears, shouts, small skirmishes. And when they set out, they ran like Tecumseh ran. They kept watch like Tecumseh kept watch. Without his wanting it, without his commanding it, he became their center.

Once an older boy said, "Why do we listen to you? You're not older than we are." Tecumseh looked at him with that gaze he had inherited from his father—calm, cold, cutting. "Because I don't run when things get serious." The other boy remained silent. That was answer enough.

The adults noticed this too. "He's young, but he gathers children like a chief gathers warriors." "Maybe that's good. Maybe that's dangerous." "Both," murmured a third.

Camp life on the run was miserable. They built huts out of branches and bark, little more than shelters. When it rained, it dripped through. When it snowed, they froze. Diseases crept through every crack, hunger gnawed at every belly. But Tecumseh took it all like training. For him, every hardship was another blow to absorb.

Once, a child died next to him in his sleep, quietly, just like that. No gunshots, no blood—just the hunger that took his breath away. Tecumseh woke up, saw the empty face, and said nothing. He remained silent, as always. But he swore to himself:*Not another one. Not another one if I can help it.*

His mother saw him getting tougher. She tried to slow him down. "You're not old enough to lead yet." "Old enough to lose. So old enough to lead, too." She wanted to argue, but she knew he was right.

The escape also brought encounters with other tribes. Sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. Always tense. Every tribe was caught in the same vortex, each seeking space, safety, food. And always the whites were the invisible pressure that drove them against each other. Tecumseh observed this closely. He realized: As long as we are separated, we all lose. This thought grew within him, even if he hadn't yet spoken it out loud.

He saw the white people more and more often. Settlers with carts, axes, and fences. Soldiers with uniforms, rifles, and drums. Merchants with whiskey, mirrors, and promises. Each of them was a symbol to him. Not a person, but a mask: the mask of greed, the mask of deceit, the mask of death.

Once he saw a settler boy across the river. His age, blond, dirty, laughing while playing with a dog. For a moment, Tecumseh wondered:*What if I were born there? Would I laugh while he starves here?* The thought made him angry. Not at the boy, but at the damned fate that pitted people against each other just over land.

The escape lasted years. From one village to another. Sometimes hope, sometimes despair. But for Tecumseh, it was like a forge. Every loss was a hammer blow. Every move was a new fire. And he, the boy, was the iron that grew ever harder.

By the end of those years, he was no longer a child, not even remotely. He was a young warrior, forged from smoke, hunger, and the rage of what they had lost. The escape hadn't broken him. It had made him what he had to become.

And somewhere deep inside him a thought grew that was bigger than himself:*We have to stop running.*

The escape was no longer a journey; it was a war in installments. Every path, every river crossing could become a trap. The Shawnee were no longer just

hunters, but also the hunted, and everyone knew: sooner or later, things would go wrong.

Tecumseh was no longer a little boy. His legs were longer, his gaze harder, his silence heavier. He had the eye of a scout, the ear of a hunter—and the wrath of a warrior, just waiting to erupt.

The first skirmishes came suddenly. Small groups of militiamen raiding a camp. Not many, five or six, but enough to cause chaos. The dogs barked, the women screamed, the men grabbed their weapons. Tecumseh was no longer one to just run. He reached for a spear. His heart raced, but he held still until he saw an opportunity.

A white man burst through the bushes, running blindly, searching for prey. Tecumseh leaped forward, rammed his spear, not perfectly, but enough to make the man stumble, scream, and fall. Blood spurted, the smell filled his nostrils. For the first time, he felt another's life changing beneath his grasp. It was no longer a game. It was real, raw, brutal.

He trembled afterwards, not from fear, but from the realization: *I can do it.* He could kill. He didn't want to, but he could. And that was more important than anything else.

The men saw it, one shouted: "That boy is one of us!" But Tecumseh heard only the dying man's wheezing. He remained silent, as always. But deep down, he knew: He had crossed a threshold. From this point on, nothing was innocent anymore.

After that day, the men treated him differently. No more scouting roles, no more errands. Now he was allowed to stand on the edge of the warriors. Not yet in the middle, but close enough that he could smell the blood when it was flowing.

The battles became more frequent. Small skirmishes by the river, ambushes in the woods. Tecumseh learned that war wasn't a heroic dance, but dirt, sweat, and panic. Men screamed like animals, died like pigs, lay in the mud while the life drained from them. But he remained calm. He did what had to be done.

Once they walked into a trap. Militiamen had hidden in the undergrowth. Bullets whistled, men fell. Tecumseh threw himself to the ground, feeling dirt and blood cover his face. Beside him lay a man, wheezing, his chest shot to pieces. "Run, boy," he gasped. Tecumseh stayed. He pulled the man a little

way, away from the line of fire. Not out of duty, but because he knew: If you stick together, you live longer. The man didn't survive, but Tecumseh did. And the others saw: He doesn't run away when the going gets tough.

His mother knew he was a warrior now. She saw the stains on his hands that he couldn't wash off, no matter how many times he scrubbed them in the river. "You're still too young," she said quietly. "I was too young when Father died. Now I'm old enough."

The other children avoided him a little. He wasn't one of them anymore. They still played, but he didn't. He was serious, always. They sensed that he had seen things they didn't know. Things that had changed him.

But the adults came closer to him. They asked him what he saw, what he thought. He spoke little, but his answers were sharp. "We have to wait until they cross the river." "We have to let them run, not us." These were sentences you wouldn't expect from a boy, but they made sense.

During this time, his reputation grew. No official title, no chief, no leader. But in the smoke of the fires, the men talked about him. "The boy is different." - "He has something of Pukeshinwau about him." - "He sees things we overlook."

Tecumseh didn't hear it directly, but he sensed it. And he accepted it quietly, not proudly, not loudly. It was natural to him.

The escape continued, ever on. New camps, new losses, new battles. But now he was no longer just a victim. He was part of those who fought back. Not always victorious, not always strong, but always with teeth.

And every time he smelled the blood, he thought of his father. He thought: *I'm still here. And you made me stronger than you intended.*

Thus, the fleeing child became the first shadow of a warrior. Not yet fully formed, not yet the leader he would become. But already more than a boy.

The escape had left its mark on him. But it had also made him sharp, like a knife rubbed against stone until it glitters. And he knew: one day, he would be the knife that cuts back.

The flight not only aged the children, it also tired the elderly. Many men who once walked proudly through the village, their voices loud and their muscles hard, now squatted by the fire like burnt-out candles. Their shoulders slumped,

their words slack. They spoke of the old days as if they had long since given up on the idea of new times yet to come.

"We used to have dignity," one murmured. "We used to have land." "The old days are dead," thought Tecumseh. He didn't say it, but the thought ate away at him.

He saw the men mentioning treaties, as if that were still a way out. They whispered about peace agreements, about borders that might be drawn. Borders that the whites would cross tomorrow. To Tecumseh, all of this was just watered-down self-deception.

In the evenings by the fire, when the children were asleep, he heard them talking. "We can't fight forever." "We have to be wise." "Wise means you give them what they want until they're full." Tecumseh wanted to scream: *They never get enough, you idiots*. But he remained silent. He remained silent because he knew his time to speak would come.

The elders sometimes saw in him a spark that bothered them. A boy with too much fire in his eyes, too little patience to duck. Some said, "He's too impetuous." Others said, "He'll drag us into disaster." But no one could deny that he was different.

He watched the men closely. He noticed they were afraid. Not the fear of bullets, everyone knew that. But the fear of responsibility. It was easier to blame the spirits, the treaties, or fate. Tecumseh hated this fear. For him, fear was only useful if it woke you up. Everything else was poison.

Once, it finally burst out of him. An old man wailed, "We are too few, too weak." Tecumseh growled, "Then become stronger instead of complaining." The old man glared at him. "You are a child. You know nothing." "I know enough not to die with my head hanging down."

Silence. No one said anything. Some nodded quietly. Others looked away.

His mother scolded him afterward: "You shouldn't snap at the old people like that." "Why not? Because they're old? Age doesn't automatically make you right." She shook her head. But deep down, she knew he was right.

Tecumseh began to avoid the men's conversations. Instead, he trained alone. With spears, with arrows, with his body. He ran, he climbed, he practiced until he could no longer. And he spoke quietly to himself: "They will say satiated, they will say peace. But I will say war. Until they finally hear us."

The other boys sensed this energy. They continued to follow him because he had something the older ones had lost: faith. Not in ghosts, not in contracts, but in themselves. He radiated something that couldn't be bought or faked: the will not to crawl.

And that's precisely what made him dangerous. Not only for the whites, but also for his own people, who were already half-broken. A spark in the dry grass.

The flight continued, as always. Villages were built, then destroyed. Children were born, children died. But while the old men grew weary, Tecumseh only grew tougher. He took every blow, every hardship, and turned it into a brick for his inner fortress.

When the men complained, he remained silent. When they spoke of hope for peace, he stared into the fire. When they raved about the past, he thought about the future. A future that consisted not of flight, but of resistance.

Thus, the seed of what later became his dream was born. It wasn't yet big, not yet clear. But he knew: things couldn't go on the way they were. The old people had talked themselves into their own graves. If anything could be saved, someone else would have to do it. And that someone wouldn't be old.

Flight turned men into shadows. But Tecumseh didn't want to be a shadow. He wanted to be the spark that would strike back. While the old men hung their heads and their mouths were full of excuses, he began to do what none of them could do anymore: lead.

It started small. With the boys who already looked to him. They ran as he ran, they practiced as he practiced. One evening, he said, "We'll stop with these childish games. If we're going to fight, we'll fight properly." So they carved spears, practiced attacks, sneak attacks, ambushes. They lay down in the dust, crawled through the grass, jumped out, screamed, stabbed. No silly "bang, you're dead." No. It was training. Dirt under their nails, sweat on their faces, breath like fire.

The others laughed at first, but then they realized it made them stronger. That it wasn't a game, but a rehearsal. And they followed him. Without titles, without words. They just did it.

The adults viewed this with mixed feelings. One murmured, "He's making his own little band of warriors." Another, "Better that than them just playing in the

dirt." The adults remained silent. They saw that the boy was doing something they themselves no longer had the strength to do.

Tecumseh also began to make plans. Small, crude plans. "If they come from there, we'll go from here." - "We can't wait for them to find us; we have to find them." He scribbled in the dust with sticks, drawing lines, indicating directions. The others watched, not always understanding everything, but they listened.

Once he dared to speak to the adults. "Why do we always build villages where they're easy to find? Why not deeper in the forest, where they're unfamiliar?" The men grumbled. One growled, "Because we need fields." "And how long will you have the fields before they burn again?" Silence. He was right, and they knew it. But no one wanted to admit that a boy was spitting the truth at their feet.

His mother worried. "You're not old enough to play leader yet." "I'm not playing." "You don't know what it means to control lives." "I know what it means to watch them die."

It wasn't bravado; it was bitter truth. He had seen too many faces disappear in the smoke. He had heard too many screams fall silent in the forest. For him, leadership wasn't an ambition, but a necessity.

The escape brought new encounters. Sometimes they encountered groups of other tribes. Tecumseh observed them closely. Some were just as tired as the Shawnee, others tougher, more vicious. He noticed: Some of them had more fire. And he thought: *If we were all together, we wouldn't escape.* The thought gnawed, grew, became stronger.

But for now, it remained with the small band of boys he trained. They became faster, quieter, more dangerous. They could read tracks before they needed men. They could keep watch without falling asleep. They learned to swallow their hunger and keep going. Tecumseh turned them into miniature warriors. And he made himself their teacher.

The men began to pay more serious attention to him. Not loudly, not officially. But when an attack threatened, they looked to see where the boy stood. If he remained calm, they calmed down. He was like a silent touchstone. Not because he was old, but because he never wavered.

The elderly, who had already half resigned themselves to it, avoided him. His gaze was like a mirror to them, showing them that they had become weaker. But to the young, he was everything.

Once, as they fled again—smoke at their backs, children screaming, dogs yelping—a small boy stumbled and fell. His mother screamed, but she couldn't reach him. Tecumseh turned, ran back, grabbed the little boy by the arm, and pulled him along. Arrows whizzed, bullets cracked, but he ran until they were safe. Afterward, he simply said, "Next time, you won't fall." The boy nodded, tears in his eyes.

That was it: no big speeches, no sacred promises. Just actions.

Tecumseh now knew he was no longer a child. He wasn't yet officially a warrior, but he had the heart of a leader. Not because he wanted to be, but because no one else did. He filled the void left by the elders, and he did it with a toughness that everyone felt.

The flight continued, relentlessly. But for Tecumseh, it was no longer a mere defeat. It was a lesson, a test, a preparation. Every step, every night, every burned village was further proof that he must be the one who would one day say: *Enough*.

And while the old ones crumbled in the smoke, he built himself up in the smoke.

Escape has a way of changing people. Most were diminished by it—broken backs, broken spirits. But Tecumseh grew taller. Not physically, but in his attitude. He had learned that you can't run away without something growing inside you: hatred, hunger, hardness.

The Shawnee had been on the move for years, always in the smoke, always on the brink of extinction. For the elders, it was the continuation of a long dying process. For the children, it was the only life they knew. But for Tecumseh, it was more: It was preparation.

He saw how many were giving up. Men who once walked proudly now talked only of peace, of treaties, of retreat. They were like old dogs, lying down in the shadows to die. Tecumseh felt disgust. Not because they were weak, but because they accepted weakness. He couldn't do that. He would rather fall in battle than end up like this.

On quiet nights, when the smoke hung over the huts, he swore to himself: *I won't run until I'm old. I'll let them run. I'll turn the chase around.*

This vow burned into him like fire. He never spoke it to anyone, but every step he took was a part of this promise.

His small band of boys became a kind of shadow brigade. They knew the woods like the backs of their hands. They sensed danger before adults noticed it. They were alert, silent, deadly serious. And they all followed Tecumseh because he showed no fear.

Once they encountered a patrol of white men along the river. The men stood back, just observing. Tecumseh whispered, "We could surprise them." One of the older men shook his head. "There are too few of us." "They're only men," Tecumseh muttered. In the end, they retreated. But the words stuck. A boy, barely more than fifteen, was more hungry for battle than men twice his age.

The flight brought losses. More and more graves, more and more names vanishing in the smoke. Tecumseh memorized each one. He carried them inside like stones. To him, they weren't simply dead—they were unfinished business.

One evening, when they had to leave another village because smoke was rising on the horizon, he turned around, saw the flames, and said quietly: "Enough." It wasn't a scream, not a shout. Just a word so heavy that those standing nearby fell silent.

His mother looked at him, full of concern. "You'll burn before you live." "I only live when I burn."

That was the truth. He couldn't live like the others—with broken pride, with half-hearted hope. For him, life was a struggle. Everything else was just waiting for death.

The elders said he was too young, too wild. But they knew: if there was still hope, it wasn't with them, but with those who were young and hadn't given up. And Tecumseh was the toughest of them.

The years of flight ended not with victory, not with peace, but simply with continued survival. But for Tecumseh, they were more than lost time. They were the anvil upon which he was forged. Every defeat, every burned village, every dead face was a blow that shaped him.

As he stood by the river, older, tougher, with eyes that had seen more than a boy should, he knew: the escape was over – for him. Not because it was truly over, but because he swore he would no longer accept it.

He was no longer a fugitive. He was a hunter, just waiting for the moment to change direction.

And the smoke that had been her prison for years was now a veil for him. A veil behind which he lurked, ready to strike back.

A boy who became a warrior too early

A boy is meant to hunt, laugh, and dream. A warrior is meant to kill, suffer, and give and take orders. Tecumseh had no choice as to whether he wanted to be one or the other. Life spit him straight into the second role long before he was ready—or perhaps precisely because of that.

The years of flight had toughened him, but now he stood on the edge of the true warrior world. No longer a scout, no longer a messenger, no longer a boy who simply runs. Now it was time to stand, fight, and bleed.

The men saw it first. They realized he no longer waited for orders like a boy. He took action. He saw opportunities before others saw them. He wasn't afraid to make mistakes, and when he did, he learned. "That boy is growing faster than the rest of us," one murmured.

The old men grumbled. "He's too young, he doesn't know what he's risking." But they knew they had no choice. They didn't have a plentiful supply of warriors. Anyone who could hold a weapon was welcome. And Tecumseh could do more than that.

The first real battle he participated in was not a heroic dance, not a glorious moment. It was chaos. Smoke, screams, gunfire, blood. Men ran, men fell, arrows whirled, muskets cracked. Tecumseh stood in the middle of it all, spear in hand, feeling his heart race—not with fear, but with clarity.

He saw one of his brothers—not blood, but brother of fate—slain beside him. Blood spurted, the boy fell. Tecumseh didn't kneel, didn't cry. He only tightened his grip, charged forward, and struck. The first man he truly killed stared at him with a look that was half rage, half surprise. As if he couldn't

believe such a youth had struck him down. But the knife in his chest didn't argue.

After that, Tecumseh was no longer a "too-young warrior." After that, he was simply a warrior. Blood washes away titles faster than any ritual.

After the battle, he sat by the river, washing his hands, which never came clean. He saw his reflection, but it was no longer the boy. It was someone else—harder, colder, older, without being so.

The men didn't praise him, they just nodded. A silent acknowledgement. In their world, no pats on the back counted. Only actions. And his actions had spoken.

From then on, he was always there. Not on the sidelines, not just as an observer. In the thick of it. A spear, a bow, a shout, a fist. He was small for battle, but great in will. And everyone saw that.

His mother cried secretly when he didn't return at night. She knew she had lost him long ago—not to death, but to fate. He no longer belonged to the family, but to the war.

Tecumseh felt this too. He no longer had dreams of a peaceful future, of fields or families. He dreamed only of battles, of faces in the smoke, of blood in the grass. Not because he loved blood, but because he knew: That's all that remains.

The other boys continued to follow him, even though some of them died. Everyone who fought beside him knew that he stood his ground. That he wasn't running away. That was worth more than any badge, any speech.

The elders said, "He's a boy who became a warrior too soon." But they also knew: Perhaps that was exactly what was needed. Perhaps what was needed was someone who couldn't wait, who no longer had the patience for escape and treaties.

And so Tecumseh's true path began. No longer as a fugitive, no longer as a scout. As a warrior. Too young, too early, too hard. But just right for a world that left no other choice.

The first battles were pure chaos. Smoke, blood, noise—a storm in which everyone was just trying not to be the next to fall. Tecumseh fought like an animal because he knew nothing else. But he quickly realized: those who struck

wildly died faster. The men who screamed and raged were the first to die. The survivors were those who kept their eyes open, who chose their moment, who struck like snakes, swiftly and with precision.

Tecumseh saw this and learned. He was young, but he was no fool. He realized that fighting wasn't just about muscle, but also about brains. That you didn't just have to strike, but also know when to strike. He absorbed everything, every move, every tactic.

Once, he observed an older warrior not attacking the enemy head-on, but staying in the shadows to the side, always a step out of sight. Only when the opponent turned did he strike—precisely, fatally. Tecumseh thought: *That's how you do it. Don't run into it like an idiot.*

Soon he was doing it himself. He was fast, quiet, and nimble. He stabbed when his opponent wasn't expecting him. He dodged when his opponent came roaring. He learned that survival lay not in noise, but in the cold.

The men noticed this. "The boy thinks while he fights," said one. "That makes him dangerous." "Dangerous to the enemy—and perhaps to us too," murmured another.

But they took him seriously. Everyone did.

Over time, Tecumseh also began to see the battles from above—not just the man in front of him, but the movement of the whole. He observed how the white men held their lines, how they drummed, how they marched in blocks. Stupid, but effective. Many warriors ran blindly against them and died. Tecumseh thought: *You can't attack where they're strong. You have to hit where they're weak, where they're not looking.*

That wasn't a thought for a boy. That was strategy.

After a battle, he sat with a few men around the fire. They talked about the losses, about the whites, about the next move. Tecumseh stared into the fire and said, "We shouldn't attack them head-on. We should let them run, and then strike when they think it's over." The men looked at him. One laughed. "Big words for a little man." But another nodded slowly. "Perhaps he's right."

From then on, they sometimes listened to him. Not officially, not as a leader. But they asked, "What do you see, boy?" And he said it. Briefly, succinctly, without any heroic speeches. Simple, clear. And often he was right.

But the warrior's life wasn't just strategy. It was dirt, hunger, cold. Nights in the forest, without fire so the enemy wouldn't see them. Days when they ate nothing but a handful of berries. Weeks in which every step was dangerous. Tecumseh accepted all of this. For him, it wasn't a punishment, but a lesson. He knew: If you can endure this, you can endure anything.

Many of the other boys who grew up with him died. Some from bullets, some from disease, some simply because they were unlucky. For Tecumseh, every death was another brick in the wall he was building inside himself. He remained silent, he didn't grieve aloud. But something was gathering inside him. A list. A bill.

He also began to see the weaknesses of the white people. They were numerous, yes. They had weapons, yes. But they were also slow, clumsy, trapped by their own rules. They needed roads, they needed wagons, they needed order. In the forest, they were like children playing too loudly. Tecumseh thought: *We are few. But the forest is ours.*

And that's exactly what made the difference. For him, war wasn't honor, wasn't glory. War was hunting. And the whites were nothing more than game that trampled too loudly.

The men began to respect him not just as a fighter, but as a leader. They sensed that he thought differently. One said quietly, "That boy has a better future than all of us."

His mother saw how he became increasingly quiet. He didn't speak much to her anymore, not to his sisters, not to his brothers. His mind was already elsewhere. "You're becoming a stranger to me," she said. "I'm becoming a stranger to everyone, except those who fight," he replied.

The warrior's life consumed him, but he let himself be consumed. He gave himself up. Too soon, too hard, but he knew no other fate.

And deep down, he already knew: He wasn't just a warrior. He was more. Someone who didn't just want to fight, but to lead. Someone who didn't just want to survive the war, but to turn it around.

There's a difference between fighting and leading. Fighting means you strike, hoping you survive. Leading means you decide where others strike, and when they fall, a part of you falls with them. Tecumseh was far too young to have to carry that—so that's exactly why he was charged with it.

It started small. His own gang, the boys he'd already trained in the Smoke. They'd grown older, tougher, some already bearing their first scars. None of them had the experience of an old warrior, but they had fire. And they had him.

One evening, shortly before a raid on an enemy camp was planned, a warrior said, "We need scouts. But not just to watch. We need ones to make noise, to distract them." The men looked at each other. No one wanted the role because it was extremely dangerous. Then Tecumseh stepped forward. "We'll do it. My men." A murmur. "You're crazy, boy." "No. We're fast, we're quiet. We can lead them wherever you want them."

And so it was. For the first time, Tecumseh put not only himself but others in danger. They crawled through the woods, ten boys, more shadows than bodies. They made noise in the right place, sent screams through the trees, threw stones that sounded like attacks. The white men charged in the wrong direction, and that's exactly when the men struck.

The raid was successful, and the men returned with loot, with weapons, with cries of victory. But Tecumseh returned with something else: the knowledge that he had guided lives. His band had survived, yes—but only just. One had stumbled, almost been caught. Tecumseh pulled him up, pulled him along as arrows whistled over their heads. He never forgot that boy's face.

He realized: Leadership isn't glory. Leadership is responsibility, which keeps you awake at night.

The men saw him differently afterward. "The boy has nerves of steel," said one. "He's got more than that," said another. "He's got brains."

Soon they gave him small groups. Not officially, not solemnly, simply because it was practical. "Take five, go ahead." - "Take eight, watch the flank." And Tecumseh did it. Always close, always hard, always with the clarity that every mistake would cost blood.

The boys who followed him trusted him blindly. They no longer saw him as a peer, but as someone who always knew where they were going. Tecumseh felt this trust like a weight. But he accepted it. "If I lead you, you live. If you don't follow, you die." That was his simple truth.

But even with him, men died. Once, he led eight men through the woods. They encountered a troop of militiamen, and a skirmish ensued. Three of his men

fell. Not because he was wrong, but because death simply doesn't give a fair account. But for Tecumseh, it was a scar that cut deeper than any blade. He didn't speak of it, but he bore it. And he swore: *Never again so many.*

The elders watched him. Some grumbled that he was gaining too much influence. "He's not yet man enough to lead." But others saw that he was doing things they could no longer do. "He leads because he can't do anything else. Maybe that's exactly what we need."

His mother noticed how he was growing heavier. Not physically, but spiritually. She saw the shadows in his eyes, the words he didn't speak. "You're still young, Tecumseh," she said. "Old enough that others die if I make a mistake." "That's not your burden." "Yes, it is. Mine exactly."

The nights grew longer for him. He sat by the fire while others slept, and thought. About paths, about plans, about enemies. He scribbled lines in the dirt, drew traps, ambushes. Other boys slept with their mouths open. He stayed awake and planned.

The men began to ask him what he thought. No longer just out of curiosity, but because they knew the boy was seeing things they weren't. And often they were right.

But he also felt the bitter taste of responsibility. Every death, every defeat, every escape gnawed at him. He became harder, but also heavier. His gaze was no longer just cold—it was burdened.

And that was precisely the truth: He was no longer a boy. He was a warrior. And he was a leader, whether he wanted to be or not.

Every warrior has his own signature at some point. Some strike blindly like hammer blows, blunt and direct. Others are like fire, loud, glaring, unpredictable. Tecumseh was neither. He became a wolf. Silent, alert, deadly when he leaped.

The first few times, it was still random. An ambush here, a quick attack there. But soon it became a pattern. He noticed that the white men marched like machines—drums, lines, orders, volleys of shots. They loved order, they needed it. Without order, they were like children who had suddenly lost their mother. So Tecumseh aimed precisely for that.

When he led a group, he never let them attack head-on. He sent them into the thicket, made them make noise, and drew attention. He waited until the

enemy became restless, until the drums faltered. Then he struck from the shadows. Fast, hard, and before the enemy knew what was happening, they were gone again.

The men called it the "wolf tactic." Tecumseh didn't laugh, he didn't explain anything—he just did it. But in his head, he knew exactly why: A wolf doesn't win by numbers, but by timing, by patience, by knowing where to bite.

The elders were skeptical. "We've been fighting the way we're fighting for generations." "And we've been losing land for generations," thought Tecumseh. He simply said aloud, "Then try it differently."

His group of boys became the core. They moved as he moved, quickly, quietly, always on the edge. They knew his signs, his looks. A finger, a nod, and they knew what to do. He hardly needed words.

Once, he lured a patrol of ten white men into a swamp. They heard noises, saw shadows, and ran after them. But the deeper they went, the slower they became. The water sucked in, the ground swallowed their footsteps. Then Tecumseh struck. He and his men threw spears, shot arrows, and disappeared again before their muskets could fire. The white men fired into the void, into the fog and trees. In the end, three of them lay in the water, and the rest fled in panic. No casualties on the Shawnee side.

The men were amazed. "That wasn't an accident. It was planned." Tecumseh just nodded. For him, it was a given.

But this kind of warfare came at a price. It wasn't a dance with honor, not a direct fight. It was deception, patience, traps. Some old warriors growled, "This isn't honorable." "And what has your honor brought us?" Tecumseh retorted. "Lost fields, burned villages, dead children."

Silence. No answer.

He realized he wasn't just a fighter. He was a thinker. He didn't just think about today, but about tomorrow, about the next step. He saw patterns where others saw only chaos. For him, war was a game won with the mind, not the chest.

The men began to realize this. They let him do his thing, and he delivered results. Every battle he fought ended with fewer deaths on their side and more on the other.

But responsibility weighed heavily. Every loss that happened cut deeper into him. At night, he washed blood from his hands that wouldn't wash away. He stared into the water, saw the faces of those he had lost. But instead of breaking him, it only made him stronger. He swore to himself: *Every death of ours must cost two of them.*

The other boys grew with him. They became men under his leadership. And they remained loyal to him because he never pretended to be invulnerable. He wasn't infallible. But he was there. Always in front, never behind.

The elders began to talk quietly about him. "He leads differently. But he leads." "Perhaps one day he'll lead us all."

Tecumseh didn't hear it. But he sensed that he stood apart from them. He wasn't just part of the warriors—he was the wolf among dogs.

And so he left his mark on the war: cunning, patience, shadows, precision. No child's play, no senseless shouting. War like a silent knife, only visible after it has already cut.

The first victory that truly counted came not in a major battle, but in an ambush, the kind he liked. Tecumseh led barely fifteen men, half of them barely older than himself. Opposite him: a patrol of twenty white men, heavy, loud, arrogant. For anyone else, that would have been suicide. For Tecumseh, it was mathematics.

He made them march, drumming, snorting, with the stench of whiskey and gunpowder in the air. He led his men sideways, always under cover, always in the shadows. Then he sent two ahead to make noise, so the whites dispersed stupidly. That's when he struck. Spears from the right, arrows from the left, screams from the fog. The whites shot in panic, hitting more trees than enemies. Before they realized it wasn't an army, just a pack, seven of them had fallen.

The rest fled. And Tecumseh let them go. He wanted them to run. He wanted them to go back and say, "The Shawnee have a boy who fights like a demon."

And that's exactly what happened. In the village, the talk of victory spread, in the next village too, and soon in the white camps. A name made the rounds: Tecumseh. No longer just a boy, no longer just a warrior, but a name that meant something.

The men no longer just nodded at him—they followed him. "Tell us where to stand," they said. "Show us how to strike." For a moment, it looked as if he would truly become a leader, not just for his gang, but for everyone.

But with glory comes burden. The white men who fled brought back stories. They told of a young warrior who lured them into a trap like cattle. And the officers listened. Soon, the name "Tecumseh" was not only a whisper among the Shawnee, but also on the lips of the enemy. "Catch him," they said. "Kill him."

Tecumseh knew that fame is as sharp as a blade: it cuts your opponent, but also yourself. But he took it in stride. He wanted them to know his name. He wanted them to be afraid when they entered the forest.

The next victories came more quickly. Small parties, raids, patrols that never returned. Tecumseh led with precision, never wastefully. He struck, took what he could, and disappeared before the other side realized what had happened. And each time, his reputation grew.

But he also learned how thin the line was. Once, he faced a group larger than he expected. The trap was sprung too early, the fog was wrong, and the whites held their lines. He lost three men, one of whom was one of his closest friends—a boy he had fought with since childhood. Tecumseh saw himself fall and could do nothing.

That night, he sat silently by the fire while the others rejoiced over the victory they had achieved despite their losses. He didn't rejoice. For him, the price was too high. He swore to himself: *Every victory must be wise. Every victory must be worth more than it costs.*

But that's not always how war works. Sometimes it consumes you, no matter how smart you are.

Nevertheless, the men saw in him what they needed: hope. A young leader who didn't just shout, but thought. Someone who showed that they weren't yet broken.

The whites hated him. They spoke of him as if he were a ghost. Some officers claimed he was supernaturally fast, that bullets missed him, that he disappeared into the forest like smoke. Tecumseh heard this and grinned for the first time in a long time. If the enemy saw ghosts, he had half the battle.

But the older men remained skeptical. "He's too young, too hot." "But he brings victories," said the others. "Victories cost blood." "And defeats cost more."

So he stood between admiration and mistrust. For the boys, he was already the one they followed. For the men, he was the one they needed. For the enemies, he was the one they feared.

And for himself? To him, he was just a boy who had become a warrior too soon. Someone who saw the faces of the dead who had fallen under his command at night. Someone who knew: every victory made his name bigger, but also the list of his debts.

But there was no way back. The years of flight had shaped him, the first battles had burned him, and the victories had turned him into a legend.

And so the name Tecumseh went through the smoke – like a curse for the white man, like a spark for his own.

Fame is like firewater: It warms you, it makes you strong, but it also eats you from the inside if you're not careful. Tecumseh sensed this early on. His name echoed through the camps, and with every whisper, the expectation grew. Everyone wanted him to bring victories, to perform miracles. And everyone saw only the successes, never the faces of those who had remained in the dirt.

The whites took him seriously. Too seriously. Soon they were no longer traveling in small patrols, but in larger groups, more heavily armed, more cautious. They set traps and ambushes. Tecumseh sensed that the more famous his name became, the more dangerous it became to bear it.

And even within his own ranks, something almost worse was growing: envy. Some warriors, twice his age, saw others listening to him and growled softly. "He's just a boy," they said. "He thinks he's more." But their voices were weak, for his results spoke louder.

Nevertheless, he felt the eyes on his back. Not only from enemies, but also from brothers. Every success brought admiration, but also suspicion. Every victory was a knife he wielded, blade forward—and with the edge in his back.

The first serious setbacks came quickly. Once, he led a troop into the woods to confront a small unit of white men. But they had learned their lesson. They pretended to be weak, retreated, and allowed themselves to be hunted. Tecumseh took the bait—and walked into a trap. Bullets rang out from both sides. Two of his men fell instantly, a third bled for hours before dying.

They escaped, but were badly wounded. For the men, it was "only" a defeat. For Tecumseh, it was more: proof that he wasn't infallible. He could die, and worse—he could let others die.

After that night, he sat by the river, staring into the water until the sun rose. Not a word, not a wink. The faces of his dead stared back. He swore to himself: *Never blind again. Never like this again.*

But war doesn't allow you to rest. They had barely gathered when the next danger arrived. White troops, larger, better led, with officers who had heard of Tecumseh. They were hunting him down. "Find the young wolf," they said. "Knock out his teeth."

He felt it in every encounter. The enemy shot faster, moved more intelligently. It was no longer a game of wolf versus sheep. It was wolf versus hunter. And Tecumseh had to think harder, strike harder, and disappear harder.

The pressure grew within their own ranks. "Tecumseh will fix it," they said. "Tecumseh will lead us." He heard this and sometimes wanted to shout: *I'm not your god, damn it!* But he remained silent. He knew that silence was more powerful than words.

His mother saw how he was getting heavier. He barely spoke to her anymore. When he came to the village, it was only to plan, to rest, and then leave again. She said, "You are no longer my son, you are just the war." He nodded. "Yes."

The envious voices grew louder. "He brings us victories, but also deaths." "Everyone brings deaths," another retorted. "But he also brings hope."

Hope—a word Tecumseh didn't like. Hope was weak, hope was waiting. He didn't want to give hope; he wanted to instill fear. Not his own people, but the white people.

And that's exactly what he did. Every trap he set was harder, faster, more brutal. He left no opportunity to plunge the enemy into uncertainty. He wanted them to hesitate, to keep them awake at night, to think: *If we go into that forest, he will be waiting there.*

But the price rose. Every victory claimed lives. Every ambush was a roll of the dice. And every day he lived was another day others died under his name.

He was young, far too young to bear this burden. But he bore it. And that was precisely what made him the warrior they feared—and the one he himself sometimes hated.

Because fame, he now knew, wasn't a gift. Fame was a weight that pulled you down. But he swore: *If I fall, I won't fall quietly. Then let my name ring out like thunder before it falls silent.*

There's a point at which a boy ceases to be a boy—not because he grows old, but because war forces him to. For Tecumseh, that point had long since passed. He bore scars, not just on his body, but deep inside, where no knife can reach.

The years of flight had shaped him. The first battles had sharpened him. The victories had made him a name. And the defeats had shown him how much a name weighs. At the end of this path stood no longer a boy. At the end stood a warrior.

He noticed it himself one evening as he sat by the fire. The men talked, the children played, the old people grumbled. But their eyes were on him. Not because he said anything—he hardly spoke. But because they knew: If something happened, he would see it. If danger came, he would react. If blood was shed, he would be right in the middle of it.

He needed no titles. No chief, no prophet, no "great warrior." His name was enough. Tecumseh. It already meant something.

But fame didn't make it easy. He wore it like a stone. Every night, when he closed his eyes, he saw faces. Friends, brothers, boys who had trusted him and never came back. He didn't talk about it, but he wore them like a chain of bones.

Sometimes he thought about just leaving. Deep into the forest, alone, away from the war. But he knew the war would follow him. It wasn't just in the villages, not just in the fields. It was within himself. There was nowhere he could escape to.

So he accepted it. He was a warrior, too early, too tough, too young—but just right for a world that had run out of patience.

The elders finally accepted him. Not everyone liked him, not everyone trusted him, but they knew: without him, they would be weaker. He was the spark they had lost. And even though he sometimes accused them, sometimes despised them, he fought for them. For his people.

The boys continued to follow him, now men, marked like him. They were his pack, and he their wolf. They walked where he walked. They struck where he struck. And when one fell, the others swore twice as hard to keep going.

The white people hated him. To them, he was a thorn, a shadow, a ghost in the forest. Some said he could dodge bullets. Others said he vanished into smoke. Stories bigger than the truth—but just the way he wanted them. Fear was a weapon, and he used it.

But he knew: This was only the beginning. The war was bigger than him, bigger than his band, bigger than the Shawnee alone. He could already see that more was needed. More tribes, more fire, more unity. But this idea was still raw, still a spark. For now, it was enough that he was a warrior.

He was no longer a boy. Not in his eyes, not in his demeanor, not in his soul. He was someone the war had swallowed too soon – and whom it would never spit out again.

And so this chapter of his life ended: Tecumseh, the boy, was dead. Born in smoke, baptized in blood, honed in shadow – only Tecumseh, the warrior, remained.

Whiskey, weapons, white traders

Sometimes death doesn't come with muskets or axes. Sometimes it comes in barrels. It sloshes amber, smells sweet, and burns like fire in the belly. Whiskey. For the whites, it was just a commodity; for the Shawnee, it became poison.

The first traders to come near the camps weren't officers, nor soldiers. They were men with crooked hats, yellow teeth, and the look of rats. They had carts full of cloth, knives, iron goods—and barrels. Always barrels. "Whiskey," they said, grinning as if it were gold.

Many men immediately took action. They were tired of fighting, tired of fleeing, tired of dying forever. One sip calmed the trembling, two sips made their voices louder, three sips threw them onto their backs, and the world was less gray for a few hours. But in the morning, everything was worse. Heads heavy, mouths dry, souls empty.

Tecumseh watched with cold hatred. He saw men who once stood on the front lines with spears, now fighting with barrels—against themselves. Whiskey made them soft, slow, stupid. He heard them laugh like children, howl like dogs, vomit in the dirt. And he thought: *This is worse than any bullet. Bullets kill the body, this kills the spirit.*

The traders knew exactly what they were doing. They sold the whiskey not for coins, but for land, for furs, for meat, for anything they could squeeze out of the Shawnee. "One more drink, brother," they said. "Just a piece of forest for that." And too many said yes.

They had weapons, too, yes. Old muskets, rusty blades, pistols that produced more smoke than damage. But it was the whiskey that truly captivated them. An addiction that pulled harder than any chain.

Tecumseh tried to dissuade the men. He rarely spoke, but when he did, it was harshly. "You'll give yourselves to the whites without them having to shoot." Some laughed. "Just a little." "A little is enough to soften them up." "You're too young to tell us what to drink." "And you're too old not to realize you're poisoning yourselves."

This made him enemies in his own camp. Not the kind of enemies who came with muskets, but the kind who whispered drunkenly, "That boy thinks he's better than us." But Tecumseh remained silent. He knew that words could hardly win against whiskey.

The weapons the traders brought were double-edged. Yes, they helped in battle. But they were old, unreliable, and expensive. Each shot cost more than a spear thrust. And for every musket they received, they had to give up twice as much land. The whites didn't sell; they extorted.

Tecumseh saw the trap clearly. "They give us guns so we'll kill each other. They give us whiskey so we'll forget they're killing us." Some listened, nodded, murmured. But many drank anyway.

He began to develop a deep resentment—not only toward the whites, but also toward his own weak people. For him, whiskey wasn't a pleasure, but a new kind of war. One that was quieter, but deadlier.

One night, he saw a drunken warrior beating his wife. Children screamed, women screamed, and the man himself fell into the fire, completely drunk,

half-burned. The next morning, he was dead. No enemy had killed him, only whiskey.

Tecumseh knelt by the charred body, stared, and swore: *As long as I live, I will fight this poison.*

But he also knew: He wasn't strong enough to stop it alone. Not yet. For that, he needed more than his bonds, more than his voice. He needed something bigger. But the thought remained, like a thorn in his flesh.

And as it grew, so did the traders' hunger. More whiskey, more weapons, more land. A vicious cycle that swallowed every village like a swamp.

For Tecumseh, it was clear: the war had a new front. Not just against muskets and bayonets—now also against barrels and cups.

Whiskey ate its way into the camp like a hungry dog that wouldn't leave. At first, it was just a few barrels opened at night when the men thought they deserved a victory. Then it grew, and soon there was no need for victory anymore, just boredom or cold.

The nights were filled with voices, laughter, and shouts. Men staggered through the village, stumbling, vomiting in the dust. Some cried, some yelled, some hit. Women dragged their children away, away from the fire, away from their fathers, who were transforming into beasts.

Tecumseh saw all this and felt a rage greater than any battle. Bullets and blades killed quickly; whiskey killed slowly but more thoroughly. It took the strength from men's arms, the courage from their hearts, the light from their eyes. A drunken man was worse than a dead man, for he still lived, but not for his people.

He began to hate the stench. Even the sweet smoke rising from the barrels made him sick. For him, this wasn't drinking—it was treason in the cup.

The traders knew exactly how to do it. They gave the first sip cheaply, sometimes even for free. "For the brother, for friendship," they said through their rotten teeth. But the second sip cost, and the third cost twice as much. Soon the men were paying with everything they had—furs, jewelry, weapons, even land. A piece of forest for a few nights of intoxication.

Tecumseh watched old warriors sell their bows just to get another barrel. He saw mothers beg their husbands to stop, and the men shout at them, hit them, and push them away.

Once, he intervened. A drunkard was shouting at his wife, grabbing her as if he wanted to break her neck. Tecumseh stepped in. The man slurred, "You don't interfere, boy." "I'll interfere when you treat your people like cattle." The man drew a knife. Tecumseh was faster. One punch, hard, precise, left the drunkard sprawling in the dirt. The woman pulled him away, crying.

The next day, some murmured, "The boy is too proud. He thinks he's better." But others said, "He was the only one who had the courage to intervene."

Thus, whiskey became not only an enemy, but also a touchstone. Those who drank were weak. Those who stood their ground were strong. For Tecumseh, there was no gray area.

The traders' weapons were the second poison. They sold them cheaply if there was enough land on the table. Old muskets that jammed on the second shot, pistols that spewed more smoke than lead. The Shawnee took them anyway. They felt strong when they held metal in their hands. But Tecumseh knew: these weapons were traps. Every shot meant one less piece of forest.

He once mocked: "White people sell us guns so we can shoot each other." Some laughed bitterly, some remained silent. But everyone knew it was true.

The poison of trade divided the Shawnee. There were those who said, "Take what you can get. A little land for a little strength." And there were those who, like Tecumseh, said, "Every piece we give, we don't get back."

But the merchants' voices were sweet. They promised friendship, protection, and prosperity. And many wanted to believe because it was easier than continuing to fight.

But Tecumseh couldn't believe it. He saw no friendship in the traders' eyes, only greed. He saw them laugh when men collapsed drunk. He heard them speaking in English, quickly, mockingly, words the Shawnee didn't understand. But he understood enough: They were laughing at the stupidity of those who drank.

Every night that whiskey flowed, Tecumseh's hatred grew. Not only for the whites, but also for his own weak brothers. For him, weakness was worse than cowardice. Because cowardice could be fear. But weakness was a choice.

He began to mentally write off the drunkards. For him, they were no longer warriors, no longer brothers. They were a burden dragging the people down. He didn't say anything out loud, but in his head he made a list: who remained strong, who fell.

The women sensed that Tecumseh was different. Some looked at him with respect, some with fear. They knew: He was one of the few who didn't bow down. One of the few who never reached for the barrel.

And as the poison flowed, as the people softened, Tecumseh only grew harder. For him, every barrel that rolled was another reason to hate the whites. Not just for the bullets, not just for the land—but for this slow, creeping poison they called "trade."

In quiet moments he thought: *An enemy who lets you die in a frenzy is worse than one who kills you in battle.* And he swore that one day he would not only tip over the barrels, but bury the men who brought them with them.

There came a point when Tecumseh was no longer just a spectator. The whiskey had already softened too many men, beaten too many women, made too many children cry. He could no longer stand still in the corner while the barrels rolled.

The first trader he openly confronted was a fat, red-faced bastard with barely any teeth. He came into the camp with two wagons full of junk: cloth, blades, old muskets—and three barrels of whiskey. The men ran to him as if he were bearing gifts from the spirits. The stench of the barrel immediately permeated the air.

Tecumseh stood there, arms crossed. He watched as the first cups were filled. Then he stepped forward and knocked the cup out of a man's hand, sending the liquid splashing into the dust. The drunkard tried to curse, but Tecumseh's glare silenced him.

Then he turned to the merchant. "Take your barrels and get out of here." The merchant laughed, a slimy, rattling laugh. "Brother, I bring you joy. I bring you strength. What do you want, boy?" Tecumseh stepped closer, so close that the man saw his cold stare. "I want you to go. With your poison. Or you go without a wagon."

At first, the merchant didn't understand, believing it was just a bluff. But then he saw five young warriors standing behind Tecumseh, silent and ready. No

words, no threats, just silent anger. Then he realized: This was serious. He packed his things, growled, but he drove off.

The camp was divided. Some grumbled, "That boy is spoiling our fun." Others nodded, "He's protecting us." For Tecumseh, it wasn't fun or protection. It was a necessity.

But that was just the beginning.

A few weeks later, another trader came, smarter, tougher. He brought whiskey, yes, but also weapons, better than usual. Men pounced on them. Tecumseh stepped forward again, this time not with words, but with deeds. He went to the barrel, tipped it over, and let the liquid spill into the dust. The trader screamed, raged, and reached for a knife.

Before he could pull it, Tecumseh grabbed him by the collar. "If you bring whiskey into this camp again, you'll end up in the barrel, not your stuff." His voice was quiet, almost calm, but the men heard the steel in it.

The trader departed. But not without a threat. "You will die without us. Without whiskey, without weapons. You will have nothing." Tecumseh growled, "Better nothing than your poison."

From that day on, he was branded—not only by the traders, but also by some of his men. The traders hated him because he disrupted their business. Some warriors hated him because he took away their intoxication. But others began to see him differently. "He has the courage to say what we all know."

The division among the people deepened. There were those who drank and said, "Without whiskey, we cannot endure the suffering." And there were those who said, "Whiskey is the suffering." Tecumseh stood firmly on the second side.

His mother warned him: "You're making too many enemies, even among your own brothers." He replied: "Better enemies who drink than brothers who lie dead in a barrel."

The boys he led followed him here as well. They never drank, they never accepted gifts from the merchants. They swore by his toughness because they knew it kept them stronger. Soon they were called "the sober ones," half a term of derision, half a sign of respect.

The traders, however, didn't give up. They came again, again and again, with barrels, with lies, with sweet talk. Sometimes they even sent white men with weapons to protect their interests. Tecumseh didn't back down. He faced them, every time. Sometimes with words, sometimes with his fists, sometimes with bare steel.

And each time his reputation grew. Not just as a warrior who fought against muskets, but as one who fought against the poison within. To some, he was a hero. To others, a troublemaker. To himself, he was simply someone who couldn't stand by and watch his people drown in drunkenness.

He thought about it at night. He knew that whiskey and weapons were more than trade. It was strategy. The whites didn't need armies when the people weakened themselves. It was war in the cup, war in the hand, war without battle. And Tecumseh swore: *I will fight it like any other war.*

From then on, every merchant who came knew that when Tecumseh was there, no business was safe. And every warrior knew that if he drank, he risked the young wolf breaking the barrel over his head.

Whiskey had already weakened men, destroyed families, and left children without fathers. But at some point, it wasn't just broken nights and broken bones. At some point, blood was shed.

It began on a gray morning when a trader arrived at the camp, accompanied by two armed white men. They were loaded with barrels, three in all, and a few crates of muskets, rusted but still functional. The men, already addicted, ran to the wagons like dogs. Hands grabbed, voices shouted, everyone wanted to be first.

Tecumseh intervened. "Not one more drop." His voice was hard as stone. One of his own men, already half drunk from the previous evening, laughed in his face. "You're not my chief, Tecumseh. I'll take what I want." He reached for the barrel, and Tecumseh swatted his hand away.

The merchant grinned. "See, boy? They want it. You can't stop them." "I can stop you."

The two white men stepped forward, muskets in their arms. They thought a few threats would be enough. But Tecumseh was faster. A spear in hand, a leap, a throw – one of the white men fell, screaming, his chest pierced. The second shot, but only hit the ground. Then the boys in Tecumseh's group

rushed forward, screaming, pulled the man to the ground, and broke his neck in the dust.

Silence. Only the creaking of the wagon wheels in the wind.

The men who wanted to drink stared in horror. The merchant turned pale, his lips trembling. "You... you'll pay for this. The whites will come." "Then let them come," Tecumseh growled. "But you won't come anymore."

He grabbed the merchant and shoved him against the wagon. For a moment, he considered killing him right there. But he let him go—with the wagons, with the rest of his damned barrels. "Tell your men what'll happen if you keep bringing us whiskey."

The merchant fled, staggering, his face red with shame and fear.

But the camp didn't remain calm. Some men were angry. "You're bringing death to our village! If the whites come back, we'll all burn!" Tecumseh snapped back: "They'll burn us anyway. But at least now they're afraid of us."

That was the moment the divide became clear. One part was on his side: those who wanted to stay sober, those who saw that whiskey was just poison. The other part grumbled, continued drinking, and whispered at night that Tecumseh would lead them to disaster.

A few days later, the first act of revenge came. Not from the whites directly—but from his own. Three drunken men ambushed him at night. "You think you're better than us," one slurred. "But you're just a boy." They had knives in their hands, staggering, but dangerously enough.

Tecumseh didn't wait. He struck first. One man got a stone in the face, breaking his nose. The second stumbled, his knife missed, and Tecumseh rammed his spear into his stomach. The third ran away, screaming, half in ecstasy, half in fear.

When the body lay in the dust the next morning, everyone knew: Tecumseh was fighting not only against traders and whites, but also against his own brothers, who loved the barrel more than their people.

The older ones whispered. "He's causing unrest." - "He's dividing the people." - "Perhaps that's exactly what's needed." No one dared to condemn him directly, because everyone knew: Without him, they would have fallen further afield long ago.

But for Tecumseh, the line had now been drawn. For him, there were no half measures anymore. Drinking was weak. A weak person could betray the entire group at the decisive moment. He began to view them as enemies, regardless of whether they were Shawnee or not.

This made him harder, colder. Some even called him "the Wolf," not because of his tactics, but because of his eyes. Eyes that no longer saw brothers as brothers, but as a burden.

In quiet moments, he wondered if he was going too far. Whether he would tear his own people apart before the whites could. But then he heard the laughter around the barrel again, the blows in the night, the whimpering of the children—and he knew: There was no turning back.

Whiskey was war. And Tecumseh was one of the few willing to wage it. With blood, if necessary.

After the blood in the dust, it was clear: the merchants would not be forgotten. Whiskey wasn't just a drink, it was a business. And whoever destroyed a business had the entire system against them.

The whites didn't come immediately. At first, there was only silence, a few days in which the air was as if before a storm. But everyone knew: they would come. And they came—not with wagons full of barrels, but with wagons full of weapons.

A small unit of militiamen marched into the village, ten men in dirty uniforms, but with muskets at the ready. They came not like traders, but like hunters.

The leader, a broad-shouldered bastard with a red beard, stood in the middle of the square. "We're looking for the boy. The one who killed our men." His voice was loud, confident. No one answered. Silence, only the crackling of the fires. "You know who I mean. Hand him over, or we'll take what we want."

Tecumseh stepped forward. No trembling, no hesitation. "I'm here."

A murmur went through the village. Some held their breath. Others looked away.

The white man grinned. "You? A half-brain? You don't look like someone who could take down two men." "Ask their spirits," Tecumseh said coldly.

The leader's musket jerked up. For a moment, it seemed as if he would simply pull the trigger. But before he could, the boys in Tecumseh's band screamed. They leaped from the shadows, arrows flew, stones crashed. One of the militiamen fell, an arrow lodged in his neck.

Chaos erupted. Shots, screams, smoke. The whites fired wildly, hitting a few of the houses; a dog was torn to pieces, an old man fell. But the Shawnee fought like wolves. Fast, unpredictable, always from the trees, never directly.

Tecumseh himself rushed at the leader. The red-bearded man raised his musket, but Tecumseh was already there. He struck, spear to chest, a scream, and then the man fell heavily into the dust.

The remaining militiamen fled. Two were left dead, three seriously injured, and the others ran.

The village breathed a sigh of relief, but not a break. Everyone knew: This was only the beginning. The traders now had their answer—and the whites their excuse.

The discussions began that same evening. The elders cast angry glances at Tecumseh. "You're bringing us ruin. They'll come with more. With twice as many. With cannons." "They're coming anyway," he snarled back. "Today it was ten, tomorrow it would be twenty, even without me. At least today they learned that we don't crawl."

Some nodded, others shook their heads. The people were divided, more deeply than ever before.

The night that followed was difficult. Women wept, children screamed, men stared into the fire. Tecumseh went alone to the river and washed away the blood that clung to his hands. The water took it away, but not the guilt. He knew: every blow to the traders made the whites harder. Every death brought new ones.

But he also knew: If he remained silent, if he retreated, then the barrels would win. Then the whites would win without a fight.

In the morning, the news came: a larger contingent of troops was on the way. Militiamen, twice as many, perhaps more. Tecumseh felt the weight in his chest. Not fear—determination. "Then we'll prepare ourselves. When they come, they should know that we don't drink, we bite."

Some listened, some laughed bitterly. But he knew: There was no turning back. Whiskey had fired the first bullet. Now the war was no longer just outside, but in the very hearts of the people.

And Tecumseh was right in the middle of it all, the wolf who had decided he would rather die than open a can of worms for the enemy.

The news came with a breathless man rushing through the undergrowth: "They're coming. Lots of them. With wagons. With cannons." The village froze. Cannons. The word alone was like thunder in the mind. The old people looked at each other, their faces gray as ash. Women pulled the children closer. Men reached for weapons, but their hands trembled.

Tecumseh stood still, watching fear creep through the ranks like smoke. *So that's it, he thought. That's the price. Whiskey brought them here, and I gave them the reason to shoot.*

But instead of running away, he stepped forward. "We can't just run. If we run, we burn. If we stand still, we have a chance."

An old man spat in the dust. "You're crazy, boy. They have cannons." "Cannons hit houses. Not ghosts." Tecumseh pointed into the woods. "We're fighting there. Not here."

It was his first big plan. No ambush against ten, no small trick. He had to save an entire village.

He ordered the women and children to be brought deeper into the forest, quietly, in groups. "No shouting, no fire. Only silence." Then he lined up the men. Not in a line, not as the whites wanted. He had them spread out in a semicircle through the forest, each with cover, each with an escape route.

"They'll point the cannons at the houses. Fine. Let them. If they see fire here, they'll think they've won. And then we'll strike."

Some grumbled, some shook their heads. But they followed. Not because they were convinced, but because they had nothing else to do.

In the morning, thunder rolled. The whites marched with drums, wagons, and uniforms. Cannons in front, barrels behind, always barrels, as if they had already planned the celebration.

They lined up, aimed their cannons at the village. One shot, a bang, and the first house exploded, sending dust and splinters flying. A second shot, a third. Soon half the square was ablaze.

The whites cheered, certain they had buried the Shawnee there. But then came the silence. No screams, no bodies. Only smoke.

The leader yelled, "Forward! Get the remaining dogs out!" The troop marched into the embers, into the charred remains. And that's when Tecumseh struck.

From the forest, on three sides, erupted the thunder of arrows and the crack of old muskets. Shadows rushed forward, spears flew, warriors screamed. The white men stumbled, fired wildly, not knowing where the attack was coming from.

Tecumseh himself leaped like a wolf onto the first wagon, pulled the driver off, and smashed him against a wheel. He saw the cannon, saw the fuse—and kicked it out before it exploded. Then he disappeared back into the smoke.

The battle was chaos. Smoke, blood, splinters, screams. The cannons fired twice more, but into the void. Half of the whites fell, the other half fled, stumbling, burning, screaming.

When the dust settled, the village stood in ruins. Houses burned, the square was devastated. But the people were alive. Women, children, men—they had survived because Tecumseh had the courage to fight not head-on, but like the forest itself.

The elders had to admit it. "Without him, we'd all be dead." One even murmured, "He's more than just a warrior." But others said quietly, "He brings fire, yes, but he also attracts lightning."

Tecumseh heard this and remained silent. He knew both were right.

He walked through the rubble, saw what the cannons had left behind. He felt the children's eyes on him, looking at him like a hero. But he didn't feel like one. He felt only the guilt of the dead lying in the dust. Three men, two women—not killed by whiskey, not by weakness, but in battle, because he had led them there.

That night he sat alone by the river. He washed the blood from his hands, as he often did. But this time, a different weight remained. *I saved a village. But how many more before we're all burned?*

It was the moment he realized: his fight had grown. Not just against traders, not just against whiskey, not just against militiamen. Now everything was at stake—survival itself.

And while the fire in the village slowly died down, the fire within him burned brighter than ever.

The village was half-burned, but it was still alive. Smoke hung over the charred huts, children screamed, women searched for belongings in the rubble. Men stood silently, weapons in their hands, faces gray. They had survived, yes. But what they saw was not victory, but ashes.

Tecumseh walked through the ruins like a shadow. Every footstep crunched on charred wood, every breath smelled of death. He saw the dead lying in the dust—not many compared to the whites, but enough to fill his chest with emptiness.

An old man murmured, "You saved us, boy." Tecumseh didn't answer. He thought: *Saved? No. Just postponed.*

Because he knew that the war with the whites never ended. Today cannons, tomorrow twice as many. Today traders, tomorrow armies. But what bothered him most wasn't the enemy outside – it was the enemy inside.

Whiskey had burned more than the cannons. It had turned men into traitors, brothers into thugs, fathers into monsters. It had weakened the people from within, long before the first bullet was fired.

Tecumseh stood amidst the rubble and swore quietly, his teeth clenched: *Never again. Not a barrel, not a cup, not a drop. As long as I breathe, I will fight the poison. Whoever brings whiskey is my enemy. Whoever takes whiskey is weak. And I will fight both.*

It wasn't an oath for the ears of others. It was one for himself. But it burned like fire.

The men saw him standing there—young, but tougher than any of them. Some nodded, some looked away. They sensed he had sworn something, even if they didn't hear the words.

That evening, he gathered his group, the boys who had long since become men. "Listen to me," he said. "Whiskey is worse than any bullet. Whoever drinks it betrays the people. Whoever brings it wants to kill us. From now on,

there will be no more barrels in our camps. If you see one, tip it over. If you see a dealer, chase him away. If he stays—he dies."

The boys nodded. They knew his look, they knew he wasn't joking.

And so a new front began. Not just against the whites outside, but against the traders, against the poison, against the weakness within his own people. Tecumseh knew this war would be even dirtier, even harder, even more painful. But he also knew: If he didn't fight it, no one would.

The elders whispered again. "He's too harsh." - "He divides us." - "He keeps us alive." No one found the courage to confront him openly. Too many had seen how he had saved the village.

The women looked at him with mixed feelings. Some filled with fear, some with hope. They knew: He wasn't a man like the others. He wasn't just a man who talked, but acted. Someone who was willing to shed blood, even if it was his brothers.

And the children? They whispered his name, the way children fear ghosts and admire heroes. "Tecumseh."

That night, he sat by the river again. Always the river, always the water that took the blood from his hands, but not from his soul. He stared into the current, saw the stars flickering in the water. *Whiskey, weapons, white traders*, he thought. *They're bringing us death. But they didn't count on me.*

That was the end of a chapter and the beginning of a new war. No longer just spears versus muskets, no longer just flight and ambush. Now it was a fight against greed, against poison, against weakness.

And in this fight, Tecumseh was no longer a victim. He was the wolf who not only lurked outside, but also bit inside when necessary.

First skirmishes on the great river

The Ohio was not a stream, not a pond, not a small waterhole like those rippling through the woods. It was a monster. Wide, dark, sluggish, but full of power. Once you saw it, you never forgot it. A river that devoured more than it gave.

For the whites, it was a road. With their boats, rafts, and barges, they carried weapons, supplies, and entire settlements down the river. For the Shawnee, it was a border—a heart they couldn't afford to lose. Whoever held the Ohio held the land. Whoever lost it could only flee.

Tecumseh stood on the bank, the current rushing before him, feeling the river's breath like an enemy watching him. He knew: this was where the next battles would be fought. No ambushes in the thicket, no burning huts—but battles where the water itself would decide who lived and who drowned.

The first skirmishes began small. White boats, full of provisions, floated down the river. Tecumseh and his band lurked in the reeds, waiting until the current made the whites careless. Then they charged out, arrows flying, spears crashing, boats capsizing. Men fell into the water, screaming, swallowed by the current.

It was a new war. Not in the dust, not in the smoke, but on the water. Tecumseh adapted. He leaped from boat to boat, fighting with wet hands and slippery feet. He learned that a spear was twice as deadly in the water, driving the enemy between the boat and the current.

But the whites were also learning. Soon, not just small boats were arriving, but convoys, with guards and riflemen who immediately fired into the shore as soon as they saw shadows. They shot bullets into the bushes that cracked like thunder before the Shawnee even appeared.

Tecumseh knew the game had become tougher. But he loved it. Here he could demonstrate what he had learned—patience, cunning, precision. He let the boats pass, only striking when the whites believed they were safe. He transformed the river itself into a weapon.

Once, he floated an old raft filled with burning pitch down the river. The white men laughed at first, even shot at it. But when it crashed into their boats, the fire spread like a hungry animal. Men jumped into the water, their clothes

burning, and the current carried them away. Tecumseh watched as the river itself completed the work.

The men at his side were amazed. "You don't fight like a human," one said. "You fight like the river itself." Tecumseh simply nodded. For him, this wasn't praise, but necessity. The enemy had roads made of water—so he made the water his ally.

But even these victories came at a price. Every raid resulted in deaths. Not only whites, but also Shawnees. One of his closest brothers, who had fought alongside him for years, drowned when a boat capsized. Tecumseh jumped into the water, searching for him, but the current swallowed him as if he had never existed.

That night, Tecumseh sat on the shore, staring at the dark water. It roared as if it were laughing. *You took him*, he thought. *But I will force you to bring me more white people than you devour Shawnee.*

The river was neither friend nor foe. It was a judge. And Tecumseh swore that he would keep it on his side for as long as possible.

The elders began to talk about him again. "He leads us along the river as well as through the forest." - "He understands the water as he understands the earth." - "He is more than a warrior, he is a leader."

Tecumseh heard this, but he didn't smile. For him, it was just the beginning. The Ohio was great, yes. But he knew: beyond it lay even greater rivers. The Mississippi, the Missouri – white roads that cut deeper into the land like knives in flesh.

And he knew: This was only the prelude. The great war would be decided not in the village, not in the forest, but on these rivers.

The first attack on the Ohio River was like a thunderclap—swift, brutal, successful. But the whites didn't forget. They came back, harder, with convoys that smelled more of war than trade.

No more crooked boats, no more farmers with oars. Now they were long barges, manned by soldiers, every second one with a musket, every third one with a pistol, and everyone with ammunition. They had learned that the river was not an open field—it was enemy territory.

Tecumseh watched them from the reeds, his eyes narrowed, like a wolf about to pounce. He saw that they were no longer coming alone, but in columns, always three, four, or five boats together. He knew that a quick attack, as he was used to, would only mean dying in a hail of bullets.

So he adapted. He thought bigger, dirtier. No more direct attacks—trap.

Once, he rolled entire trees into the river, thick trunks that he and his men felled for days and hid in the water. When the boats arrived, the first one crashed into the trunks, tipped over, and men fell screaming into the water. In the chaos, Tecumseh struck from both sides, like a claw. Arrows hissed, spears pierced, muskets crashed into the void. Two boats sank, the others fled.

But the white men learned their lesson too. The next time, they fired from a distance, before they even got near the reeds. Bullets ripped through the undergrowth, men screamed, blood spurted. Tecumseh had to curse and retreat before he could even lay a hand on a boat.

It went back and forth, like dice thrown by the river itself. Sometimes Tecumseh won, sometimes the whites. And each time, corpses lay in the water, floating downstream, faces up, mouths open.

For Tecumseh, this was no longer a game. He felt the weight of every attack. Once, he returned to camp with only seven men out of fifteen. The rest – in the water, in the belly of the Ohio.

The elders looked at him, some with respect, some with fear. "You bring victories, yes. But you also bring the river to our village." Tecumseh growled back: "The river was here before I was born. It takes anyone who is weak."

But at night, when he sat alone on the bank, he felt the water speaking. Not in words, but in its current, in its roar. *You can use me, but I'll take my price.* And he knew it was true.

The white people began to tell stories about him. Some said he was a demon rising from the water. Others swore he could dive beneath the surface and capsize entire boats. Lies, myths—but useful. Fear was a better weapon than any musket.

Tecumseh began to deliberately feed these stories. After an attack, he let the white men's bodies float in the water without burying them. When farmers downstream found a boat full of dead faces staring in the moonlight, they whispered, "Tecumseh."

But fame was always twofold. For the Shawnee, he became a hero; for the whites, a monster. And monsters are hunted until they're dead.

He realized this when a particularly large convoy arrived—ten boats, fully armed, with officers shouting to keep their men in check. They didn't fire into the void; they waited, aimed, and calculated. When Tecumseh attacked, they immediately caught two of his men. Blood splashed into the water, their bodies swallowed by the current before they could even scream.

He cursed, gritted his teeth, and pulled his men back. No victory. No loss? No—two dead. And two dead were two more faces that haunted him at night.

That night he pounded his fists on the ground until his knuckles bled. *I need more. More men. More tribes. More than just my flock.* He felt that the war on the river could not be won alone.

But he was still young, and he still had only his own. So he gritted his teeth and swore: *As long as I'm here, the Ohio will not be a safe route for them.*

The next morning, he stood on the bank again, spear in hand, eyes on the river. He knew he had to strike again, no matter the cost. Because if the Ohio fell, everything fell.

The Ohio rushed on as always—sluggishly, indifferently, as if it had already forgotten yesterday's dead. But Tecumseh didn't forget. The river had swallowed two men, and their faces stared back at him at night. He knew: If he didn't make the river his ally, it would swallow them all.

So he planned bigger. No quick raid, no arrows in the fog. A blow the whites wouldn't forget.

For weeks, he observed the convoys. He saw how they moved, when they rested, where they believed they were safe. He noticed: They trusted the moon. On bright nights, they stayed in the middle of the river, but on dark nights, they sought the bank to avoid being lost to the current. That's exactly where he wanted them.

He gathered men—not just his own band, but also warriors from neighboring villages. Thirty, forty, enough to act not as a pack, but as a storm. Some doubted. "Too dangerous. Too many." Tecumseh simply replied, "Too many? No. Enough to feed."

The night was dark, no moon, only the river's glitter like cold snake eyes. Tecumseh made the men wait in the reeds, crouched, silent. No fire, no whispering. Only breathing and heartbeat.

Then the boats came. Five of them, heavily laden. Men with muskets, but tired and nervous. They believed the river was their friend. They believed the darkness would protect them.

Tecumseh raised his hand. Not a word. Just a sign. And all hell broke loose.

Flaming arrows shot from the reeds and crashed into the boats. Oil they had spread on the water the day before caught fire. The Ohio itself was burning. Flames licked at the boats, men screamed, muskets cracked in panic.

Then came the warriors. From both banks, silently at first, then roaring, spears and axes in hand. They stormed the boats, jumped into the water, and dragged men into the darkness. Shots echoed, but blindly, uselessly.

Tecumseh was in the thick of it. He jumped onto a boat, pushed a soldier into the water, ripped a musket from another's hand, and struck him down with the butt. His face was a mask of sweat, smoke, and blood. To the whites, he must have appeared like a demon rising from the flames.

The battle lasted less than an hour. When it was over, three boats were ablaze, one drifting empty down the river, and the last one captured by the warriors. Men were still screaming somewhere in the darkness, drowning, being swallowed by the current.

Tecumseh stood on the deck of the captured boat, dripping wet, the blood of strangers on his skin, and roared into the night: "The river is ours!" His voice echoed across the water, carried by the fire.

The warriors rejoiced. They hadn't just won, they had taken plunder. Weapons, gunpowder, supplies—more than they had seen in months. For a moment, their hunger was sated, their anger quelled.

But Tecumseh thought further. He knew this victory was more than just a full belly. It was a message. Every trader, every soldier, every settler who sailed down the Ohio would hear the story: a young Shawnee setting boats ablaze, dragging men into the water, making the river itself his enemy.

He wanted to sow fear. Fear that went deeper than bullets. Because a man with fear aims poorly, sleeps poorly, and lives poorly. And Tecumseh knew: fear was cheaper than ammunition.

The next day, as the sun made the charred remains of the boats gleam, he gathered his men. "That was a victory. But the river is greedy. It will come again. And when it comes, we must be ready. Not with cheers, not with ecstasy—with our teeth."

The men nodded. Some were still grinning, drunk on blood. Others were silent, knowing this victory was costly, even if none of them had fallen. For they sensed: The Whites would respond. And if they responded, it would be with fire and cannons.

But Tecumseh only thought of the face of his drowned brother. *I paid you back, a little. But not enough.*

Over the next few days, the story spread like smoke. In every village along the river, they whispered, "Tecumseh set the Ohio on fire." And in every white camp, they said, "The devil himself waits on the banks."

And so the coup was not just a victory, but the beginning of a legend. A legend that made the Ohio River blacker than it had ever been.

The burning boats drifting down the Ohio were more than a blow—they were a humiliation. And the whites knew only one answer to humiliation: revenge.

They came weeks later, this time not like traders, not like farmers in boats. They came like soldiers. Twelve boats, long and wide, with sails and oars. On board, not drunken militiamen, but men in uniforms, officers with sabers, drums setting the beat. And between the boats rolled small cannons, lashed down, ready to spit fire.

Tecumseh stood on the bank, hidden in the reeds, and saw them. He felt the river vibrate as the heavy boats cut through the current. *This is no longer a convoy. This is an army.*

He knew an open attack would be madness. The cannons would tear through the forest, the muskets would gun down everything that moved. So he had to do what he always did: think like a wolf. Wait until the enemy thought he was safe.

He watched the boats for days. They stayed in the middle of the river, shooting at every shadow on the bank, drumming as if they wanted to drive fear itself into the forest. But he also saw their weaknesses. At night, they became restless. The water was treacherous, the men tired. They docked more often than they should have. Always on the same shallow banks.

So he built his trap there.

He had trees felled, pits dug, and thorns pulled into the undergrowth. He had stones loosened on the slope, which would fall with a shock like thunder. And he kept his men silent for days. No attack, no arrow, nothing. He wanted the white men to believe that the wolf had disappeared.

Then came the night they docked. Twelve boats, men lighting fires, tired but disciplined. Officers shouted orders, posted guards. They thought they were prepared.

They didn't know they were standing in the middle of a mouth.

Tecumseh gave the signal. No shout, no drumming—just a soft whistle.

The trees crashed first. Huge trunks tumbled down the slope, crushing a boat and burying men. Then the stones fell, rolling like thunder, shattering tents and breaking bones.

From the darkness came arrows, spears, and screams. Tecumseh charged forward, leaping into the chaos. He slashed with his blade, bit with his eyes, and moved like a shadow between fire and smoke.

The white men fired back. Bullets ripped through the air, men screamed, blood spurted. Two of his warriors fell beside him, one with a shattered skull, one with a bullet in his stomach. Tecumseh grabbed the wounded man and pulled him away, while he swung his spear.

It wasn't a battle, it was a storm. Chaos, fire, smoke. Cannons blazed, but blindly, into the darkness. A bullet tore through the earth beside Tecumseh, nearly knocking him to the ground. But he stood, roared, and plunged back into the fray.

In the end, four boats were burning, and three had capsized. The rest managed to break free and escape into the current, men screaming, officers cursing. They left behind corpses, weapons, and blood in the sand.

The warriors cheered, but Tecumseh didn't. He saw the dead of his own men lying in the dust. Ten men he knew, who had trusted him. Victory tasted bitter.

But he knew: the blow was necessary. The whites had believed they could control the river. Now they knew: the river belonged to no one. Or rather: it belonged to the wolf.

The elders heard the stories and murmured, "He doesn't fight like us. He fights like a ghost." Some viewed him with respect, others with fear. But all knew: Without him, they would have been dead long ago.

The whites also told stories. They spoke of a demon that made trees fall, of a spirit that burned their boats in the dark. Officers wrote reports, warning that the Ohio River was not safe as long as the name "Tecumseh" echoed through the forests.

But for Tecumseh himself, it wasn't a myth. It was blood, sweat, and death. He sat by the river at night, washing himself, watching the red water that refused to clean itself. *A victory? Maybe. But how many more victories before there's nothing left?*

But he also knew that retreat was not an option. The river had bared its teeth. And as long as Tecumseh breathed, it would make them even sharper.

The smoke from the burned boats hung over the water for days, as if the Ohio itself had been offended. Men collected weapons from the flotsam, pulled corpses from the current, and buried them in the sand. The smell of blood still lingered in the air, mixed with wet wood and pitch.

Tecumseh walked silently along the bank. He didn't just see the dead—he counted them. Not the white men the river had swallowed, but his own. Each fallen warrior was like a stone on his chest. Ten stones after the last battle, heavy enough to drown him in the water.

The men cheered nonetheless. They called him "the Wolf of the River," laughed, and sang. But Tecumseh heard no cheers. He heard only the silence between the voices. He knew: A victory was worthless if it cost blood every time, blood that could not be replaced.

He sat down by the fire, his eyes on the river. An old warrior sat down next to him. "You fight like ten men, Tecumseh. But ten men alone don't win a war." "I know." "Then get more. Go to the tribes. Let them fight with you."

The words burned. He'd thought about it himself, but always pushed it aside. But now, with the dead fresh in his mind, he knew: he couldn't hold the Ohio alone.

In the weeks that followed, he began traveling. He visited his neighbors—Delaware, Miami, Kickapoo. He didn't speak like a chief, not with sugarcoated words. He spoke like a warrior, with a raspy voice, with sentences that cut like knives.

"The whites aren't coming for my village. They're coming for everyone. Today my huts burn, tomorrow yours. Today my men drink their poison, tomorrow yours. If we fight alone, we die alone. If we stand together, we have a chance."

Some listened, some laughed. "You're young, Tecumseh. You think courage is enough. But courage doesn't fill stomachs." "Not courage alone. But courage and alliance."

He continued on, tribe by tribe. Sometimes he received only dismissive glances. Sometimes only whiskey fumes and tired faces. But sometimes he saw sparks—warriors who understood that their land was burning just as much as his.

He brought stories with him. Stories of burning boats, of white men screaming in the water. He had the children whisper, "Tecumseh." He turned fear into a weapon, and his name into a flag.

But alliances were harder than battles. Every tribe had its old feuds, its own scars. Many distrusted each other more than the whites. Tecumseh sensed that this was the hardest war—not with spears, but with words.

And as he spoke, as he traveled, as he swore, he always saw the river in his mind. The Ohio was big, but the white people were bigger. Only if the tribes themselves became as big as the river did they have a chance.

In the camp, people began to talk about him differently. No longer just "the Wolf." Some now called him "the Orator." Not because he spoke beautifully—there was nothing beautiful about his words. They were harsh, dirty, like rusty nails. But they stuck.

The elders looked at him and knew: This was no longer a boy who just set traps. This was someone who thought of more. Of something bigger than the river, bigger than a village, bigger than a tribe.

One night, by the fire, he looked into the flames and whispered: *If we do not become one, we all die.* It wasn't a prayer, not a promise. It was a law he felt, harder than stone.

The Ohio River had shown him the truth: No wolf hunts alone when the prey is bigger than him. He needs a pack. And Tecumseh knew he had to build one.

The Ohio River was never quiet, but now it sounded different. No longer just the current and the wind, but the pounding of hammers, the screeching of saws. The white men were building.

At first, there were only small camps where their boats docked. Then came ramparts, palisades, and sentry posts. Soon the first forts stood on the shore, crude and angular, but with cannons that peered over the water like greedy eyes.

Tecumseh watched this from the woods. He saw the logs, the wagons, the rows of soldiers shouting orders. He felt the ground vibrate, as if the river itself were bound. *They make roads out of water. And when they have roads, they create cities.*

The skirmishes became more intense. There were no easy raids anymore. Every boat was armed, every barge had guards. Patrols moved up and down the river, shooting at everything that moved. Sometimes they fired bullets blindly into the woods, just to show: "We are here, and we see you."

The Shawnee became more cautious. Many stopped attacking altogether. "Too dangerous," they said. "Too many soldiers, too many cannons." Some had already given up on the river.

Not Tecumseh. He stood on the bank, staring into the current, and something harder than fear grew within him: urgency. Every day they waited made the white men stronger. Every tree they felled was a piece of land less. Every stone they laid was a step toward the end.

One night, he led a small group close to a fort. They crept through the woods, crawled through the grass. He saw the stockades, the torches, the guards, the shadows. It was still raw, unfinished. But already strong enough to withstand an attack.

One of his men whispered, "We could surprise them now. A fire, a few deaths, and the thing falls." Tecumseh shook his head. "And tomorrow they'll rebuild it. Bigger. Stronger. With twice as many men."

He knew the battle could no longer be won with spears and traps alone. The river had grown larger, and so had the enemy.

Back in the village, he spoke to the men. "Anyone who thinks they can hold the Ohio alone is blind. We need more. We need everyone. Every tribe, every vote, every axe. Otherwise, they'll build their forts, and we'll just be guests on our own river."

The elders grumbled. Some nodded, others looked away. But Tecumseh saw that his words were on target. They sensed what he sensed: that time was running out.

But time wasn't the only thing running out. The traders still came, even if they were more afraid. They brought whiskey, weapons, promises. Some Shawnee took, despite everything. Tecumseh saw it, sensed the division growing.

One night, while he was sitting by the fire, a young warrior came to him. "Why are you fighting so hard, Tecumseh? We could just retreat. Deeper into the woods. Away from the river." Tecumseh looked at him for a long time, then spat into the fire. "Because the woods eventually end. And the river doesn't. If we lose the Ohio, we lose everything."

It wasn't a speech. It was a confession. And the men who heard it knew: For Tecumseh, there was no turning back.

The whites noticed his resistance. They gave him names. Some called him "the River Wolf," others "the Shadow." Officers wrote that he was more dangerous than an entire army.

And as the forts grew, so did his determination. He knew: Either he would soon forge the alliance he dreamed of, or the Ohio River would carry only the song of the whites.

The Ohio flowed on, indifferent, as if it had forgotten the dead it had swallowed. For the whites, it was a road; for the Shawnee, a heart. But for Tecumseh, it was now more: a mirror. It showed him what would happen if they remained alone.

He sat on the bank, his knees drawn up, his eyes fixed on the water. Behind him, men snored, children wept softly, women whispered. In front of him, the river rushed, unstoppable, like a reminder that time doesn't wait.

He thought of the boats he had burned. Of the cannons he had seen. Of the forts that grew like mushrooms on the shore. Every blow he struck brought glory, yes. But glory was no protection against walls of stone and metal. Fame could not stop a cannonball.

He also thought of the voices of the elders. "We always fought like warriors." But always lost like individuals.

The image burned in his mind: tribes scattered like leaves in the wind, while the whites built roads, erected cities, and enchained rivers. If they continued like this, the Shawnee would disappear, like smoke scattered by the wind.

No. Not with him. Not as long as he was breathing.

He rose, looked up at the sky, black and starry. And he swore: *The Ohio is just the beginning. We will be more. We will be one. Not Shawnee alone. All of us. From here to the great Mississippi. From the forests to the swamps. If we can't hold the river, we must hold the dream.*

There was no romance, no daydreaming, in this vow. It was cold, hard, like a knife. He knew it would cost blood, more, perhaps everything. But he also knew: without the alliance, they were already dead.

The next day, he spoke to the men. Not many words, no long speeches. Just sentences that hit home like blows.

"The river doesn't belong to the white people. It belongs to us. But it doesn't belong only to us. If we want to keep it, we must become one. Shawnee, Delaware, Miami, Kickapoo. All of us. Otherwise the Ohio will sweep us all away."

The men listened. Some nodded immediately, others looked suspicious. But even the skeptics knew he was right. They had seen the forts. They had heard the cannons.

So this chapter ended: not with a victory, not with a celebration, but with a thought. The thought that the fight had to be greater than it had been so far.

Tecumseh looked once more at the river, the water rushing like voices. It was clear to him: the Ohio was neither enemy nor friend. It was a touchstone. Whoever held it lived. Whoever lost it disappeared.

And in that moment, Tecumseh became more than a warrior. He became a dreamer with teeth. One who knew: If the dream didn't grow bigger than the river, he would drown in the river.

The brother who wanted to become a prophet

Every wolf has a brother. Sometimes they hunt together, sometimes they tear each other to pieces. Tecumseh had a brother—not made of steel, but of smoke. His name was Tenskwatawa, but back then everyone just called him Lalawethika—the Belch. A name that stuck like a mockery.

For Tenskwatawa was nothing like Tecumseh. While the one swung spears early on, waded in blood, and pushed the enemy into the water, the other often lay in the shadows, his eyes half-closed, his head full of fog. He drank. He stumbled. He talked nonsense. Some said he was a failure, a nobody, the brother of a warrior.

Tecumseh knew that. He saw it. And sometimes he despised him for it. But blood is blood. He didn't abandon him. Not then.

It was in the years following the first skirmishes on the river that Tenskwatawa changed. One night, he fell into the fire. Not like a warrior fighting, but like a drunkard staggering. His face burned, his eye went blind, his skin crumbled like old leather. People no longer laughed at him—they turned away. A scarred drunkard, more dead than alive.

But that's exactly when it happened. In his darkness, in his pain, he began to speak. First quietly, then louder. He didn't speak like a drunk, but like someone who heard voices others didn't. He spoke of ghosts, of visions, of a world where the whites burned and the old people returned.

At first, they thought it was just nonsense. A cripple looking for his place. But then they listened more closely. His words were raw, wild, but they struck a chord in the people's hearts. They had seen it all: whiskey, hunger, the river full of the dead. They needed more than spears and arrows. They needed hope.

And Tenskwatawa gave them hope – in the form of a prophet.

He began preaching against the whites, not with weapons, but with fiery words. He shouted that their whiskey was poison, that their wares were traps, that their roads led to nowhere. "The whites are snakes!" he roared. "They'll worm their way into your heart until you're dead!"

People listened. Women nodded, men murmured, children stared. A lame man, a blind man, a nickname—and suddenly an entire nation hung on his every word.

Tecumseh watched this with cold eyes. On the one hand, he was happy—finally, someone was speaking the same truth he had always felt. But on the other, he sensed danger. Words are mightier than spears. Words can save a people—or tear them apart.

He said to his brother, "You talk like fire. Fire warms, yes. But it also consumes everything." Tenskwatawa grinned, his scarred face crooked, his eye blind. "And you fight like a wolf. Wolves tear, yes. But they die alone. Together—fire and wolf—who can stop us?"

It was a strange alliance. One with muscles, the other with vision. One a hunter, the other a prophet. Together they were more than brothers—they were the beginning and end of a dream.

But even then, people were whispering behind closed doors. "The prophet speaks beautifully. But he still drinks secretly." – "He sees ghosts, yes. But maybe it's just the demons in the whiskey." – "Can you trust a belch, even if it talks about gods?"

Tecumseh heard all this but said nothing. He knew that when a people cling to hope, the rope shouldn't be cut immediately. But he kept his hand on the knife in case the fire got out of control.

Thus began the story of Tenskwatawa, the brother who wanted to become a prophet. A drunkard, a blind man, a burnt man—and suddenly a voice that echoed louder than drums on the river.

And Tecumseh stood beside her, the wolf who knew: Either this voice would become the heart of her dream – or a dagger in his back.

It began with a fire. No bigger than any other, but the flames danced strangely. Tenskwatawa sat before it, his blind eye gleaming, his scarred face twisted in the light. He talked, murmuring at first, then louder, until the people approached in silence.

"Don't you see them?" he asked, his hands stretched into the embers. "The faces in the smoke? Our fathers, our mothers, the ancestors who warn us!"

The people saw nothing but sparks. But Tenskwatawa's voice made them believe there was more. He described faces: an old warrior with an arrow through his neck, a woman with burned hands, a child drowning in the river. He spoke with such certainty that people stared at the flames until they actually thought they were seeing faces.

"They're talking to me," he cried. "They say: The whites will bring about the end. Their whiskey is their poison. Their treaties are lies. Whoever trusts them dies! Whoever drinks with them is cursed!"

The people trembled. Some wept, others screamed. One even fell to his knees.

Tecumseh stood aside, his arms crossed. He saw the show, and he saw the effect. Words could kill if they came at the right moment.

Over the next few days, more people came to the fire. Not just Shawnee, but also neighbors. They had heard about the voice that saw faces in the smoke. Everyone wanted to hear what the spirits were saying.

Tenskwatawa used it. He spoke of purity. "No white clothes! No white tools! No whiskey! Whoever uses the things of the snakes is a snake himself!"

He demanded that everything white be burned. Some did so immediately. They threw fabrics, metal, jewelry, into the fire. They screamed as the flames consumed them and felt purified.

Others were skeptical. "But the white man's knives cut better." - "Guns kill faster." Tenskwatawa snarled: "Faster? Yes! Faster to death! Faster into chains! Do you want to buy comfort and sell your land?"

The crowd cheered. Words like whiplashes.

Tecumseh watched his brother grow. From a drunkard, a blind man, a mocker, he became a prophet. People began to worship him as if he himself were a spirit who had returned.

But Tecumseh also saw the shadows. He knew that some followed only out of fear. Fear of the white man, fear of the spirits, fear of one's own brother. Fear is strong, yes, but it is also fragile.

One night, Tecumseh spoke to him. "You're pulling people with you. But where to, brother?" Tenskwatawa grinned crookedly. "Where the spirits want to go." "Or where you want to go?" "Is there a difference?"

Tecumseh remained silent. He knew words like these were dangerous. A man who didn't distinguish between spirits and his own desires was unpredictable.

But he was necessary for the people. His visions made them strong, made them proud. They began to feel like one people again, not like fragmented groups scattered along the river.

In one of his trances, he suddenly cried out: "One union! One union of all the trunks! Together like a tree that will not fall!" The people erupted. Tecumseh heard this and knew: Here lay the key. Not just smoke, not just faces – a dream of unity. Exactly what he himself had already felt.

But the difference was clear. Tecumseh thought in blades, in streams, in tactics. Tenskwatawa spoke in smoke, in dreams, in threats. Together, they were a dangerous mixture—perhaps fatal, perhaps saving.

The people began to call Tecumseh's name less. Instead, they heard "the Prophet." A man who could do nothing but talk, yet still filled hearts. Tecumseh felt the sting, deeply, but he said nothing. He knew: Sometimes fire wins more warriors than the axe.

And so began the dual role: the wolf with the teeth, the prophet with the visions. Together they began to form something greater than a camp, greater than a tribe.

But already some were whispering: "A prophet who is blind? Maybe he sees more. Maybe he sees nothing at all." - "A prophet who was once a drunkard? Maybe he's redeemed. Maybe he's just crazy."

Tecumseh heard the doubts, and he knew: his brother's fire could warm, but it could also burn. And if it got out of control, he would be the first to decide whether to extinguish it—or burn with it.

At first, it was just curious people sitting by the fire, looking at the scarred man and thinking: *Maybe he really does have ghosts in his head.* They came, listened, and left.

But soon some stayed. They gave him meat, fur, and blankets. They no longer called him Lalawethika, the belcher, but "the seer." Some knelt before him as if he were more than a man.

The first disciples were the weak. Men who were useless in war. Women who were widows. Boys who had never thrown a spear. They found in his words something that made them strong without having to shed blood: faith.

But then warriors came too. Tough men who had fought in the river, carrying arrows in their arms. They listened to him, and something about his voice held them. Perhaps because they were tired of fighting, perhaps because they wanted an answer that was tougher than Tecumseh's silence.

Tenskwatawa preached against everything white. "No whiskey! No metal! No clothes from them! Anyone who lives like that doesn't belong to us!" His disciples cheered, tore rags from the bodies, and threw them into the fire. They burned things they had used the day before.

Tecumseh watched this. He thought: *A spear can kill a man. But words can transform an entire nation.*

It wasn't long before the disciples began preaching themselves. They traveled to other villages, telling of the prophet who saw faces in the smoke and spoke to the spirits. They returned with new followers. A few listeners grew into a movement.

The mood in the camp changed. Where men once cursed, laughed, and drank, a new strictness suddenly prevailed. Anyone caught with whiskey was ridiculed, beaten, and sometimes worse. Women kept their children away from anything white. Even the elders began to whisper the old rites again, which seemed long forgotten.

It was as if Tenskwatawa, with his burned face, not only spoke words, but also brought back the hearts of the people.

Tecumseh sensed that power grew here. Not through blood, not through plunder, but through faith. And power based on faith could do more than any blade.

But he also sensed the danger. For with faith comes fanaticism. Some disciples became harsh, relentless. One nearly beat an old man to death for using a white man's knife. Another burned his own family's supply simply because he had bought salt from a merchant.

Tecumseh intervened, stopped the beating, and shouted at the fanatics. "We are fighting against the whites, not against each other!" But Tenskwatawa just looked at him and grinned. "Those who are weak die. The spirits will it."

The tension between them grew. Tecumseh was the wolf who fought with tactics. Tenskwatawa was the fire that wanted to devour everything. Together they had power, but also friction.

Nevertheless, the whites recognized the danger. Traders who came near were insulted, robbed, and sometimes killed. Rumors circulated: a prophet had awakened the Shawnee, a man who cursed the whites and united the people against them.

Officers wrote reports: "This prophet is more dangerous than an army." They knew that words could break down walls faster than bullets.

Tecumseh understood this too. He spoke to his brother, quietly, one night by the fire. "Your words bring us strength. But strength can also be blindness. If your disciples turn the knife against ourselves, what then?" Tenskwatawa stared into the embers, his blind eye gleaming. "Then we have too few spirits in our blood. We must become purer." "Or think harder." "You think like a warrior. I speak like a prophet. Together—we are sword and tongue. Face it, brother."

Tecumseh remained silent. He knew he was right—and wrong at the same time.

The movement grew. More and more tribes heard about the prophet. More and more came, bringing gifts, seeking advice. A drunkard whom no one took seriously became a man who suddenly moved an entire region.

And Tecumseh stood beside him, the wolf who understood: This was bigger than him. Bigger than the river, bigger than a tree trunk. And if he were wise, he wouldn't extinguish this fire, but rather direct it.

But deep inside him the thought gnawed: *A fire cannot be controlled. It consumes what it wants.*

The fires grew larger. No longer just small embers in the camp, but tall flames that towered into the night sky. Tenskwatawa sat before them, his blind eye white in the light, his burned skin like a mask. He was no longer a man; he was an image. An image that both frightened and gave hope.

He began to introduce rituals. No more drinking—not just whiskey, but anything the white people brought. Anyone who did so had to justify themselves to the crowd. Some were beaten, others were expelled. It was no longer a choice; it was the law.

The nights filled with trances. Drums, screams, smoke. Men and women danced until they fell over. Tenskwatawa stood in the center, arms raised, speaking in tongues, rolling his eyes until only the whites were visible. Some said he was truly falling into the world of spirits. Others whispered he was just an actor. But no one dared to say it out loud.

He ordered a return to the old ways. No white tools, no fields cultivated according to their methods. "Back to the spirits, back to purity!" he cried. "Everything white is poison!"

Some followed enthusiastically. They threw away metal, smashed guns, burned clothes. They felt free, purified.

Others grumbled. "How are we supposed to hunt without guns? How are we supposed to survive without tools?" The disciples shouted them down. "Anyone who speaks like that is already poisoned!"

Thus the schism began. On one side, those who followed the Prophet—fanatical, strict, full of fire. On the other side, those who doubted—quiet, fearful, but increasingly under pressure.

Tecumseh saw this. He knew that his brother was making the people stronger—but also that he was dividing them. A people who distrusted each other could not be strong. But he said nothing. Not yet. For he sensed that his brother's fire also attracted strength. And he needed this strength if his dream of an alliance was to become reality.

Once, he saw an old man trembling before the flames. He had secretly kept salt from a merchant. The disciples dragged him before the crowd, shouting that it was tainted. Tenskwatawa raised his hand and said, "The spirits curse him." Then he spat into the fire. The crowd went wild, and the old man was chased from the village, alone and without his family.

Tecumseh stood in the shadows, clenching his fists. He could have intervened. But he didn't. He knew that an open break with the prophet would tear the people apart. And they were already torn apart enough.

The rituals became more intense. Nights filled with screams, filled with smoke. Men fell into trances, women saw faces in the fire, children howled because they believed spirits were reaching for them. Tenskwatawa played this fear like a drum.

Sometimes he himself fell into the fire, rolled in the dust, and screamed words no one understood. Then he rose, trembling, and cried: "The spirits have spoken! They want purity, they want blood, they want strength!"

And the crowd believed.

But Tecumseh didn't believe in spirits. He believed in spears, in tactics, in rivers. To him, the visions were just smoke. But he saw that smoke set men in motion. And movement was power.

He spoke to his brother one night. "Your words are strong. But they also kill our own." Tenskwatawa grinned, his burned skin tearing. "Then they were weak. And weakness cannot sustain an alliance." "An alliance needs many. Not just the toughest." "An alliance needs spirits, brother. Without spirits, we are only flesh."

Tecumseh remained silent. He knew they spoke different languages, even though they shared the same mother. But he also knew: together they were stronger than apart.

Meanwhile, the whites heard about the rituals. Traders reported that entire villages had gone "crazy," that a prophet was purifying the tribes, and that they were burning the whites' goods. Officers noted: "This prophet is a problem. He is radicalizing the Indians."

And that's exactly what he did. From a people teetering between whiskey and hunger, he transformed a movement that believed it was guided by spirits.

For Tecumseh, this was dangerous. But also useful. He knew that if he ever wanted to forge the great alliance, he needed more than spears. He needed a vision. And so he let the prophet speak—even though he felt deep down that the fire might one day consume him.

The fire didn't stay in the village. Smoke always rises, and the wind carries it far. Soon other tribes heard of the prophet—the blind one, the burned one, the one who spoke with the spirits.

The Delaware arrived first. A small group, tired, half-starved, their eyes filled with doubt. They sat by the fire and listened as Tenskwatawa preached. He spoke of purity, of faces in the smoke, of the return of the ancestors. The Delaware listened, nodded, and the next morning they burned their knives, their blankets, and their few white clothes.

"We follow you, Prophet," they said. "Your words are stronger than iron."

Word got around. Soon, curious groups from the Miami, Kickapoo, and even Cherokee arrived. They brought gifts, asked for advice, and listened to the visions. Some returned convinced, others shook their heads.

Because not everyone wanted to hear that they should throw away their guns. Not everyone believed that spirits were more powerful than cannons. Some tribes openly said: "Your prophet is a madman. Without guns, we are dead."

This caused conflict. In some camps, men fought each other because one defended the prophet, the other mocked him. Families broke up, villages split. The name Tenskwatawa was like a knife—it cut through everything, whether for or against him.

Tecumseh saw this. He knew: This was precisely his brother's power. He didn't make people indifferent. He forced them to take a stand. And a people who took a stand were at least no longer drunk, no longer down.

But he also saw the danger. Division meant weakness, and weakness meant the whites laughed.

The whites actually laughed. Traders told of Indians burning their own belongings, of throwing away their guns. "Stupid as children," they said. But the officers didn't laugh. They wrote: "If they truly believe a prophet is leading them, then they are more dangerous than we thought. For faith knows no fear."

Tecumseh began to take advantage of the movement. When he went to a tribe, he didn't just talk about wars and rivers. He spoke of the prophet, of the spirits demanding an alliance. And suddenly, people listened differently. A wolf with spears was one of many. A wolf with a prophet on its back was something else—a sign, a symbol.

But he had to be careful. Sometimes people talked more about Tenskwatawa than about him. "The Prophet says..." "The Prophet wants..." – and Tecumseh gritted his teeth. Because he knew: Without his brother, the movement would be weaker. But with him, he risked being overshadowed.

Once, at a Kickapoo encampment, Tenskwatawa spoke for hours. He screamed, he cried, he rolled in the dust. At the end, men were on their knees, women were weeping, children were clinging to their mothers. Tecumseh then stepped

forward and said calmly: "And now let us forge the weapons. For spirits alone do not strike cannons."

The crowd was silent for a moment, then cheered. They saw the prophet and the warrior side by side—vision and spear. Together they seemed invincible.

But at night, when they were alone, Tecumseh said, "You build faith, brother. But faith without weapons is smoke. We need both." Tenskwatawa laughed. "And you build weapons, brother. But weapons without faith are empty. We need both."

They knew they needed each other – and that they distrusted each other.

So the movement grew. Tribes came, some stayed, others refused. Some called Tenskwatawa a saint, others a madman. But no one could ignore him.

And in the center stood Tecumseh, the wolf who understood: This was the beginning of something greater. A union of smoke and blood. A dream that was bigger than the river—but also more fragile.

Because a dream can carry everything – or burn everything.

The fires now blazed almost every night. But they were no longer just visions, no longer just faces in the smoke. Tenskwatawa began to speak laws—not as requests, but as commands.

"No more whiskey. Anyone who drinks is not one of us." "No more guns. Anyone who uses one betrays the spirits." "No white clothes, no white tools, no trading with the snakes."

At first, people cheered. Finally, clear rules, finally something that provided stability. After years of flight, hunger, and chaos, it was almost a relief to have someone telling them what to do.

But soon the next step came: punishments.

A man was caught drinking whiskey. Once, he would have been laughed at, perhaps beaten. Now he was dragged before the crowd. Tenskwatawa stood before him, his arms raised, his blind eye a white ball in the firelight.

"The spirits curse him!" he cried. "He is weak, he is poisonous, he is a snake!" The crowd went wild. Some spat at him, others beat him. In the end, he was

chased from the camp, alone, without supplies. Everyone knew what this meant: death.

Another time, they caught a woman who had bought a knife from a merchant. She claimed she only needed it to cut meat for her children. But the disciples shouted, "Traitor! Snake!" Tenskwatawa had her house burned down. The woman wept, the children screamed, and the people watched. No one intervened.

Tecumseh stood in the shadows, his fists clenched. He could have intervened. But he didn't. Because he knew that any open conflict with the prophet would tear the people apart. And a torn people was a dead people.

But inside, his anger grew. For him, weapons weren't snakes, but tools. For him, whiskey was poison, yes, but a knife? A gun? Things that determined the war? He knew: without them, they were weaker. But Tenskwatawa's words burned hotter than any reason.

More and more often he heard in the camp: "The prophet says..." "The prophet wants..." Less often he heard: "Tecumseh says..." or "The wolf wants..."

He felt the reins shift. He was the warrior, the leader in battle. But outside of the fighting, his brother ruled.

Once, he confronted him directly about it. "You make laws, brother. Laws that divide the people." Tenskwatawa grinned, his burned skin stretching grotesquely. "Laws don't divide. They purify. Those who don't follow are no longer part of us." "But what if too many don't follow?" "Then they are weak. And the weak have no place."

Tecumseh remained silent, but his heart was seething. For him, every pair of hands, every voice, every child was important. For the prophet, only the "pure" were important.

The whites heard about the new laws. Traders reported that entire tribes were breaking off trade, that Indians were burning their own supplies. Some laughed: "They're making themselves weaker." But officers wrote: "They're becoming unpredictable. Fanaticism is more dangerous than poverty."

And that's exactly what happened. The disciples became more fanatical, more violent. They no longer attacked only whites, but also their own people who hesitated. Children denounced their fathers, women berated their husbands

for being too weak. The people purified themselves—but in a fire that burned ever hotter.

Tecumseh recognized the danger, but also the power. At the same time, he saw how tribes came together because they believed in the same laws. They no longer saw only themselves, but something greater. Something that united them.

One evening they sat side by side by the fire. Tenskwatawa murmured prayers, rolling his eyes. Tecumseh looked at him for a long time and thought: *You are both poison and healing. Without you, everything falls apart. With you, we could lose everything.*

He simply said, "If your laws make the people strong, fine. But if they weaken them, I will stop you. Even if you are my brother." Tenskwatawa smiled crookedly. "Then you must fight the spirits, not me."

So it stood between them. One with spears, the other with laws. Together invincible—or deadly for themselves.

And the people followed both. Sometimes the wolf, sometimes the prophet. Sometimes the spear, sometimes the smoke.

But Tecumseh knew: Soon, standing side by side would no longer be enough. Soon they would have to decide whether they were a dream—or a nightmare.

The smoke hung over the villages like a second heaven. Sometimes it smelled of burnt flesh, sometimes of whiskey being poured into the fire, sometimes of wood being burned in the name of purity. Always the prophet was the focal point. Tenskwatawa, the blind one, the burned one, the nickname. A belch had become a voice that moved entire tribes.

Tecumseh saw it and knew: They had changed. The people were no longer the same as they had been back when they traded whiskey for furs. They were more fanatical, harder, louder. They had hope—but a hope that lay like a dagger in their hand: sharp, but dangerous.

He stood beside his brother as he preached. While Tenskwatawa stared into the flames, with rolling eyes and a broken voice, Tecumseh stood there like a shadow, spear in hand, still, firm, immobile. One was the fire, the other the stone.

The people loved that. They didn't see two brothers, they saw an image: prophet and warrior. Smoke and blood. Vision and action. They believed that the spirits themselves had sent the two to lead the people back.

But Tecumseh knew how fragile it was. He saw the divisions growing. Tribes joining forces, and tribes laughing. Men throwing their rifles into the fire, and men secretly hoarding ammunition. Women praying, and women doubting. Children whispering the prophet's name louder than the wolf's name.

In quiet moments he asked himself: *What if he's wrong? What if the ghosts don't speak? What if it's all just smoke—and we're following him into nothingness?*

But then he thought of the forts on the Ohio River, of the cannons that were growing larger, of the white towns that were growing like mushrooms. And he knew: smoke was still better than resignation. A dream, even if it was dangerous, was stronger than no dream.

One night, they spoke alone. The fire crackled, the night was silent, only the river rushed in the distance.

"You are the prophet," Tecumseh said quietly. "And they listen to you. But listen to me now: If you lead them into the abyss, I will stop you." Tenskwatawa grinned crookedly, his burned skin cracking in the light. "Then you must be stronger than the spirits." "I just have to be stronger than you."

They were silent, looking at each other. No hatred, no smiles. Just brothers who knew: They were two blades rubbing against each other. Together they sharpened each other. But if they collided too hard, they would break.

But the people saw only the image. They saw the brothers standing side by side. And in this illusion lay the power. For while Tecumseh forged alliances, Tenskwatawa forged faith. While Tecumseh planned wars, his brother planned visions. Together they built something greater than a tribe, greater than a village.

A dream that was dangerous – but also the only chance.

Thus ended this chapter: Two brothers, Wolf and Prophet. One with teeth, the other with smoke. Together, stronger than any enemy—and yet always just a breath away from tearing each other apart.

And somewhere in the darkness, between the river and the forest, the white men waited. They heard of a prophet, they heard of a warrior. They weren't laughing yet. They were planning.

Faces in Fire – Tenskwatawa's Vision

It was a night without a moon, only the stars shimmered coldly. People sat huddled around the large fire. Children clung to their mothers, warriors braced their spears, women kept their eyes wide open. Everyone was waiting for him. For the blind man, the burned man, the man they called "Prophet."

Tenskwatawa stepped into the light, his face a mask of scars, his blind eye gleaming white like a dead man's bone. He raised his arms and remained silent for a long time. Then he began to stare into the flames.

At first he mumbled. Barely understandable, words that sounded like a hum. Then louder, firmer, a singsong that wafted overhead. The crowd held its breath.

Suddenly he screamed, so loud that children screamed. "Don't you see them? DON'T YOU SEE THEM?"

Everyone stared into the fire. Some saw only sparks, others thought they recognized faces. Tenskwatawa described them: a man standing in blood, a woman with burnt hair, a child reaching out for help.

"These are the ones who died from whiskey!" he yelled. "These are the ones you betrayed when you sold land to the white man! They're coming to warn you!"

People began to cry, some falling to their knees. An old man tore his hair out, screamed that he himself had sold land, and pounded the ground with his fists.

Tenskwatawa continued on. He saw more faces in the smoke, more ghosts, more warnings. His voice swelled, broke, swelled again. It wasn't speech—it was thunder, a roar, a rush.

"The spirits say: The whites are snakes! They say: Their poison is whiskey, their smile is a trap! They say: Anyone who signs their contracts is dead before they even die!"

The crowd screamed back. Men raised spears, women screamed, children cried. The night was an orgy of fear, rage, smoke, and faith.

Tecumseh stood at the edge, arms folded. He heard every word. Part of him wanted to laugh—faces in the smoke? Ghosts in the fire? But another part knew: It worked. He saw it in the people's faces. They believed. And faith made them strong.

The vision ended with a scream. Tenskwatawa fell to the ground, trembling, foaming at the mouth as if he had a demon in his stomach. People ran to him, shouting, crying. After a few minutes, he stood up, his hair matted with sweat.

"The spirits have spoken," he gasped. "They say: Only purity will save us. No whiskey. No trade. No land for whites. No pact with snakes."

The crowd cheered, roared, and beat their chests. Men swore never to drink another drop. Women swore to keep their children away from anything white. It was as if the vision had remade them from the inside out.

But Tecumseh saw deeper. He knew this vision was more than a spectacle. It was a tool. A tool to turn a weary people into an angry people. And anger could move mountains—or drive entire tribes to ruin.

After the vision, the first disciples came to him, their eyes still wide, their voices hoarse. "The prophet has seen the spirits. He is our light." Tecumseh just nodded. But in his head he thought: *A light can guide. But it can also blind.*

The night ended, but the vision remained. The next day, everyone was talking about it. Anyone who wasn't there heard it from five others. Each sentence grew bigger, wilder. Some claimed they had seen ghosts themselves. Others said they had heard voices. Soon the vision was more than an event—it was a myth.

And myths are stronger than blood.

The first vision had electrified the people. But Tenskwatawa knew: a spark wasn't enough. It had to be turned into fire. So he began to describe the faces in the smoke more precisely, to translate the voices more clearly.

Once again, they all sat around the large fire. The Prophet knelt, his hands outstretched, his blind eye sparkling like a cold moon. He stared into the embers as if seeing through them. Then he began to speak, slowly, penetratingly.

"The spirits say: You may no longer sell any land. Not a single leaf, not a single stone." His voice rose. "Anyone who gives land to the whites is a traitor! Dead before they even die!"

People murmured, nodded, and beat their chests. Some remembered the old treaties, the cursed pieces of paper their chiefs had signed. Some felt shame, others anger.

"The spirits say," he continued, "that you should no longer allow the white people into your villages. No more whiskey! No more meat from them! No salt, no iron! Everything that comes from the snakes is poison!"

More cheers, more screams. Men threw old bottles into the fire, women pulled knives from traders' huts and hurled them into the flames.

Then came the next blow. "The spirits say: Whoever is weak should go. Whoever doubts is not worth a snake. Purify yourselves! Purify yourselves!"

The crowd roared, but Tecumseh listened intently. This was new. Not just against the whites, but against his own. Words that could hold the people together—or divide them.

After the meeting, the first consequences began to emerge. A man who was still secretly drinking whiskey was exposed. Once, he would have been ridiculed. Now he was beaten unconscious and thrown to the dogs. "The spirits have cursed him," they said.

Tecumseh was there. He didn't intervene. But he saw the brutality, saw how quickly words turned into violence. He thought: *A prophet with fire in his voice is stronger than a warrior with a hundred spears.* And he knew that this was both an opportunity and a danger.

The visions became more political. Tenskwatawa no longer just screamed about spirits, but also about the white people in detail. "The Americans are demons! They want to take everything from you! But the British across the great river—they're different. They're friends, as long as you don't trust them. Use them, but don't fall for them!"

This was dangerous. Such words made the whites nervous. Returning traders reported: "The Indians are now listening to a madman who says we are demons." Officers wrote reports that a prophet was stirring the tribes against the United States. They gave him a name: *The Shawnee Prophet*.

Suddenly, not only the tribes knew him, but also the whites. Some laughed: "A drunkard who sees ghosts." Others warned: "Don't laugh. Fanaticism is harder to break than bones."

In the villages themselves, the effect was even stronger. Women refused to receive traders. Men burned things they had used for years. Children screamed when they saw a white person. It was as if the prophet had driven the entire people through a fire.

Tecumseh began to use it. When he approached a tribe, he spoke of alliance, and the Prophet's disciples supported him. "The spirits want unity!" they cried. "The Prophet says we can only survive together!"

But he also saw that it was dangerous. Not every tribe believed in the visions. Some said, "We need guns. We need trade. Without that, we'll die." These tribes turned away—and the dream of unity turned into a rift.

Tecumseh saw the game clearly: His brother made them strong, but also unpredictable. Faith united some, pushed others away. And yet, without him, they would have been just a people like any other, half drunk, half broken. With him, they were a storm.

A storm that could either sweep away everything – or itself.

It was no longer just a bonfire. It was a stage. The disciples had prepared the space as if for a ritual greater than anything before. Three fires blazed in a circle, drums pounded, women sang in shrill voices, children waved torches. The smoke hung thick, acrid, making people cough—but no one flinched.

Tenskwatawa stepped into the center, slowly, solemnly, as if he were already half a ghost. His face was painted with ash, his blind eyes white as chalk, the scars gleaming in the fire. He raised his arms, and the people fell silent. Only the drums continued, dull as heartbeats.

He began to stagger as if possessed. His body shook, and he made sounds no one understood. Some held their breath, others stared, transfixed, at his twitching, as if he were a medium, a vessel being used by something greater.

Then he suddenly shouted, so loudly that even the drums fell silent: "THE SPIRITS ARE HERE!"

A murmur went through the crowd. Children screamed, women held their faces. Men knelt.

"They're showing me pictures!" he gasped, staring into the fire, his arms raised trembling. "I see white cities, as big as forests, their streets like snakes, their smoke like poison! I see our peoples scattered like leaves, trampled beneath their feet!"

The crowd groaned as if they themselves were being kicked.

"But the spirits also say: You can stop them!" he cried. "If you become one, like a tree with a thousand branches, then you will break the snakes! If you stay pure, if you stay strong, if you resist the whiskey and resist the treaties, then the whites will fall like leaves in winter!"

Cheers erupted. Men beat their chests, women tore their hair, children screamed.

Tenskwatawa spun in a circle, his arms wide open, as if he himself were about to ascend to heaven. "The spirits have told me: Every tribe that joins will become part of the great tree! Every tribe that doubts will be cursed! The ground beneath them will burn, their children will die, their names forgotten!"

The crowd roared. Warriors vowed loudly to throw away their guns. Women cried out that their children would grow up pure. Old men murmured prayers they hadn't spoken in decades.

Then Tenskwatawa fell to the ground, twitching, foaming, rolling in the dust. The disciples cried out, "The prophet is fighting with the spirits!" Some women ran forward, wanting to touch him, hoping to feel some of his power.

He lay like that for minutes until he suddenly jumped up, drenched in sweat, his hair disheveled. "The ghosts are gone," he gasped. "But their words remain."

Then the crowd collapsed—not in despair, but in tears, jubilation, and oaths. Men snatched away their weapons and threw them into the fire. Women burned jewelry, fabrics, and tools. Children cried out the prophet's words: "One tree! One tree! We are one!"

Tecumseh stood at the edge, arms folded, face hard. He saw the show, and he saw the effect. It was no accident, no spontaneous outburst. It was theater—perfectly acted, but with deadly effect. Because the people believed it. Every scream, every twitch, every image in the smoke—it burned itself into their minds.

Later, as the crowd dispersed, an old warrior approached Tecumseh. "Your brother has been touched by the spirits. I have seen many, but none have spoken like this. He will save us." Tecumseh just nodded. But inwardly, he thought: *Salvation or ruin. Both look the same when you're standing in the smoke.*

The next day, entire families, entire groups, swore to join the prophet. Some tribes sent messengers: "We've heard he speaks with the spirits. We want to be part of the tree."

The movement was no longer just an idea. It was an oath, a promise, a bond stronger than blood.

And Tecumseh understood: Something was growing here that was greater than any war he had fought before. Something that would either make the whites tremble—or tear his own people apart.

Because a vision that powerful could move mountains. But it could also burn everything in fire.

The whites had long believed that the Indians would consume themselves—with whiskey, with division, with hunger. But then the first reports came in. Traders, trembling, told how the villages were suddenly different. No more open bottles, no more rotten furs, no drunken men. Instead, there were fires, chants, and a man with a burned face who was called "the Prophet."

Officers wrote to their superiors: "A certain Shawnee has fanaticized the people. They follow his words like a law. He speaks of spirits, but his messages are political: no treaties, no sales, no whiskey, no trade. If this continues, we will lose our control."

At first, some laughed. "A drunkard suddenly becomes a prophet? Ridiculous." But then more reports came in. Entire tribes burned goods, refused trade. Some began to fortify their camps. The movement spread faster than any troops could march.

In Cincinnati, in Kentucky, in Fort Wayne—everywhere, whispers were circulating about the "Shawnee Prophet." Newspapers began writing about him: "A madman, a sorcerer, a dangerous fanatic." But there was nervousness behind the lines. Because they knew: A fanatic is harder to break than a drunk.

Tecumseh observed this with cool clarity. He saw the whites becoming nervous, and he knew: This was a good thing—but also dangerous. Because nervous men with cannons are more dangerous than proud men with flags.

The white men's spies came more frequently. Men in worn coats pretending to be traders. They crept through the villages, asking questions, buying information with salt or money. But the disciples recognized them immediately. Some disappeared without a trace, others were sent back half-dead. The message was clear: *We see you. We don't need you.*

This made the officers even more nervous. Words like "rebellion," "alliance," and "danger" appeared in their reports. They wrote of "a charismatic leader"—meaning not just the prophet, but also his brother, Tecumseh. The spies had reported that next to the preacher stood a warrior, one with an iron gaze, one who had already fought battles.

The combination frightened them: vision and spear. Prophet and wolf. Faith and war.

In the Shawnee camp itself, the mood was charged. Everyone knew the whites were now paying attention. Some saw it as a sign of success. "If they're afraid, then we're strong." Others feared revenge. "They won't let us go. They'll come."

Tecumseh walked among the people, speaking quietly, briefly, and succinctly. "Prepare yourselves. They will test us. Soon." He knew war was inevitable. His brother's visions had lit the spark—now the fire would spread.

Tenskwatawa, on the other hand, enjoyed it. He stood by the fire, preaching even louder, even sharper. "You see, the white people fear us! They tremble before the spirits! That's proof we're on the right path!"

The crowd cheered, but Tecumseh thought differently. For him, fear was not confirmation, but a sign. When an enemy is afraid, he strikes more quickly.

And that's exactly what the whites did. In Fort Wayne, they began gathering troops. In Vincennes, officers, politicians, and traders met. They talked about "measures," about "neutralizing the Prophet," about "taming the Shawnee." Behind these words lay the truth: They wanted war before the movement became too large.

Tecumseh sensed it coming. He saw the sharpness in the spies' eyes, heard the tension in the white men's conversations. And he knew: Soon they would strike.

But he said nothing to his brother. Tenskwatawa would have simply sold it as confirmation of his vision. "The spirits told me!" he would have shouted, and the people would have become even more fanatical.

Tecumseh remained silent. But he sharpened spears, prepared hiding places, and talked with the warriors. For he knew: A prophet may have visions, but a cannonball doesn't ask about spirits.

And while the whites nervously planned and the Indians swore in the fire, the tension grew like a rope about to break. Everyone knew it would soon explode. The only question was: where and when.

The night was thick with smoke. Three fires burned, larger than usual, and the smell of burnt flesh hung in the air. Some had sacrificed animals, others things they had dragged from the huts: rifles, blankets, metal. Everything that came from the whites went into the flames.

The crowd waited. Over a hundred people, warriors, women, and children. All stared at the center, where Tenskwatawa stood. His face was painted with red earth, his blind eye white as stone. He was breathing heavily, as if he had already fought before he even spoke.

Then he raised his arms and the crowd fell silent.

"The spirits are here," he said, his voice deep, almost a whisper. "They spoke to me. They showed me what was coming."

The drums began, dull and steady, like heartbeats. The people held their breath.

"I have seen," cried Tenskwatawa, "the whites burn! Their cities ablaze, their boats sink, their cannons fall silent! I have seen our people sweep over them like a storm! I have seen the snakes crushed until nothing remains!"

The crowd erupted. Men screamed, women beat their chests, children shouted the Prophet's name.

"The spirits have told me," he continued, "that they will protect you! Their bullets will not hit you if you remain pure! Their cannons will fall silent if you remain firm! Their streets will split if you remain strong!"

The crowd exploded. Men jumped to their feet, shouting vows. "I will not drink whiskey anymore!" - "I will never speak to white people again!" - "I will defend my country with blood!"

Tenskwatawa shouted over the noise: "It is promised! The spirits themselves have told me so! If we are pure, if we are one, then we will not fall, but they! They are the dead, not us!"

The crowd was beside itself. Some threw themselves into the fire to prove their purity. Others tore off their clothes, shouting that they were free. It was no longer a camp; it was a frenzy, a mass obsession.

Tecumseh stood at the edge, arms crossed, eyes cold. He saw it, heard it, and he knew: This was madness—but also power. People who believed bullets wouldn't hit them were fearless. But fearless people could also run to destruction like sheep to fire.

After the vision, entire groups swore to follow him. Not only men, but also women and children shouted their oaths. They would never trade again, never sell again, never drink again. They would remain pure, remain one, and fight to the end.

The news spread faster than any boat could travel down the river. "The Prophet says the bullets won't hit us!" people shouted. "The Prophet says the spirits protect us!" Soon it was no longer just a sermon, but a belief, a law.

The whites heard about this and shook their heads. "Fools," they said. But their reports said something else: "They believe they are invincible. That makes them dangerous. Because those who are not afraid of death fight harder."

Tecumseh heard it too. And he knew: It was a lie stronger than any truth. No spirits would stop bullets, no cannons would fall silent. But if enough men believed it, they would fight until they were dead—and that could move mountains.

Later, he spoke to his brother. "You promise things you can't keep." Tenskwatawa grinned crookedly. "I promise what the spirits say." "You know bullets don't stop flying just because one is pure."

"But they believe it." "And if they die?" "Then they die pure. And their death makes the others stronger."

Tecumseh remained silent. He hated this logic, but he couldn't deny it. A man who believes himself immortal fights differently. And sometimes that's enough to turn a battle.

But fear gnawed at him. For he knew that one false vision could lead an entire nation to its grave.

But he also knew that without this vision, he would have no people who even wanted to fight.

So he accepted it. The prophet promised victory. The spirits had spoken. And the people believed.

And in this belief lay the greatest weapon – and the greatest danger.

It didn't take long for the vision to be tested. The whites had heard of the rituals, the oaths, the words that bullets would no longer do anything. A captain laughed: "Then we'll let them come. Let's see if their spirits can fight against gunpowder and lead."

And they came. A small unit of American soldiers marched along the river, on their way to a trading post. They had no need for cannons—just muskets, sabers, a few dozen men. They expected a few arrows, perhaps a raid. They didn't expect a frenzy.

The Shawnee lay hidden in the forest, as always. Tecumseh was among them. He had warned the men: "Be wise. Fight like wolves. Get out of here when it gets too hot." But many had the prophet's words in their blood. They didn't want to disappear. They wanted to prove that the spirits were protecting them.

The soldiers marched, the grass cracked, the birds fell silent. Then the storm broke.

Screams from the forest, spears flew, arrows whizzed. Men with bare torsos rushed forward, painted, screaming, their eyes filled with madness. "The bullets won't hit us!" they roared.

The soldiers paused briefly, confused. Then they fired.

The crack of muskets cut through the forest. Two warriors fell instantly, blood spurting, bodies twitching. But the others were not deterred. They continued running, shouting louder, and throwing themselves at the soldiers with spears.

One soldier screamed as a spear pierced him. Another was knocked to the ground. For a moment, it seemed as if the prophet was right.

But then the muskets crashed again. More warriors fell. One, with outstretched arms and shouting "Invulnerable!", was shot in the chest. He fell, his eyes wide, his mouth open, as if he had never understood that ghosts can lie.

Tecumseh fought like a wolf, leaping from the shadows, hauling a soldier to the ground, and plunging his knife into his throat. But he saw his own men fall, one by one. Their faith was strong—but lead was stronger.

After an hour, it was over. The soldiers retreated, half dead or wounded. But the Shawnee had suffered heavier losses. Too many, far too many.

Silence reigned in the camp. The women wept, the children screamed, the elderly murmured prayers. Tecumseh sat silent, his face covered in blood that wasn't his own.

Then the prophet rose. He walked through the crowd, saw the corpses, saw the weeping women—and spoke. "They fell because they weren't pure enough. Because they doubted. The spirits protect only the pure!"

People raised their heads. Some nodded desperately, seeking comfort in his words. Others looked away, silently doubting. But no one dared to openly contradict him.

Tecumseh clenched his fists. He knew it was a lie. The men had died because they had been foolish enough to run bare-chested into bullets. But he said nothing. Because he knew that if he refuted his brother in front of everyone, the people would fall apart.

He spoke to him at night, his voice harsh. "Your spirits lied." Tenskwatawa grinned. "The spirits don't lie. The men were weak." "They were brave. Braver than you. And they died because you gave them false hope." "No, brother. They died for the dream. Their blood feeds the movement."

Tecumseh turned away. He wanted to strike him, but he held back. Instead, he walked out into the night and looked into the river. *For how much longer?* he thought. *How long can we go down this path before everything burns down?*

But the next day, the mood was different again. The disciples shouted that the dead were martyrs. Women recounted seeing faces in the smoke that said, "We live on." Children played "prophet and warrior," throwing stones and shouting that bullets wouldn't hit them.

And Tecumseh saw it clearly: Faith was stronger than truth. Even defeat couldn't break him—it could even make him stronger.

For him, this was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it meant that the movement wouldn't simply disintegrate. On the other, it meant that one day they might all march together into disaster, with burning eyes and bare breasts—and no one would be able to stop them.

So it continued. The vision had been tested—and failed. But the people believed anyway. And perhaps that was precisely the most dangerous truth: that belief was stronger than reality.

The silence after the fighting was heavier than any cannonball. The village was filled with the cries of women, of children asking for their fathers who hadn't returned. The dead hadn't even all been buried yet when the Prophet began to speak again.

Tenskwatawa stood by the fire, arms raised, face covered in ash. "The spirits have spoken! The fallen are not dead—they are with the ancestors! They sacrificed themselves because they weren't pure enough. But their blood purifies us!"

People screamed, cried, nodded. For many, it was the only support they had left. The truth—that bullets tear flesh, no matter how pure you are—was too harsh. The lie—that it was spirits who made the decisions—was easier to bear.

Tecumseh saw it. He knew that his brother's words were poison, sweet poison that filled hearts and clouded minds. But he also knew that without this poison, the people would have been broken long ago.

So he remained silent. Not out of consent, but out of necessity. He had to harness this fire, even if it burned him inside.

The days that followed were like a frenzy. The disciples preached in the villages, retelling the story. "The whites shot, but only the weak died. The pure ones fought on!" With each retelling, the fallen grew taller, braver, holier. Soon, children were speaking the names of the dead like heroes, not victims.

And so the defeat became a legend. Not a warning sign, but proof that the ghosts were really there.

Tecumseh recognized the power in it. He hated it, but he used it. He spoke in the meetings: "You have seen that the spirits guide us. But spirits also need spears. If we are one, if we are strong, if we fight as the prophet says—then we can accomplish more than we ever thought possible."

The people cheered. They no longer saw him merely as a warrior, but as part of the picture: prophet and wolf, smoke and blood, vision and action.

But Tecumseh knew how fragile it was. He saw the doubt in the eyes of some of the elders, heard the quiet conversations in the nights. "What if the bullets hit us after all?" - "What if the spirits remain silent?" But no one dared to speak out loud. The pressure was too great. The prophet too powerful.

And perhaps that was the greatest truth: People needed lies more than the truth. Truth made them weak. Lies made them strong.

For Tecumseh, this was a dilemma with no solution. He often thought: *I could stop him. I could expose him. But then we would have nothing. No dream, no faith, just naked fear.*

And so he let it go. He knew that one day the fire would get out of control. But he also knew that without this fire, there would already be nothing left today.

So this chapter ended: with a people living in intoxication, intoxicated by visions, intoxicated by lies, intoxicated by hope.

Tenskwatawa was no longer a simple man, no longer a drunkard, no longer blind. He was the prophet who saw faces in the smoke, who turned the dead into martyrs, and transformed defeats into victories.

And Tecumseh stood beside him, the wolf who knew: He had to ride this fire, no matter where it took him. For in the smoke lay not only danger—in the smoke also lay the only opportunity.

The federal government against the treaties

The visions had prepared the ground. Smoke had made the people hot, but smoke alone doesn't build walls. Tecumseh knew he had to act now. Not a shout, not a dance, not a promise from the spirits—but words. Hard, cold, like rusty nails.

He began to travel. From village to village, from tribe to tribe. He was no longer just the wolf by the river; he was the messenger of a greater dream. Wherever he arrived, people first spoke of the prophet. "He said... he saw..." But when Tecumseh spoke, silence fell.

He didn't speak like his brother. No faces in the smoke, no foaming lips. His words were simple but sharp.

"The white people want your land. They're not coming for furs or whiskey. They're coming to drive you out. They're building their roads, their forts, their cities. And if you fight alone, you're dead. But if we're one, we can stop them."

Some nodded immediately. They'd seen enough: burning huts, dead children, treaties that were nothing but lies. Others remained skeptical. "We've already fought wars. We've already had alliances. And we've always lost."

Tecumseh shook his head. "Because you were alone. One tribe alone cannot win. But all the tribes together—that's a storm even the whites can't hold."

He drew analogies that everyone understood. "One spear can break. Ten spears together – difficult. One hundred spears – impossible. Will you continue to break individually? Or do you want to stand together for the first time?"

In some villages, they rejoiced. Warriors swore to join him, women brought him food, children looked at him as if he himself were a ghost. In other villages, he encountered suspicion. "And what if your prophet is lying? What if his spirits lead us to ruin?"

Then Tecumseh spoke in a cold voice: "Forget the prophet. Forget spirits. Think of the ground you stand on. If you lose it, you are no longer anyone. This is not a vision. This is fact."

He played both sides: faith and reason. Where smoke helped, he let smoke do the work. Where there was doubt, he spoke clearly, soberly, without embellishment.

So the alliance began. Slowly, tenaciously, but it grew. Miami, Kickapoo, Delaware – they listened. Some joined immediately, others hesitated, but the spark was lit.

The whites sensed it. Spies reported that Native Americans were traveling in groups, that meetings were taking place, that speeches were being made. Officers wrote: "The tribes are planning something. It's more than talk. It's a movement."

In Vincennes, in Fort Wayne, in Kentucky – everywhere there was discussion about how to break the "Shawnee Confederacy" before it became big.

Tecumseh ignored their conversations. He continued, talking, swearing, threatening. Once, he pounded his fist on the ground and shouted: "This land belongs to all of us. No tribe may sell it without everyone's consent. Anyone who does so is a traitor—and traitors die."

This was new. Not just resistance against whites, but a law between Native Americans themselves. A law that was greater than any tribe.

Some chiefs became nervous. "This takes away our freedom. It makes us prisoners." Tecumseh cut them off with a look. "Your freedom is already dead if you sell it to the whites. This law is the only thing that can save us."

Thus he planted an idea that was harder than spears and fire: the principle of a common land. One tribe, one people, one alliance against treaties.

It was no longer a dream. It was politics.

And while his brother continued to scream visions, while the smoke made people fanatical, Tecumseh laid the foundation for something that even the whites had to fear: unity.

Not everyone listened to him. Some chiefs, fed up and lazy, sat in their huts with whiskey bottles and shining knives they had gotten from traders. They looked at Tecumseh as if he were an annoying beggar.

"We've already signed treaties," they said. "The whites are paying. They're giving us blankets, guns, salt. Why should we fight? Why should we die?"

Tecumseh became hard. "Because you're already dead, you just don't realize it. Every treaty takes a piece of your land. Every sip of whiskey takes a piece of

your soul. Soon there will be nothing left—neither land nor soul. Then you won't be chiefs, but just dogs on a leash."

Some laughed. "Fine words, Tecumseh. But words don't fill stomachs. Whiskey warms better than dreams. The whites are strong. You can't stop them."

Tecumseh slammed his fist against the ground, kicking up dust. "I tell you, whoever sells land doesn't just sell earth. He also sells the bones of his ancestors. He sells his children. And he sells me. And I swear, anyone who sells land dies like a traitor."

The chiefs were silent for a moment. Some were still laughing, but it was an uncertain laugh. Others looked at each other and knew: This was no idle remark. Tecumseh meant it.

He traveled further, and the message became harsher. "No tribe may sell land without everyone's consent. That is the law. Anyone who breaks it is my enemy—and I kill my enemies."

Some tribes cheered. Finally, someone who spoke clearly, who didn't beat around the bush. Others feared him. "He speaks like a tyrant," they murmured. "He wants to force us."

And that's exactly what he did. For Tecumseh knew: without coercion, without threats, the alliance would never hold. Every tribe that weakened was a hole in the boat. And a boat with holes sinks.

In Vincennes, Governor Harrison learned of these speeches. He read the reports, snorted, and rubbed his beard. "The Shawnee have gathered fools around them. But they are dangerous. For they speak of a law greater than their tribes. That is new. That is politics. And politics is harder to shoot than a warrior in the woods."

He began planning countermeasures. More treaties, more money, more whiskey. If he could buy off enough chiefs, Tecumseh's dream would collapse before it grew too big.

Tecumseh knew this. He knew that the whites fought not only with guns, but also with paper and silver. Therefore, he spoke louder, harsher, more threateningly. "They come with gifts. But every gift is poison. Whoever accepts it is already lost."

The prophet's disciples spread his words like fire. Soon, the word in the villages was, "Tecumseh says selling land is treason." Men who still traded with whites were insulted. Women refused to allow whiskey into their homes. Children spit on treaties when they saw them.

But the resistance persisted. Some chiefs were too deeply involved in trade, too fed up with silver. They said: "Tecumseh is a warrior, but he doesn't understand. You have to live with the whites."

Tecumseh looked at her with cold eyes. "No," he said. "You must die with the whites. Or you die because of them. There is no third way."

Thus the alliance grew—not through unity, but through threats. Not through trust, but through fear. Tecumseh knew it was a rotten stick he was nailing together. But it was better than nothing.

Because he knew: The whites could no longer be stopped. Only slowed down. And if he didn't slow them down, soon there wouldn't be a single tribe left that could even object.

Vincennes, summer 1810. The sun beat down on the fort, and dust hung in the air like a gray curtain. Governor William Henry Harrison had summoned—and Tecumseh came. Not alone, but with over a hundred warriors, painted, with spears, some with rifles, all with eyes that sparked.

The Americans watched nervously as the group marched into the fort. Women pulled children away, soldiers tightened their hands on their rifles. Tecumseh led the way, tall, erect, his gaze hard. He seemed not a supplicant, but a general.

Harrison sat on a bench, his uniform neat, his posture stiff. He expected a fierce warrior, perhaps a few stammered words. Instead, he heard a man speaking, his voice like iron.

Tecumseh began without hesitation. "You have made treaties," he said, "but they are lies. No single tribe may sell land. The land belongs to all of us—from here to the great rivers, from the mountains to the sea. It's not yours, it's not mine, it's all of us."

Harrison replied coolly: "The treaties are legal. Chiefs signed. We paid."

Tecumseh laughed harshly. "Payed? You pay with whiskey, with glass beads, with silver that rusts. You pay the drunks, the weak, the old who no longer know what they're doing. That's not trade, that's theft."

The warriors behind him nodded and stamped their spears. Harrison remained calm, but his fingers twitched. "If a tribe sells land, it's their right."

"No," Tecumseh said sharply. "It is not his right to sell our land. A trunk is only a branch. The people are the tree. And no branch has the right to sell the entire tree."

Silence hung in the air. Even the American officers knew they were hearing something bigger than a scream. It was politics. It was a law, clear and simple.

Harrison muttered, "You speak of something that does not exist. Your people are not a nation. You are tribes. Scattered. Weak."

Tecumseh stepped closer, his eyes like knives. "Then we will make one nation. We will make one covenant. One tribe out of many. And if you continue to steal from us, if you continue to sign treaties with the weak, then this covenant will be your enemy. And I swear by the spirits of my fathers: It will make you bleed."

The warriors screamed, stamped, and raised their weapons. The soldiers grabbed their rifles, their hands trembling. For a moment, the air stood still, charged like before a thunderstorm. One wrong word, and blood would have flooded the fort.

Harrison raised his hands and forced a smile. "No one here wants blood. But I tell you: If you threaten, the United States will destroy you."

Tecumseh stepped back, slowly, his eyes still fixed on the governor. "Try it," he said coldly. "But remember: every treaty you sign is a knife in your own gut. For we do not forget. And we do not forgive."

Then he turned and left. The warriors followed, their feet pounding like thunder. Harrison remained, pale, his beard damp with sweat.

He later wrote in a report: "Tecumseh is the most dangerous man I have ever met. He is not just a warrior, but a politician. He speaks not for one tribe, but for many. If he succeeds, he will create a power we must take seriously."

And that's exactly what Tecumseh had achieved. He was no longer a simple chief. No longer a man around the fire, no longer a warrior in the forest. He was a statesman. One who fought with words as if they were arrows.

His message spread faster than smoke in the wind. "No tribe may sell land. The land belongs to everyone." For some, it was hope. For others, a threat. But no one could ignore it.

Thus, smoke and visions became law. A dream became a manifesto. And a man became an enemy feared even by the whites.

After Vincennes, nothing was the same. Harrison sat in his office, writing reports with a scratchy pen, sweat dripping onto the papers. "This Shawnee," he wrote, "is no ordinary savage. He is wiser than most men I know. He talks of nations, of laws, of a covenant. As long as he lives, peace in the West is impossible."

He sent letters to Washington. "Tecumseh must be neutralized." Neutralized—that sounded straightforward, but everyone knew what it meant: If words didn't work, bullets would do the talking.

Tecumseh, on the other hand, didn't go home like a man who had lost. He went home like someone who had smelled blood. In the villages, he recounted how he had told the governor to his face that no tribe was allowed to sell land. He described how the whites became nervous, how they trembled. And the people cheered. "Finally, someone who tells them the truth!"

But cheering alone wasn't enough. Tecumseh began putting direct pressure on tribes. Whenever he heard that a chief somewhere was considering selling land, he came with his warriors. No conversation, no friendliness. He stood before the men, tall, erect, with eyes like steel, and said: "If you sell, you are traitors. And traitors die."

Sometimes that was enough. Chiefs who were already ready to sign gave in, throwing in the towel. But not always. Some defiantly said: "We are free. We do what we want."

Then Tecumseh changed. Once he was the wolf in the woods, the warrior. Now he became the judge, the executioner when necessary. Once he had a man struck down in front of his tribe because he wanted to give a piece of land to white people. "Look," he said coldly. "That's how a traitor dies."

It was brutal. But it worked. The message spread like a cry in the wind: Whoever sold land also sold their life.

The prophet encouraged this. "The spirits have said: Anyone who gives land to the white man is accursed!" He made Tecumseh's threat a divine law. Thus, politics and religion became one, inseparable.

Some tribes followed out of conviction, others out of fear. But the result was the same: the alliance grew.

Harrison observed this like a growing tumor. He sent spies who reported: "Tecumseh travels tirelessly. From tribe to tribe. Everywhere he leaves oaths, vows, threats."

The spies also recounted the effect. "He doesn't talk like a chief. He talks like a general, like a president. He makes laws as if he had the right to do so."

This made Harrison even more nervous. He told his officers, "If he continues, we will no longer be dealing with individual Indians, but with an army. And an army needs a battlefield."

Tecumseh knew Harrison wanted to break him. But he also sensed that now was the moment to tighten the screws. The more pressure he applied, the tighter the bond became. He couldn't go back.

One evening, surrounded by his closest warriors, he spoke clearly: "We have reached a point where there is no turning back. Either we become a nation, or we disappear. Anyone who doubts now is already dead."

The men nodded. One said, "And if Harrison attacks us?" Tecumseh looked at him for a long time. "Then we have two options. Either we die like dogs. Or we die like men who made history."

This was the new harshness. He no longer spoke of victory alone, but also of sacrifice. No longer of a dream, but of destiny.

People followed him anyway. Perhaps precisely for that reason. Because they knew everything else was already lost.

And so the bond continued to grow. Not cleanly, not perfectly, but like a rotten rope being pulled at both ends. But it held. For now.

And Harrison, with his beard and his letters, knew: This rope would break at some point. And when it broke, blood would flow. Lots of blood.

Tecumseh was no longer just a shadow in the forest. He was a wanderer, a voice, a man whose steps changed the land. From village to village, tribe to tribe—he talked, threatened, persuaded. But he knew: If the alliance consisted only of the tribes of the North, it was too weak. He needed more. He needed the greats of the South—Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw.

So he set off. A journey that took weeks, through forests, swamps, and rivers. Everywhere he appeared, there was a stir. People had heard of him. "The Shawnee who argued with the governor. The warrior who speaks of a nation." Some expected a madman, others a priest. Instead, a man came with eyes sharper than knives, with words that carried more weight than bullets.

He spoke first to the Cherokee. They listened to him, politely, thoughtfully. Many of them had long since begun to adopt the white ways—fields, houses, trade. Some laughed at Tecumseh's words. "An alliance against the whites? Folly. You have to live with them. You have to take what they give and give them what they want."

Tecumseh snorted. "You think you can fool them. But they're fooling you. Today they build roads, tomorrow they take your villages. You think you're clever. But you're selling yourselves like children chasing glass beads."

Some became angry. But others listened. Young warriors who didn't want to toil in the fields, but wanted to fight. Old men who remembered past wars. They whispered, "Perhaps he's right. Perhaps a storm is coming."

Things were harder for the Creek. They were divided. Some wanted peace, others war. Tecumseh spoke to both. To the peaceful ones, he said, "Your peace is a strangling cord." To the warriors, he said, "When you fight, do not fight alone. Fight with us. One tribe falls, many tribes survive."

The warriors cheered, the peaceful ones shook their heads. But the spark had been lit. Later, this very spark would become a flame in the Creek Wars.

The Choctaw listened, suspicious and silent. "You talk big, Shawnee," they said. "But words don't beat cannons." Tecumseh replied, "Cannons beat tribes. But nations beat cannons."

He left his mark everywhere. Not everywhere was jubilation, not everywhere was approval. But he left something behind: doubt. Doubt about the friendship

of the whites, doubt about the treaties, doubt about peace. And doubt was often the first step toward war.

Meanwhile, the whites watched his journey like a hunting dog following a scent. Reports fluttered into Harrison's office. "Tecumseh is in the south. He's talking to Cherokee. He's talking to Creek. He's calling for a confederation." Harrison read, rubbed his beard, and muttered, "If he succeeds, we're finished."

Alarm bells rang in Washington. Politicians spoke of "an Indian Napoleon," of "a man who wants to unite the West against us." Newspapers wrote articles that sometimes portrayed him as a devil, sometimes as a genius.

And Harrison began to plan. "We must strike before he returns. We must destroy the nest where he gathers his power." The nest was Prophetstown—his brother's village, full of believers, full of dreamers, full of warriors who believed that bullets would not strike them.

Tecumseh knew nothing of this. He rode on, talking, vowing, threatening. But a shadow already hung over him.

For while he tried to make one tree from many trunks, the Whites sharpened axes to cut down the roots.

Harrison sat in his office, his pen dancing like a dagger. Piles of paper, cards with lines like veins, letters with words that sounded like knives. He wrote, he rubbed his brow, he cursed quietly into a beard that collected more sweat than pride. Sometimes you had to start a fire, he thought. Sometimes you had to create the smoke yourself to make the rats crawl out of their holes. Prophetstown had to be broken—and if that meant burning down the nest, so be it.

There was that word in his notes: neutralize. A vague euphemism; but behind it lay a bill that would be paid with bullets if words failed. He thought of Tecumseh, of the Shawnee who had told him straight to his face that no tribe could sell land. He thought of the prophet, of the fire, of the crowds. He thought of the river of rumors that had already run back to them. And he feared that which grows if you let it grow.

"If we don't act now," he growled to himself, "in a year we won't have treaties, but a coalition." He looked at the maps, searching for the place where he could strike without setting the entire country ablaze. Prophetstown wasn't hard to

find: a village built like a threat, a magnet for those with nothing left to lose. It was a village that healed wounds, but also collected scars. It was a place where smoke had become law.

The men he chose were not gentlemen. They were soldiers and volunteers, peasants with muskets, policemen of order who preferred to shoot rather than argue. Harrison knew a clear gesture was needed—an exclamation mark, a knife in the flesh of the rebels. Prophetstown should understand that there were limits: not of logic, but of force.

While Harrison dragged his plans across the table like a dry rag, the messengers rode in all directions. "Advance," the orders read. Small detachments, ammunition, provisions, a crowd of men whose hands were already itching to leave. They wore uniforms, but their eyes held the expectation of blood. They were told it was necessary. They were told they would restore order. They talked of stakes, of fortresses, of rendezvous points—words that carried the scent of gunpowder.

But Tecumseh was far away. He sat on a horse that looked as tired as the man on it. Southern swamps and cottonwood groves, Cherokee bushes and creek trails—he had moved through them like oil through water, gathering voices, forging hands. He didn't just speak to chiefs; he spoke to the boys, the mothers, the men who still had a spark of pride in their chests. Every spark was a piece of wood to him. He wanted a fire big enough to drive away the whites—or at least to show that one couldn't steal with impunity.

In the southern villages, there were glances weighing like scales. Some chiefs wanted to trade: blankets, knives, sickles—practical things. Others said quietly, "Perhaps the man is insane." And still others, young dogs with scars, saw in Tecumseh the opportunity to stand up and not always follow. Tecumseh spoke, and his words had teeth. He knew that not every speech works like a bullet; sometimes it works like a void that fills people until they act. He gave them an idea, and ideas are dangerous because you can't buy them back.

He didn't hear the warnings, or he heard them and thought them away: Harrison would shoot? Of course. Harrison would do more. But an open admission only made him more determined. "If they come," he told a Cherokee warrior, "I'll be there. Not with a hat and good manners, but with spears. If you're with us, come now. If not, stay away." His tone was like cold steel: barely room for doubt.

While Tecumseh collected, while he shook hands and took promises, the clock was set in the white casemates. Harrison left no detail out. He didn't need a fancy parade; he needed results. It was part of the business to smash problems before they become flesh. Prophetstown wasn't just a village to him—it was the heart of a problem that, when it beat, swept other hearts with it.

The men marching for Harrison talked of order, but they rejoiced like hungry dogs rejoicing at rats. It was human, this joy in force; men who waited a long time for orders, when they finally came, there was something like jubilation in their movements. They didn't want to be political; they wanted the simple mathematics of force: you pull a button, someone falls, the problem shrinks.

And amidst all this lay Prophetstown itself, a village still unfinished cleaning its own scars. People were driving stacks of log wagons, erecting shacks, building porches, preparing supplies for the season. Children were running, men were practicing in groups. Tenskwatawa was preaching, the fires were burning, and the disciples were singing, loud and hard. They believed what they heard. Faith is a weapon, Tecumseh knew that. And faith was exactly what Harrison feared.

But no one knew better than Tecumseh that faith only goes so far. Bullets meet faith with the same indifference that water meets fire. Still—and this was both the horror and the beauty—faith makes men fearless. And fearless men have a chance to upset the calculations of the powerful. Tecumseh thought of the heads of his dead friends, of his mother, of the country. He didn't think of glory. He thought of households that must still exist. He thought of the face of a child who isn't supposed to know what it's like to lock the doors because a stranger is coming.

Harrison gritted his teeth. His plan was simple but brutal: a dawn march, a blow to the heart of the movement, a destruction so visible that it served as a warning to all. No discussions, no long debates—a single act that screams. "Crush the belly," he told his captain, "and the rest will bleed to death."

No one thought of heroes, no one thought of moral elegies. They thought of logistics: provisions, ammunition, fast lines. It was a mathematical way of thinking that knew victory and defeat. And yet, in every calculation lay the chance of something else: war.

But Tecumseh was far away, his voice still echoing in the southern tribes, his footsteps like small fires. He noticed the change in the villages—men who now said "yes" more clearly because the alternative was becoming more visible. He thought an alliance should have no price. But priceless is a dream, and dreams

always have a cost. His hands grew dirtier, his voice harder. He felt the weight of a crowd that took his words like a vessel.

It was the game of time: Harrison planned the fire; Tecumseh gathered wood for it. Both knew that at some point a spark would fly. And when it flew, it wouldn't just burn—it would draw, cut, and change. Those left standing would call themselves something else. Those who fell would serve as a warning.

On a final night before the troops left, Harrison sat alone, staring at the blade of his letter opener. He thought of his children, of the order he wanted to secure. It was an ugly thought: order is built with blood when it doesn't listen to reason. When he stood up, his face was a mass of responsibility and calculation. He put down his pen. "Tomorrow morning," he murmured. "Tomorrow we wake the sleeper."

And while the whites greased their marching maps and scrubbed their horses, Tecumseh still rode through southern tribes, unaware that a storm was on the way, as cold and merciless as the barrel of a gun. He wanted to forge a nation. Harrison wanted to enforce a calm. Both were hard. Both would lead to bloodshed.

When Tecumseh returned from the south, his face had hardened. For weeks, he had talked, vowed, begged, and threatened. He had found young warriors, ignited old men, but also reaped ridicule and rejection. Not everyone had believed him. But enough had hesitated, enough had sown doubts, so that the dream still lived. He didn't bring a complete nation with him—but he brought an echo that grew.

He entered Prophetstown and smelled the smoke before he saw the village. Not the smoke of visions, but the smoke of weapons being sharpened, of supplies being burned because they came from white people. The village was like a cauldron about to overflow.

His brother welcomed him like a priest. Tenskwatawa stood before the great fire, his face painted, his voice harsh. "While you were in the south," he cried, "the spirits spoke. They said: Soon the enemy will come. Soon our faith will be tested. And we will win!"

The crowd roared, roared, and stamped. Tecumseh saw them and sensed the danger. He knew Harrison wouldn't sleep with a village standing here, like a knife aimed at his stomach.

That same night, messengers arrived. "The Americans are marching. Harrison is leading them himself. There are many of them. They have rifles, cannons."

The village fell silent. Men pressed their lips together, women held their children tighter. Then the prophet rose. "The spirits said their bullets won't hit us. They'll fall like leaves. Don't be afraid!"

Cheers erupted, but Tecumseh shouted back: "You fools! Bullets hit flesh, whether pure or not! Don't just listen to smoke, listen to reason! We must be prepared, we must fight wisely, not blindly!"

People wavered between prophet and warrior. Between smoke and spear. Between dream and reality.

Tecumseh knew there was no turning back now. Harrison was on his way, and with him an army that hadn't come for speeches. He looked into the faces of his men, shining with hope, and he felt how heavy the burden was. Hope can be stronger than weapons—but hope can also kill.

He took his brother aside. "You must not send them blind to their deaths." Tenskwatawa looked at him, one blind eye white, the other glowing. "The spirits have spoken. If they fall, then that was their fate." "No," Tecumseh growled, "if they fall, it is your fault."

The tension was like a taut rope between them. The wolf and the prophet. Reason versus vision. But they both knew: Harrison was marching, and soon fate would no longer be a matter of debate.

The next day, Tecumseh sent messengers to gather warriors. "Come, as many as you can! Harrison will break us if we aren't many!" But time was short, too short. Many heard, but couldn't come in time.

Prophetstown prepared itself. Spears were sharpened, rifles oiled. Women carried water, children gathered wood. The entire village was like a drum, beating faster and faster.

And Harrison drew closer. Marching columns, clouds of dust on the horizon, drums, flags. Farmers with muskets, soldiers with bayonets, officers with maps. They talked of order, but they marched like a storm.

Tecumseh stood at the edge of the village, looking into the distance. He knew that blood would soon flow here. Perhaps the blood of his people, perhaps the blood of the whites, perhaps both.

He raised the spear that had served him faithfully for years and said quietly, just to himself: "If this is the end, then let it be an end they will not forget."

And so the chapter ended: Harrison marched, Prophetstown waited. The alliance against the treaties was no longer a dream, no longer a fireside chatter. It was now flesh and blood.

And soon he would be tested—not by words, but by smoke, fire, and cannons.

Words like rusty nails – land sales

It always started the same way. A table, a piece of paper, a pen. A few white men with stomachs like barrels and beards covered in leftover food. They sat down, poured whiskey, laughed loudly, and then they pulled out the paper. They called it a treaty. For the Native Americans, it was more like a death certificate.

The language was twisted like a rope. "We'll buy land," they said, "and give you gifts in return." But the gifts were whiskey, cheap iron, blankets that smelled of moths. The price was always ridiculous—a few barrels, a few coins—for thousands of acres of forest, river, and hunting ground.

And the chiefs who signed were rarely sober. They already had their glasses in their hands before the pen was dipped into the inkwell. Sometimes the traders had to guide the chief's hand themselves because he was too drunk to draw a line. But in the end, there was a cross on the paper, and the whites grinned as if they had outwitted the devil himself.

Tecumseh saw all this with his own eyes. He was young the first time he saw such a treaty. His father was dead, the country was shrinking, and there sat a few white men with maps saying, "This land belongs to us." And he knew: This wasn't a deal. This was robbery disguised as paper.

The tribes often didn't understand what was written on them. Some thought they were giving up land for a while. Others believed it was an alliance, a friendship. But the whites meant something else: ownership. Forever. And they had courts, laws, and armies that stood behind these words. Words like rusty nails—crooked, sharp, dirty, but they held if you drove them deep enough into the wood.

Tecumseh hated these papers more than cannons. Cannons were honest. They killed directly. But these treaties crept into the blood, making the land disappear, piece by piece. One treaty could destroy more than ten battles.

He began to warn the tribes. "Look at the paper," he said. "It's a knife that slowly cuts you. It's whiskey in words. It makes you think you're winning—but you're losing everything."

Some listened. They burned the papers, spat on the treaties. Others shrugged their shoulders. "It's just paper. We'll take what we get. The land is vast." They didn't understand that for the whites, land wasn't a meadow, but gold, the future, power.

Harrison and his men knew exactly how to go about it. Invite a few chiefs, let them drink, and hand them silver. A few speeches about friendship, peace, and big brothers. And in the end, a document that changed everything.

Tecumseh called it "theft with a pen." And he swore to kill anyone who allowed it.

In the villages, he told the stories as if they were cautionary tales. "There was a tribe that sold land for whiskey. Today they have no land. There was a chief who signed it. Today he's dead, killed by his own people."

He turned every contract into a curse. And soon people were saying, "Keep your hands off those papers. Tecumseh will kill us if we sign them." Fear became a weapon.

But the whites didn't give up. They knew that enough men would always give in—for whiskey, for money, for convenience. Harrison wrote: "We must find the weak and use them. For the Shawnee hold the strong together."

Thus began a dirty game. A fight not just with spears and guns, but with paper, whiskey, and words. A fight in which the Whites forged nails—and Tecumseh tried to rip them out before they became too deeply embedded in the wood.

It was a war of smoke and ink. A war that most people didn't even see, but that was as bloody as any raid in the forest.

And Tecumseh knew that if he didn't win this war, there would soon be nothing left to fight for.

Harrison was no fool. He knew that Native Americans couldn't be defeated with cannons alone. Cannons made martyrs. But treaties made dead that no one saw. A treaty was an invisible bullet. No blood, no scream—just land that vanished, like water in dry sand.

So he spun nets. He invited the chiefs, not to his fort, but to small huts on the outskirts of the settlements. There were tables, traders with whiskey barrels waiting, and the papers already laid out. Harrison himself sometimes didn't even show up. He let others do the dirty work. Traders with stomachs like pigs, missionaries with Bibles, officers with medals. They were all cogs in his machine.

"Friendship," they said, "eternal peace." Words like sugar, words that stuck. And as they talked, they poured more whiskey. The chiefs drank, laughed, nodded—and in the end, the pen trembled on the paper. A cross was enough. The whites didn't want anything more.

Some chiefs understood the deception. They knew they were selling land that didn't even belong to them. But they had no choice. They were indebted to traders, they wanted weapons, they wanted peace. Others truly believed they were making a good deal. "The land is vast," they said, "we have enough." They didn't see that every treaty was like a wolf, ever approaching.

Tecumseh could smell the stench for miles around. He appeared in villages when he heard negotiations were underway. He came without invitation, stepped right into the middle of it, tall, proud, with eyes like knives.

Once, he found a chief at the table, his hand already on his pen. Harrison wasn't there, only a few traders. Tecumseh stepped forward, tore the paper from the table, and threw it into the fire. "This isn't a treaty," he shouted, "it's a noose around your neck!"

The traders jumped up, ready to protest. But Tecumseh grabbed the table and overturned it, shattering glasses and soaking the floor with whiskey like blood. "None of you sign!" he shouted. "This land belongs to everyone. Whoever sells it, sells me too. And I won't kill any white man first—I'll kill you traitors!"

The warriors in the village rose to their feet, the women screamed, the traders turned pale. The chief, who had almost signed, dropped his pen like a hot coal. He knew: Tecumseh wasn't making empty threats.

So he went from village to village. Sometimes he spoke calmly, sometimes he shouted, sometimes he showed his knife. But his message was always the same: No treaty, never.

The whites hated him for this. Harrison wrote: "The Shawnee destroys our work. He travels faster than we can make treaties. He threatens, he intimidates. As long as he lives, every treaty is uncertain."

Some traders wanted to kill him. They whispered in taverns: "All we need is one man, one gun, one quiet night." But Tecumseh was like smoke—he appeared when you least expected him and disappeared when you tried to grab him.

He wasn't a diplomat in the white sense. He was a troublemaker, an avenger, a screamer. But that was precisely what made him dangerous. He was everywhere a treaty was being drawn up. A shadow over every piece of paper, a knife over every pen.

The tribes told stories. "Tecumseh will come if you want to sign." Some said it with pride, others with fear. But the effect was the same: treaties stalled, were delayed, and were abandoned.

Harrison raged. "This isn't a man anymore, this is a movement. He must be broken."

But Tecumseh knew that every torn-up treaty was a small victory. Every trader who went home cursing was a slap in the face to the white people.

So he fought, not with cannons, not with rifles, but with fire, shouts, and threats. A war of tables, a war of papers. And every torn-up treaty was as valuable to him as a victory in a battle.

Tecumseh fought with words like knives—sharp, direct, threatening. But his brother, the Prophet, transformed the business into something even darker. He turned contracts into a curse.

Tenskwatawa stood by the fire, his hair disheveled, his blind eye unblinking, the other glowing like a piece of iron. "The spirits have spoken," he cried. "Anyone who sells land dies. Not by warriors, not by arrows—by disease, by madness, by fire. Whoever sells land has already lost his soul."

People shuddered. It was more than politics. It was religion, superstition, sheer fear. Women whispered that children would get sick if a chief signed. Men said

dreams were filled with black birds when someone talked to white people about land.

Thus, every treaty became not only a disgrace, but a sacrilege. And in villages where Tecumseh could only threaten, the prophet acted like poison in the water.

Once, they said, a chief went to Vincennes to talk with Harrison. He returned with silver in his pocket and a treaty in his luggage. That night, he screamed in his sleep, tossed and turned, sweating, and saw shadows in the smoke. In the morning, he lay dead in front of his hut, the silver beside him, cold as ice. "The spirits took him," the people said. "He sold." No one asked about fever or poison. It was clear to everyone: the prophet was right.

Tenskwatawa used such stories like a gambler uses his cards. He inserted them into every speech, twisted them, and magnified them. Soon, people believed: Whoever sells land dies. Period.

The whites understood what this meant. Harrison wrote angrily: "The Prophet poisons their minds. He makes our treaties worthless. Even if we let them sign, they are afraid to go back to the village. He turns trade into witchcraft."

Some traders became more cautious. They whispered more quietly, poured less whiskey, and hoped to avoid being talked about. But others cursed louder: "We can't fight ghosts!"

Tecumseh understood the advantage. He used the prophet, even though he didn't like him. When he entered a village, he talked politics: "The land belongs to all of us. No tribe may sell." And when he left, his brother followed him, shouting, "Sellers are cursed! They will burn!"

Together, it was like a hammer and a nail. One hit hard, the other made the hole bigger.

Of course, there were skeptics. Some elders said, "We used to trade land, too. Why not now?" But they were quickly silenced—by the young people who believed in the prophet and by Tecumseh's knife-wielding warriors.

Thus, village life was poisoned. A chief could barely speak to a trader without being accused of being a traitor. Children pointed fingers at men who went near forts. Women avoided men rumored to have spoken to Harrison.

Treaties became not only politically risky, but deadly dangerous. For those who signed them had to fear not only Tecumseh, but also the ghosts that supposedly lurked behind their backs.

Harrison raged. He wrote: "We are fighting two men. One threatens violence, the other terrifies us. Together they make any agreement impossible."

But that was precisely Tecumseh's goal. Every broken treaty, every burned document, every chief too afraid to take up his pen, was a victory for him.

And so a new kind of war began: not with cannons, not with guns, but with fear, smoke, and words that stuck in the heart like rusty nails and could no longer be removed.

The poison worked. What began as a threat and a curse ate into the villages like a worm into rotten wood. Tribes that had only recently eaten together began to distrust one another.

"He spoke to Harrison," they whispered about a chief who had disappeared for three days. "He has silver in his pocket." - "His wife is wearing new blankets." - "His son was seen with whiskey."

Sometimes a rumor was enough. And the man would stand outside his hut at night, a knife at his throat, warriors surrounding him. "Did you sell?" they asked. Sometimes he swore he was innocent. Sometimes he simply disappeared – no one would find him in the morning. And no one asked too loudly.

The witch hunt began. Women who went near the trading posts too often were called spies. Men who talked too often with white people were considered traitors. The spirits Tenskwatawa preached about seemed to lurk in every shadow.

In Prophetstown, the flames were particularly strong. The Prophet stood by the fire, his voice shrill: "The spirits are showing me faces! I see the traitors among you! They carry silver in their pockets, they secretly drink whiskey! They have signed treaties – they must die!"

And then names were called. Men who had been respected yesterday were suddenly shouted out as traitors. The crowd roared, warriors grabbed them, and before anyone could catch their breath, one lay in the dust, a knife buried deep in his body.

It was no longer a war against whites – it was a war against our own people.

Tecumseh hated it. He saw the violence, the paranoia, and he knew that every death was also a loss. But he could no longer stop the flow. His brother had instilled in the people that ghosts punished treason. Now there was no need for ghosts—the people did it themselves.

He once shouted in the council: "Enough of blood against ourselves! The whites are the enemy, not us!" But the prophet just grinned, one blind eye staring into the void, the other sparkling. "The whites have helpers. We must find them before they destroy us."

Sometimes it seemed as if the League was not fighting the whites, but was devouring itself.

And Harrison? He watched this with cold pleasure. Reports fluttered in to Vincennes. "They're killing their own men. The prophet is calling spirits, and the warriors are listening. Tecumseh is trying to moderate it, but he's not fully in control anymore."

Harrison rubbed his beard and grinned crookedly. "Good. The more they tear themselves apart, the weaker they become. We just have to wait."

But at the same time, he sensed the danger. Despite the witch hunts, the alliance grew. Even amid blood and mistrust, the idea that land could not be sold held firm. Every dead chief, every suspicion, every cry only made the rest more determined: *No more contracts*.

Tecumseh saw the paradox. He hated the witch hunt, but he also knew that every dead "traitor" was an example to deter others. No one dared even consider selling anymore. In a perverse way, it worked.

But it came at a cost. Men who could have been good warriors lay dead. Families were torn apart. Entire villages were split.

And over and over again, Harrison laughed in his fort. "They're killing themselves. We just need to help them a little."

He sent traders with whiskey, more treaties, and more silver. Not because he believed they would sign—but because he knew that even the rumor of the deal could be enough to sow suspicion. Harrison fed the mistrust, and the mistrust ate away at the alliance from within.

Tecumseh was racing against time. He preached unity, swore by the spirits of his fathers, talked of nation and law. But as he spoke, he saw the looks: fearful, paranoid, full of doubt.

Sometimes, on lonely nights by the river, he wondered if the bond was even strong enough. Or if it would break before he was even truly born.

But in the morning he got up again, took the spear, and spoke with the same harshness as before. For he knew: If he gave up, everything would be lost.

And so the game continued—nights filled with screams, days filled with rumors, treaties lying like rusty nails in the villages, each one a cause for blood.

The mood in the League was like a rope about to snap. Everyone could hear the creaking of the fibers. Rumors, betrayal, deaths—the blood no longer just stuck to the whites, it stuck to their own hands. Tecumseh felt the movement he had built with sweat and teeth crumbling at the edges.

So he did what he always did when things went wrong: He spoke.

The meeting took place on the banks of the great river. Warriors, women, children, and the elderly—they came from all directions. Some faces were marked by grief, others by hatred, many by fatigue. They expected more sermons from the prophet, more curses and the cries of spirits. Instead, Tecumseh stepped forward.

He stood there, tall, broad, muscles taut, eyes burning. No jewelry, no painting. Only the naked truth in his voice.

"You started killing yourselves," he said. "You slew brothers because you heard rumors. You cursed chiefs because you thought they had taken silver. You weakened your own alliance while the whites laughed."

The crowd murmured, some looked down.

"Yes," Tecumseh continued, "there are traitors. There are men who sell land. But anyone who raises a hand against his brother while the white man looks on is worse than a traitor. He is a fool. A fool who serves Harrison."

The words struck like whiplashes. Warriors who had themselves shed blood lowered their gaze. Women looked at each other as if they had suddenly realized they had shouted with the wrong people.

"Hear me," Tecumseh cried, his voice like a thunderstorm over the river. "The whites are the enemy. Not us. Every drop of blood we shed against each other makes them stronger. Every death we cause is a gift to Harrison. Do we want to give him gifts? Do we want to be his dogs?"

"No!" voices cried. First quietly, then louder, until they became a chorus. "No!"

Tecumseh raised his spear, sharp in the sunlight. "Then swear to me today: No more blood among us. No more treason without proof. No more knives against brothers. If one sells land, we will judge together. But no more with rumors, no more with fear. The enemy is outside, not in here!"

The crowd roared, warriors pounded the ground with spears, women screamed, children cheered. The speech was like thunder, clearing the smoke.

Even the prophet, standing nearby, remained silent. Tenskwatawa grimaced and muttered that the spirits had spoken differently. But this time hardly anyone was listening. The wolf had spoken, not the smoke. And his words were clearer, harsher, more inescapable.

After this speech, the bond wasn't healed, but it was stronger again. People remembered why they had come together in the first place: not to slit each other's throats, but to save land that had been taken from them.

Harrison soon heard about it. A spy reported that Tecumseh had stopped the rebellion of his own people. Harrison growled and threw the report into the fire. "That bastard. Even if they tear each other apart, he finds words to bind them again. He's more dangerous than ten armies."

And that's exactly what he was.

After this speech, Tecumseh was no longer just feared. He was revered. Not as a prophet, not as a priest—but as a man who brought clarity when everything was falling apart.

In the villages they said, "Tecumseh brought us back from madness." Some even said his words were stronger than his brother's spirits.

He knew it was only a delay. The tensions remained, the smoke remained. But he had gained time. And time was the only currency he truly needed, as long as Harrison was still sharpening his axes.

Harrison wasn't a man who gave up easily. He'd seen too many stubborn people in his life—farmers, traders, officers. Everyone had their price; you just had to find it. So why should Tecumseh be any different?

But Tecumseh was different. He didn't want silver, whiskey, or weapons. He wanted land—and Harrison couldn't give him that. So he looked for another way. If you couldn't buy the wolf, you had to buy the forest where it hunted.

Thus began the next round of treaties. This time more subtle, more clever. No more large, loud meetings with trumpets and barrels, but quiet conversations, small groups, carefully selected men. Harrison sent interpreters who not only translated, but also distorted them. A "maybe" became a "yes." A "we have to ask the others" became "we agree."

At the same time, gifts flowed. Not just whiskey, but also horses, rifles, knives made of fine steel, uniform jackets that gleamed like jewelry. And for the chiefs who wanted more: silver, gold, coins in leather pouches. "For your efforts," said the whites, "for your friendship."

Some staggered. They saw their children hungry, their wives in torn blankets. They thought: *We give away a little bit of land and in return we survive.* They didn't see that this "little bit" was like a cut in the skin - small at first, but fatal if it went deeper.

And then there was Tecumseh.

He appeared like a shadow. Sometimes in a village on the Ohio, sometimes among the Delaware, sometimes among the Kickapoo. He came without invitation, right in the middle of negotiations, suddenly standing in the doorway, tall, dark, his eyes like burning wood.

"You're selling land?" he asked coldly. "Land that doesn't belong to you? Land that belongs to all of us?"

Some stammered, some remained silent, some tried to explain. But Tecumseh wouldn't let them. He stepped closer, threw the papers into the fire, drew his knife, and slammed it into the table, shattering the cups.

"Everyone who signs," he cried, "is not just selling land. They are selling their children, their wives, their ancestors. And I swear: I will come. I will come, and you will know how traitors die."

The whites hated him for it. Treaties that Harrison had painstakingly prepared crumbled into smoke as soon as Tecumseh appeared. Interpreters reported cursing: "The Shawnee destroys everything. We talk, we drink, we almost sign—and then he stands there, and everything collapses."

Harrison raged. "This man is no longer a warrior. He's a damn politician! And politicians are worse than warriors."

He tried to be faster. Treaties were signed secretly, at night, in small huts far from Prophetstown. But even then, rumors surfaced, and soon Tecumseh appeared to have spies in every bush. And perhaps he really did.

Sometimes he wasn't even there. Sometimes his name was enough. "If Tecumseh hears about this, we're dead," the chiefs whispered, and the feather fell by itself.

Thus, every treaty became a risky gamble. For the whites, it was politics; for the Native Americans, it was life and death.

And while Harrison desperately tried to hammer rusty nails deeper into the wood, Tecumseh pulled them out again with his bare hands – bloody, laborious, but inexorable.

It was a fight that no one would record as a battle in the history books. No drum roll, no cannons, no corpse ground. But it was a war. A war over paper, over words, over lies.

And sometimes, Harrison thought at night as he pored over his reports, this war was harder to win than any campaign.

Harrison was patient, but he was also stubborn as a bull. He had seen Tecumseh burn treaties, the Prophet summon spirits, and entire tribes fly into a rage. But he knew: eventually, every bond breaks if you apply enough pressure.

So he prepared something bigger. Not a small deal, not three acres of woods for whiskey and guns. This time it would be a blow so deep that Tecumseh would scream.

The result was the Treaty of Fort Wayne in 1809. Harrison had worked on it for months, luring chiefs one by one, getting them drunk, bribing them, and showering them with gifts. Some didn't even come from the territories being sold—but they signed anyway, for silver and barrels.

Over three million acres of land changed hands on paper. Forests, rivers, villages—all suddenly "property" of the United States.

For Harrison, it was a triumph. "Look," he said proudly, "even the tribes are giving in. They want peace, they want our friendship." He sent reports to Washington, boasting of his success as if he had won a battle.

But for Tecumseh, it was a stab in the back. When he heard about it, he immediately rode to Fort Wayne. He marched into the middle of the white camp, accompanied by a hundred warriors who stood beside him like shadows. The soldiers nervously reached for their rifles, but Tecumseh kept them at bay with a glance.

Then he stood before Harrison. No greeting, no hesitation. Just his voice, cold as steel.

"You took land that didn't belong to you. You made men drunk and led their hands. You made strangers sign contracts for land that belonged to others. That's not peace, that's robbery."

Harrison tried to smile. "The chiefs signed. It's legal."

Tecumseh stepped closer, so close that Harrison could feel his breath. "If a man sells another's wife, is that legal? If a thief sells your house, does it belong to you? No. It's theft. And you are a thief."

The words fell like blows. Harrison turned pale, officers moved nervously closer. For a moment, it seemed as if blood might flow.

But Tecumseh didn't raise his spear. Instead, he raised his voice so everyone could hear: "I tell you, if this treaty isn't revoked, it's war. We won't stand by and watch you steal our land. We won't talk words any longer. We'll wield spears, fire bullets. And then your beautiful fort will go up in smoke."

The warriors behind him screamed, stamped, and flashed their blades. Harrison swallowed, but remained standing. "If you want war," he said harshly, "you will get war."

That was the break. No more rusty nails, no more papers. That was the moment when the words ran out of steam.

Tecumseh rode back to Prophetstown, his face grim, his eyes dark. He gathered the tribes, recounting how Harrison had cheated, how land had been sold that

belonged to none of the sellers. He swore: "No treaty is valid unless all the tribes sign together. This treaty is fraud. And fraud is paid for in blood."

The village was boiling. Men wanted to set out immediately, attack forts, and burn down settlements. Women screamed, children threw stones into the fire as if they were white people. The prophet cried out that the spirits themselves were calling for war.

And Tecumseh? He saw the flames, he heard the voices, and he knew: the time for words was almost over. Soon, smoke and blood would decide, not treaties and lies.

He stood by the river, the water black in the night, and murmured, "Words are rusty nails. They don't last forever. At some point, you need fire."

Knives and moonlight on the Wabash

The Treaty of Fort Wayne was still on paper when the land smelled of blood. Tecumseh had spoken the words: *If they take our land, we will take their lives.* And words, once so sharp, cannot be taken back.

The whites continued to build. Roads, settlements, fields. Farmers traversed the land with oxen as if it had always been theirs. They plowed the earth where the bones of their ancestors still lay. For them, it was progress. For the Shawnee, it was rape.

At night, when the moon hung over the Wabash, the warriors crept out. No drum roll, no banner. Just knives, axes, spears. Shadows between trees. They didn't attack forts, not yet. They attacked the edges: farmers, traders, settlers who thought they were safe.

A man was sleeping in his hut when the door was flung open. A scream, then silence, then blood in the straw. A family disappeared as if the forest had swallowed them. Wagons carrying whiskey barrels appeared empty the next morning, their drivers lying by the side of the road with their throats slit.

The Americans called it a "massacre." The Shawnee called it a "response."

Tecumseh himself didn't lead every raid. He was too busy talking and traveling. But he gave the signal, the permission. "Let them know that no foot is safe on our land. Let them know that treaties are only paper, but knives are real."

The warriors moved in small groups, three, five, sometimes ten. They struck, disappearing into the forest before soldiers could react. It wasn't European-style warfare—it was wolf warfare. Fast, silent, brutal.

The settlers began to feel afraid. Women hardly dared to fetch water from the river. Men only went into the fields armed. Children were forced into the huts at night, as if thin wooden walls could keep out ghosts.

Harrison raged. "This is Tecumseh's work!" he shouted in Vincennes, banging on the table so that the glasses shattered. "He says he wants peace, but his knives speak war!"

Spies brought reports. "The raids take place under the shadow of the Prophet. The warriors say they are protected by spirits. They speak of Tecumseh as a king."

Harrison knew what that meant: a people who had lost their fear. And that was more dangerous than any gun.

So he sent patrols. Soldiers rode out, searching for the warriors. But they rarely found anything. Sometimes only dead settlers, sometimes smoke from an abandoned camp. Sometimes they found the bodies of their own men, disemboweled, left behind as a warning.

The Americans hated this war. No battlefield, no enemy to line up in ranks. Only shadows, screams, knives in the dark.

And again and again: the Wabash. The river flowed sluggishly, but its banks were full of stories. Here a troop disappeared, there a trader was slain. The river became a symbol—a curse for the whites, a promise for the Shawnee.

Tecumseh walked through the villages, speaking to the warriors returning from raids. Their faces painted with blood, their hands full of loot. "Good," he said, "but remember: Don't kill for whiskey. Don't kill for silver. Kill only for land."

Some listened. Others laughed, drank, and boasted. War makes men wild, and not everyone followed the rules. Tecumseh knew that. But he couldn't control everything.

But the whites saw no difference. For them, every raid, every dead child, every burned hut was "Tecumseh's War."

And perhaps that's what it was. Not officially, not organized like an army—but as a movement, as a flame he had ignited.

Thus began the next chapter: no more talking, no more rusty nails. Now there were knives in the moonlight, blood on the river, screams in the night. The Wabash became a grave for many—whites and Native Americans alike.

And everyone knew: This was just the beginning.

Harrison wasn't the kind of man who understood knives in the dark. He was a soldier, raised in the order of lines, drums, and orders. But he was also enough of a politician to know that if settlers lay dead in the fields, his reputation was at stake.

So he struck back. Not with small patrols, but with retaliation. He called in the militia, gathered farmers and traders, and had officers roll out maps. "If they kill our people in their sleep," he said, "we'll burn their villages."

And so it happened.

Columns moved along the Wabash. Men with bayonets, muskets slung over their shoulders, faces hard. They rode into the woods, found villages where women ground corn, children played, and old men sat by fires.

The soldiers didn't see innocents. They saw "Indians." And that was enough.

Torches flew into roofs, smoke rose, screams echoed. Huts burned, fields were trampled. Dogs were shot, horses were taken. Those who ran away were shot in the back. Those who stayed died in the fire.

Harrison called it "punitive expeditions." For the Shawnee, it was a massacre.

The warriors often arrived too late. They found their villages in ashes, their families dead or imprisoned. Then they swore revenge. And the next night, another settler lay slain in his hut, another wagon ambushed on the road.

Thus began the cycle: raid – retaliation – massacre – raid. Each blow gave birth to the next. The Wabash became an endless chain of blood and smoke.

Tecumseh looked at it with an angry expression. He wanted war, yes. But not like this. Not this indiscriminate killing of women and children on both sides. He wanted a union, a purposeful struggle that would reclaim the land. Instead, there was chaos, a frenzy of violence that no one could control.

But he knew he couldn't stop it. If a warrior found his dead child, you couldn't tell him, "Wait, we better plan." The man reached for his knife, and the forest was red again.

Harrison used it politically. "Look," he wrote to Washington, "the Indians are wild beasts. They kill children, they burn down huts. We must be tough, we must break them, or it will never end."

He concealed the fact that his men were doing the same thing.

The newspapers picked up on it. Articles described "massacres" on the edge of the frontier. Sometimes the Indians were the beasts, sometimes the soldiers the executioners. The truth was lost in the smoke.

Tecumseh, however, knew exactly what was happening. He saw how each raid bound the tribes closer to him—while simultaneously plunging them deeper into chaos.

One evening, he stood by the river, next to a warrior who wept as he washed his brother's body. Tecumseh placed his hand on his shoulder. "Your pain is our pain. But remember: We don't fight just to shed blood. We fight to save land. Never forget that."

The warrior nodded, but his eyes held only hatred. Hatred for everything white.

And Tecumseh knew: This was the seed Harrison had unwittingly sown. Every burned hut, every dead child was a new knife in the hand of a warrior.

Thus, the War on the Wabash became not just a series of skirmishes. It became a stream of revenge in which no one remained clean. The whites called it order, the Shawnee called it justice, and in the end, it was simply blood.

The moon hung above, cold, indifferent, reflected in the waters of the Wabash. A river that flowed slowly, sluggishly—and yet swallowed more dead than any battlefield could ever count.

The war was no longer a great fuss in books or speeches in forts. It now resided in small things: in the puddles left behind by blood, in the clothes that were

never cleaned, in the eyes of children who cried silently at night. These were stories, individual stories, that ate their way into the body of the border like abscesses—and the deeper one dug, the more disgusting the stench became.

There was the case of the Harris farm. Harris was a man with a dirty shirt and clean bills. He had plowed land, hornet-averse to his neighbors, but always a dollar bill on his mind. One night when the moon was half-smeared, the warriors came. One of them knew Harris, had played nearby as a child, and now he stabbed with hands that trembled with fear. Harris screamed—not elegantly, not heroically, just a man realizing that life could end, and now. The warriors took everything: bread, blanket, the small knife Harris's father had once carried. The knife was blunt, like the conscience of those who gave it. The next morning, all that was found were the footsteps in the ground leading to the cabin. No remains, no sign except an open cupboard and an upturned chair. The neighbors later said Harris had "disappeared." That's what cleaning up sounds like: vanished.

Or the girl on the edge of Prophetstown. She was twelve, maybe thirteen—too old to be a child, too young for the drink of hate. Her mother had wept when she refused to see the white trader because the trader had brought blankets and smiled at the woman, with a look as if the smile could also buy fences. The warriors came a few nights later because a rumor whispered that the girl had seen the trader too often. A knife, two screams. The village spoke of ghosts, the Prophet spoke of purity. No one spoke of the precious life that died just like that. The mother pulled her shawl over her face and counted the years that had been torn from the house. You can say this is war; it's still murder, and when children disappear, the whole dream smells bad.

And then the story of John Reynolds, settler and pawnbroker, who thought guns, pepper, and whiskey would protect him. One night, wagons full of beans, dogs' feathers still warm, tires squealing—then howling in the roof, spears, a man's wheezing, and John was lying on his back, his eyes open like two coins no longer needed. His son found him. The son screamed until the voice was gone. The neighbors gathered, cursed, swore revenge. Harrison, in turn, gathered men and said, "Revenge is order." The word sounds good on paper when you write it. It tastes different when you swallow it.

In return, the warriors said, "Look what they've done to the land. Look how they plow the hills as if they were their plates." They collected lists of names, of farms, of paths that settlers trod every morning like filthy prayers. They chose targets with a precision that had nothing romantic about it. It was cynical,

tangible—one person wants to pay, another takes. The forest breathed it out, the moon watched and showed no mercy.

There was a night that everyone knew because it was ruminated in so many mouths until the taste became like metal: the night of the two wagons. Two wagons, loaded with salt and whiskey, drove along the Wabash, two men, too much courage, too little feeling. The warriors waited behind a blackberry bush, eyes like small coals. When the wagons came, one jumped out, cut the shaft, and with one hand applied the knife, barely hiding his trembling. The men screamed. One fell so loudly that the birds were startled. The whiskey was hot, the salt scraped from his hands. Around the campfire afterward, stories were told, the men laughed too loudly, drank, pretended it had been a feast. A feast of blood and theft. The laughter sounded forced.

Tecumseh didn't always see these things, but he heard them. They brought him the eyes of the men he knew; they brought him the stories, whether neat or messy. He often sat alone by the river and heard the Wabash talk as if he were an old fellow who had drunk too much whiskey. "We'll take back," he would whisper to snarling skins, "but not like this." And then he would go again and talk to men who weren't yet broken, to chiefs who had signed the treaty and were now seeing the world turn.

The personal war was the worst because it demanded a conscience where there was none left. Those who had killed a settler didn't rejoice forever. Many men, still in their tents, late at night, wept secretly. They thought of mothers calling their sons and of the youth they themselves had stolen. But anger numbs the soul, and once you have blood on your hands, you don't ask where it came from. You carry on. Just as a man who gets drunk drinks again until he no longer knows why he started.

The whites had their own stories. Some men swore they had seen the gaze of an Indian who had not a spark of humanity—only ice. Others reported nightly hordes that came like demons. Harrison wrote in his accounts of "savage attacks" and "accomplices," of punishments necessary "to protect civilization." Words that seemed clean on paper, even though the hands that wrote them smelled of bone.

And amid this sequence of murder and retribution, something else grew: a cold understanding. Men learned that a dead settler was a lesson; a burned village a threatening letter. Harrison could march, break bricks, build forts, but he couldn't see every bush where a knife might lurk. Tecumseh knew this. He knew that asymmetrical combat took him to places where the whites were

blind. That was the advantage—and the curse. The advantage because power wasn't an equal game; the curse because uncontrollability quickly turned into barbarism.

It wasn't all destruction. There were small fields still being cultivated, children singing songs, lovers secretly finding each other. But these moments felt wrong, as if they were resting on a cardboard house that could collapse at any moment. The line between normal and catastrophe lived in the same breath.

One of the sharpest stories was about a man named Samuels—a small-time blacksmith who protected his business like a treasure. He was neither a hero nor a coward, just a man who forged his nails and nothing more. One night, warriors came, saw his tools, his fine iron nails. They took what they needed and let him live. Some said they even left him a blanket. Later in the city, Samuels packed his things and left the country. He never looked back. His gaze was blank, a mask. So many did that: they left. And when too many left, all that remained was the scenery of a country, empty, ready to be taken.

When the men, bloodied and angry, went into the morning, one often saw the same things: smoke in the air, dogs pecking at the corpses, mothers squinting. And then, after the initial pain, one stood up again and planned the next blow. It was like a mechanical, bleak game of chess, in which no one kept their promises, except hatred.

The ghost stories the Prophet stoked helped; they turned men into fearless dead and brought some into ranks that had previously been only individual fighters. But faith alone did not fill trenches. Man by man, house by house, the price became visible. And amid all the noise, Tecumseh sat by the river at night, his hands heavy, his eyes even heavier, wondering if this path would lead him to what he wanted—or into a void no one could win.

The moon watched, the Wabash took and gave, and the border remained a place where stories were born, only to end up in files and reports. But for the people who lived them, they weren't reports. It was blood. It was screaming. It was the cold bite of a reality that neither promises nor treaties could heal.

And so the war continued: knives in the moonlight, smoke in the morning, children who would never play again. It was personal, cruel, and it left marks that couldn't be washed away. The men who participated—on whichever side—returned home, carrying those marks like bad jokes that never ended. They laughed; then they cried. Then they fought again.

Because that was all that remained. Who ever said freedom was clean? Who ever thought war had rules? On the Wabash, one learned quickly: rules are just words, and words are stabbed when someone has enough courage to use the knife.

The border was now a nerve, raw and bleeding. Every breath of wind felt like a finger plucking at a fresh seam. People could no longer pretend things had been the same before. One could no longer claim to live in a land of working sun and diligence; work was now a trench, a layer of fear, blood, and ash. And this trench consumed people.

Harrison soon realized his men weren't the same as before. They returned with empty eyes, spoke little, and ate hastily, as if afraid someone would steal the corner where they could still find warmth. They wrote reports and later drank whiskey to cover their screams. Officers practiced sober language: "punitive expedition," "security operation," "restoration of order." But the men who sat at night under the gray of the tents called it simply "the slaughter." It was more comfortable to talk that way. Words could be frosty and distant; but blood was always close at hand.

On the other side, a different pattern was growing. Warriors whose hands had previously held only spears now learned to set ambushes, build traps, and assess neighborhoods like maps. They read the settlers' routes like books, finding the moments when vigilance lapsed, when wine and fatigue softened the body. It wasn't a noble war. Not a heroic epic. It was craftsmanship—brutal, efficient, cold. You met people who melted into mush, and you didn't think twice. You thought: "Survive." And that word became justification.

The women became archives of grief. They counted losses as one once counted grain. Taking, replacing, raising—these were the steps, and beneath them lay the wound. Some took revenge in small, secret ways: they forgot the names of friends who traded with whites; they burned the blankets of families who arrived too late; they gave their children songs that later sounded like warnings. Women have always found ways to wage war without taking men's weapons. They left scars on lives that were not immediately visible.

Spies became more valuable than generals. Harrison now invested more money in information than in supplies. Men in worn coats, pretending to be traders, sat in taverns that had once been filled with laughter. They collected names, calculated routes, and tweaked lists. It was cynical: If you knew a face that was regularly on the road, you could block the road; if you blocked the road, you

had control over the rhythm of terror. Control is half the battle. Only, control was a weapon here, and weapons need hands.

The boys heard fewer speeches, they saw more corpses. They say youth is shaped by ideals. On the Wabash, it was shaped by the image of a dead neighbor. Ideals degenerate into slogans, into: "We must hunt them down." A child who encounters a skeleton too early learns what cold really means. It's not the cold of a winter morning, but the cold of a moment in which the world decides whether you still belong.

Men roamed the fields, their gazes encompassing more snow than insight. They became suspicious, not just of strangers, but of everything: the cart that arrived late; the dog that barked; the neighbor who repeatedly took the same road. Suspicion was the new currency—and suspicion consumes trust as quickly as fire consumes wood.

The hunters became more skilled. They learned how to cover a trail, how to split bloodstains in half, how to make the sound of a broken branch sound like natural forest thunder. They became shopkeepers in a new business: the business of not being seen. And in this shadow language, people changed. Some returned home and no longer found themselves exactly who they were. They were men who had learned to survive with a keen eye—and in doing so, they also lost something irretrievable.

There were moments that were like flashpoints: a raid gone wrong; an ambush that fell into a trap. Such nights didn't just leave dead, they left new stories. Men who had once prided themselves on their blades sat afterward and didn't touch their food until dusk dragged them from bed. The neighbors whispered, "He was there." They said it as if "there" were worse than any confession. In those whispering moments, guilt accumulated like soot.

The prophets and priests became arbiters. Tenskwatawa didn't talk less, he spoke differently. He polished the old stories, turning them into words that not only instructed but transformed souls. Where there had once been anger, he placed salvation—and didn't ask the price. People listened to him because faith is simpler than insight, and because faith can provide comfort when one is too exhausted to see reality as such.

And Tecumseh? He was now a man between two worlds. In one hand, he held politics—thoughts of law, alliance planning, lists. In the other, he held war—knives, ambushes, thoughts of revenge. This combination made him dangerous. He could organize an assembly into order and, at night, form a group for a raid.

That was power, and power needs direction. But power also consumes people. It was like whiskey: at first, it warms, then it consumes the life force.

The women's screams became a kind of metronome. They set the pace for the days: get up, eat, pray, mourn, don't forget. Sometimes these screams echoed the old anger that served as strength. Sometimes it was just exhaustion. And you could see how people began to avoid the border. City dwellers retreated to the towns; artisans packed crates; traders sought other routes. The border itself began to depopulate. People left—and when people leave, emptiness remains, and emptiness fills another system faster than you think.

The men who remained became tougher. They spoke in abbreviations, laughed in short, harsh bursts, and smoked as if they wanted to inhale the smoke and transform it into toughness. They had no time for philosophy. Their morals consisted of very simple equations: Whoever kills you loses; whoever helps you stays; distrust anyone who is too nice. It's cruel, yet precise.

And the white men? They continued to plan in white shirts. Harrison continued to write reports, thinking in lines. But at night, his men screamed in the tents without him stopping them. The old order no longer provided the answer to every problem. And that was the problem: the old answers didn't fit the new world.

Picture by picture, raid by raid, the region became a legend. Not the kind celebrated in Sunday sermons, but a real legend: the one that emptied you, that made you not recognize yourself in a mirror. People told their children stories that sounded like warnings; they came close to the truth, not to learn it, but to survive it.

In the end, what remained was a torn fabric: men who could fight; women who survived; children who feared; a government that reckoned; a prophet who spoke; a chief who commanded. And in the midst of this disruption was the Wabash, flowing serenely, as if none of it mattered. It carried corpses, carried news, carried stories. It was as silent and as determined as a judge who never stops speaking.

The chapter on the Wabash didn't end with a great battle in one day. It ended with the recognition that the war there knew no end, that it was a series of nights that intervened in the organism of a culture that now moved differently. And while men still suffered and planned, a new resolve was forming elsewhere. Tecumseh knew: words alone would soon no longer suffice. Time called for a finale—or a burnout that would sweep everything away. The only

question was which would break first: the land, the people—or the idea that had held it all together.

The border was no longer a place where people simply lived. It was an open wound, and every family living there was like a vein that could burst at any moment. Stories circulated that weren't about kings, governors, or grand speeches, but about men, women, and children crushed between spears and bayonets.

There was the story of Little Bear, a young Shawnee warrior. He was barely twenty, still had the fuzz of a beard, and carried an old lance of his father's, which was already blunt. His first "mission" was a raid on a wagon full of settlers. He rushed forward, shouting as loudly as he could, wanting to inspire fear. But his hand trembled. The settler, barely older than him, reached for a rifle. For a moment, they looked into each other's eyes: two boys, both too young for war, both old enough to have to wage it. Then a shot rang out, and the settler fell. Little Bear stared at the body, his heart pounding, not with pride, but with shame. The older warriors patted him on the shoulder, gave him whiskey, and said, "You're a man now." But Little Bear knew he had become the man he never wanted to be.

Or the woman Mary Thompson, a settler with three children. Her husband had fallen, slain while building a log cabin that was never finished. She was left with only a rusty rifle, a field, and fear that kept her awake at night. When warriors appeared in the distance, she grabbed her children and ran into the woods. She hid under branches for two days, feeding the children a few berries while smoke rose from the direction of her cabin. When she returned, nothing remained. Only a burned beam jutted into the sky like a bony finger. Mary stood before it, holding the rifle that was too heavy for her, and swore, "Never again." Later, she joined a group of refugees, moving east, back to the cities. But the embers remained in her eyes—not of hatred, but of an emptiness that was worse.

The children learned quickly. There were no more fairy tales around the fire, but warnings. "If you see smoke, don't run." - "If you see a trail, don't step in it." - "If a stranger smiles at you, don't smile back." Children became little soldiers of caution. They knew the sound of a rifle before they knew the alphabet. Some boys knew how to set a trap before they could even walk properly. The border extracted their childhood from their bones like one sucks the marrow from an animal.

The old men became chroniclers. They sat by the fires and told of past wars, of times when courage had a different face. But there was bitterness in their voices. They saw that war was different now—without honor, without clear rules. Only moonlight and knives, smoke and revenge. "In the old days," said an old Delaware, "we went into battle man against man. Now it's shadow against sleep." He spat into the fire and fell silent. The silence was heavier than any words.

And again and again, the everyday scenes that now became horrific. A farmer who entered the field in the morning found his cow with its throat slit. A child who went to gather wood didn't return. A group of warriors found a white man in the forest, shaved his head, and let him go – only for him to tell everyone in the fort that he had seen death. War was no longer just killing; war was also fear, so deep that one couldn't breathe at night.

Tecumseh wandered through this chaos like a man checking his own grave. He heard of everything: of Little Bear, of Mary Thompson, of the old men, of the children. He absorbed each story like poison, knowing that each story made him stronger—and heavier at the same time. For the stories showed: words had lost their value. No treaty, no speech could reclaim the land that had gone up in smoke. No curse from the prophet could magically sweep away the corpses floating in the river.

He spoke anyway. Again and again. He swore to the people: "Stick together. Every dead person cries out for revenge, yes. But revenge without a plan is suicide." But he knew many weren't listening. They only heard their own screams in the night.

Harrison, in turn, used the stories like weapons. Every dead family, every burned-down house was a reason for him to demand more soldiers, more money, more powers. In Vincennes, in Washington, in the newspapers, he turned blood into arguments. He wrote: "Savages know no order. They must be broken." And the government nodded. No one there saw the faces of Little Bear or Mary Thompson. They saw only numbers and maps.

The Wabash flowed on as if it were uninvolved. But everyone knew that it knew more dead people than any field accountant. River water that turned red and cleared again. Corpses that came and went. Screams that dissolved in its roar. The Wabash was witness, judge, and executioner all at once. And it didn't speak.

At the end of this section, one thing remained: a feeling that everything was about to tip over. The War in the Moonlight couldn't go on like this forever. It would either end in a great battle—or in a bleed-out, with no one left. Tecumseh felt it. Harrison felt it. Even the children felt it when they pulled their blankets tighter at night.

The knives still glinted in the moonlight. But the dull sound of drums and boots could already be heard in the distance. The War on the Wabash would soon become bigger. Much bigger.

Tecumseh wasn't blind to what was happening. He saw how the war on the Wabash was fraying, how knives in the wrong hands were no longer used for land, but for personal revenge. He hated it. Revenge was like whiskey—it burned well, but it made you blind and weak.

So he did what only he could: He began to force order into the chaos.

He rode from village to village, a shadow with a voice like thunder. The warriors greeted him with cheers or silence, but they listened. "Enough of aimless killing," he said. "Enough of murdering peasants who know nothing. This is not victory. This is only blood that weakens us. We need more. We need order, we need discipline."

The young ones stared at him as if he were a new spirit. The old ones nodded, sensing that the wolf was right.

He spoke of an army. Not in the European sense, not in lines and uniforms, but an army of many tribes fighting together. "We are no longer tribes," he said, "we are one people. Everyone who defends the country is my brother."

He began gathering the tribes like wood for a fire. Shawnee, Kickapoo, Delaware, Potawatomi—he called them together, swore them to one goal: to stop the whites. Some came immediately, full of anger. Others hesitated, fearing the price. But Tecumseh's speeches burned holes in their doubts.

In Prophetstown, the movement grew. Where once there had only been huts, there were now rows of tents filled with warriors from dozens of villages. Children ran among them, women ground corn, old men told stories. It was no longer an ordinary village. It was a camp, a gathering point, a heart. A heart that beat strongly—and that Harrison hated more with each passing day.

Tecumseh delivered speeches that were like drumbeats. "We are not fighting because we desire to kill. We are fighting because our land is being taken from

us. We are not fighting to steal whiskey. We are fighting to keep the soil on which we were born. And we are not fighting as Shawnee or Creek or Kickapoo—we are fighting as one nation."

The crowd roared, warriors pounded the ground with spears, women screamed, children clapped. In those moments, Tecumseh sensed the possibility that drove him: that Native Americans who had fought each other for centuries could fight shoulder to shoulder.

But while he was building, Harrison was also building.

In Vincennes, the reports piled up. "Prophetstown is growing. More and more warriors are moving there. They're training, they're gathering weapons. Tecumseh himself is leading them." Harrison read, gritted his teeth, and muttered, "This isn't a town. It's a nest of vipers."

He began to gather his own army. Militia from Indiana, regular troops from Kentucky, volunteers eager for land and glory. They were given rifles, uniforms, and a bit of training. They practiced marching, loading, and shooting. They weren't professionals, but there were many of them.

Harrison wrote to Washington that he needed authority to "break the rebellion on the Wabash." He spoke of the safety of the settlers and the government's duty to restore order. In truth, he wanted to see Prophetstown burn and to erase Tecumseh's name from the records.

Meanwhile, the conflict grew stronger. On the one hand, a growing alliance led by a man who threw words like spears. On the other, an army led by a governor who turned paper into cannons.

And both knew: things couldn't go on like this for much longer. Knives in the moonlight were one thing. But a city full of warriors was something else entirely.

Tecumseh traveled south once more to win more tribes. He left Prophetstown in his brother's hands. "Keep the warriors ready," he said. "But don't let yourselves be provoked." Tenskwatawa nodded, vowing that the spirits would protect them.

It was a mistake for which Tecumseh would later pay dearly.

For while he talked and gathered, Harrison armed his army, marched north—and the moon over the Wabash would soon see not only knives, but fire and cannons.

Autumn descended upon the land like a cold dog that could not be banished. Mist hung over the swamps, the forests rustled like old men murmuring in their sleep. The tribes knew: something big was coming.

Harrison called his men together. It wasn't an army in the European sense—more of a patchwork of militia, volunteers, and a few regular troops. Peasants who had been trained as soldiers, traders with bayonets, young men who thought war was an adventure. But there were many of them. And they had rifles, gunpowder, and drums.

They marched out of Vincennes, columns kicking up dust. Harrison rode in front, his gaze hard, his lips thin. He spoke of "order," of "peace." But only one thought burned in his gut: Prophetstown must go.

The marchers cursed, stumbled, ate hard bread, and slept in the dirt. Some muttered that they were afraid. Others spat into the fire and boasted about how many Indians they would kill. But in all of them there was a crackling feeling, an awareness: They were heading toward something greater than the usual raids.

Meanwhile, Prophetstown was filled with unrest. Tecumseh was gone, to the south. The heart of the League was missing. The Prophet—Tenskwatawa—remained. He gave speeches, shouting about spirits that would protect them. "Their bullets won't hit us!" he cried. "Their cannons are smoke! The spirits will blind them!"

The warriors listened, some enthusiastically, some skeptically. They knew Tecumseh would have spoken differently—more wisely, more cautiously. But he wasn't there. And the prophet filled the void with fire.

Women gathered supplies, children were sent into the woods, men sharpened knives, and tested rifles. Prophetstown was no longer a town; it was a powder keg.

There was a strange silence along the Wabash. Nights when only the chirping of insects could be heard. But everyone sensed that it wouldn't last much longer.

Scouts returned, breathless, their eyes wide open. "The Americans are marching. Many. Hundreds. They're not far away."

The village reacted like a body suddenly stabbed with a knife. Panic, screams, prayers. Men ran, women screamed, the prophet raised his arms and cried: "Do not be afraid! The spirits are with us!"

But in some faces, fear was stronger than any faith. They had heard stories – of burned villages, of children who never returned.

That night, Tenskwatawa sat alone by the fire. He drummed, murmured to the spirits, prayed, shouted, and laughed. Some saw him and later said he looked like a man who was already halfway into another world.

And on the horizon, through the morning mist, Harrison and his army moved. The drums beat dully, the columns approached, the grass cracked beneath boots.

The Wabash shone silently, as if it knew that more blood would soon flow in it.

The night before the battle was as heavy as a sack of stones. Warriors whispered prayers, some painted their faces with red earth, others silently placed knives beside them. Women sang songs that sounded like farewells.

And over everything hung the smell of smoke—not of burnt huts, but of the smoke that was to come.

The knife and the moonlight, the shadow play of the past few months, would soon be lost in the thunder of the cannons. Prophetstown was no longer just a village. It was a destination. And Harrison was almost there.

The Wabash held his breath.

Prophetstown – a city of dust and hope

Prophetstown was never more than a few huts and fire pits, but for the tribes, it was something else: a promise. A promise that they didn't always have to flee, that they could stand somewhere and say: *Here, this is our soil.*

It was a village of dust, because every gust of wind stirred up the earth as if it wanted to swallow the houses right back up. It was a village of hope, because people from dozens of tribes lived side by side there—Shawnee, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Delaware. Men who had once rammed spears into their bellies now sat side by side and smoked while their children played.

And it was a village full of doubt. For Tecumseh was gone, and without him, Prophetstown felt like a body without a heart.

Tenskwatawa tried to fill this gap. The prophet talked day and night. He beat drums, smoked pipes, and murmured to spirits only he could see. "The whites are weak," he cried. "The spirits will deflect their bullets, their cannons will fall silent."

People wanted to believe. They needed something stronger than fear. But fear was like smoke—it crept into every hut, into every sleep.

In those days, Prophetstown was a strange place. On the one hand, a camp full of warriors sharpening knives and cleaning rifles. On the other, a village full of everyday life: children gathering wood, women grinding corn, old people sitting in the shade. Hope and death shared the same space.

And meanwhile, Harrison moved closer.

The soldiers of his army were tired, dusty, some sick, but they marched. Harrison kept them together with orders, threats, and promises of land. "One more march," he said, "and we'll beat their nest."

Scouts brought reports: "Prophetstown is growing. Many warriors, but poorly armed. They're not building fortifications." Harrison grinned thinly. "Then we'll beat them before they learn how to build a fortress."

The night before the battle was heavy as stone in Prophetstown. Women sang to lull the children to sleep. Men painted their faces, took sips, whispered prayers. Some talked about Tecumseh, where he was, whether he would come. But he wasn't there.

Tenskwatawa stood by the fire, arms outstretched, eyes filled with smoke. "The spirits are with us!" he cried. "They will wield our knives. Tomorrow we will see the white men fall like deer in autumn!"

The warriors cheered, some out of faith, some out of despair.

And in the darkness, behind the huts, men sat silently, saying nothing. They knew that faith doesn't stop bullets.

The Wabash flowed sluggishly, as if it wanted to swallow everything before it began. But one could already hear what was coming: the dull rumble of drums in the distance, the crunch of boots in the grass. Harrison's men were camped

just a few miles away, their rifles loaded, their eyes full of weariness and hatred.

Prophetstown didn't sleep that night. It was a village on the threshold, half dream, half grave.

And when the first glimmer of morning came, hope was as thin as the smoke above the huts.

Morning didn't come quietly. It came like a dog tearing apart the tent. Fog lay over the ground, heavy and wet, so thick that the first rays of sunlight pierced a blanket like knives. Prophetstown breathed uneasily. Some warriors were already awake, sitting by the fire, their faces painted black, their eyes like burning coals. Others were still asleep, curled up like children, unaware that death was about to tear them from their blankets.

And there it was: the first bang. A shot, somewhere at the edge of the camp. Shortly after, a second, then a chorus of shots, wild, uneven. Screams echoed. Dogs barked. Children screamed.

Harrison had struck at dawn. His men, half drunk with courage, half drunk with fear, crept out of the fog and opened fire. Bullets flew, ripping through the air, rousing men from their sleep, tearing huts apart.

Prophetstown awoke in chaos. Men leaped barefoot from their huts, grabbing spears, old muskets, and knives. Women dragged children into the undergrowth, screaming, praying, and running. Old men lingered, raising their arms as if they could summon spirits.

Tenskwatawa stood amidst the commotion, his eyes wide, his face contorted. "The spirits are with us!" he roared. "Shoot! Fight! Their bullets won't hit!"

But the bullets hit. They hit men in the chest, women in the back, children who weren't fast enough. Blood spurted into the dust, staining the fog red.

The warriors rallied as best they could. They charged the American lines, leaping out of the fog like shadows, stabbing, shouting, throwing spears. Some Americans staggered back, stumbled, and fell. But Harrison drove his men forward, shouting orders, striking shoulders with his sword whenever one hesitated.

The lines held, bayonets flashed. Warriors ricocheted, tumbled, and fell into the grass, their bodies twisted.

It wasn't a beautiful fight, not a noble battlefield. It was chaos. Smoke, dust, screams, blood. Men didn't scream like heroes, they screamed like animals whose throats were being ripped out. Women screamed for children, children screamed for their mothers.

Prophetstown burned. Harrison had ordered flares thrown. Roofs caught fire, flames licked at walls, smoke rose. The wind carried it across the battlefield, making the air even more stifling. Men coughed, their eyes watered, but they fought on, blind, desperate.

A warrior named Two Hawks leaped upon an American soldier, pulled him to the ground, and slashed his face with a knife until he was left with nothing but pulp. He screamed like an animal until a bullet pierced him from behind. He fell beside his victim, both faces unrecognizable.

Another, barely older than fifteen, ran toward the lines with an axe. He got so close that he severed half of a soldier's arm—then he was hit by three bullets at once. His body hit the ground hard, the axe slipping from his hands as if it had never been there.

And again and again the prophet. He shouted, he drummed, he prayed. "They can't hurt us!" But every dead warrior was proof that the spirits weren't coming. Some cast angry glances at him, shouted in his face: "Where are your spirits now?" But he only shouted louder, as if he could drown out reality.

Harrison rode through the smoke, his uniform covered in dust, his face wet with sweat. He saw men falling, heard screams, but his mind was only on the goal: Prophetstown must burn. "Forward!" he roared. "No mercy!"

The Americans advanced, house by house, hut by hut. They shot men, pushed women away with rifle butts, pulled out children and left them to cry in the dust. Everything that didn't flee was burned.

And yet, the warriors didn't give up immediately. Again and again, they leaped out of the smoke, stabbing, striking, and throwing. They fought like men who knew that behind them stood not just a village, but a dream.

But dreams don't stop bullets.

As the sun rose higher, Prophetstown was ablaze. Smoke hung like a column over the Wabash. Dead bodies lay everywhere—men, women, children, soldiers, warriors. Blood seeped into the ground, soaking the cornfields.

The survivors fled into the forest. Some vowed to return. Others simply wept. The Prophet sat at the edge of the village, his drum broken, his eyes empty. His words were like ash in the air.

And Harrison? He stood in the middle of the ruins, dirt on his face, smoke in his throat. He had won, yes. But it was a victory that stank. A victory that brought more smoke than glory.

The Wabash flowed on, silent, indifferent. He had seen other things. But this would remain—as scars on the land, as smoke in the memory, as dust in the dream.

The smoke settled over everything like a second skin. Men coughed up blood, coughed up dust, coughed up their own lungs. It was almost impossible to tell whether the man next to them was friend or foe. Only the screams differed—some English, others Shawnee, Delaware, Kickapoo. But pain sounds the same in every language.

Harrison held the line. It was his pride, his military religion. Lines stood, bayonets forward, rifles loaded, one firing, one kneeling, one loading. No heroism, just cold routine. And this routine ate its way through the warriors, who fought fiercely, bravely, but without order.

Again and again, they rushed out of the fog as if they themselves were smoke-like figures. A scream, a spear, a leap over the front rank—and then a bayonet crashed into the stomach, a bullet into the chest. The warriors fell as if the ground had greedily swallowed them.

One managed to reach Harrison himself. A big man, Kickapoo, his face painted with red stripes. He leaped forward, axe over his head. Harrison raised his sword, parried at the last moment, the iron screeching, sparks flying. The soldier next to him fired, the bullet ripping half the warrior's skull off. Harrison stared into the dead eyes, then rode on as if nothing had happened. But later, at night, he saw that face again and again.

The Indians fought with a fury bordering on madness. Some rushed at bayonets with bare knives, as if they could tear the entire army apart with a single scream. Others threw themselves to the ground, shot from the grass, then disappeared again. They were fast, clever, and merciless. But Harrison had more men, more rifles, and more discipline.

And above it all, Tenskwatawa screamed. He had stood on a hill, his arms raised to the sky, his eyes wide. "The spirits are with you!" he cried again and again. "The bullets can't hit you!"

The warriors heard him, and many thought it was a heartbeat. They ran forward, chests open, throats filled with roars. And then the bullets slammed into their bodies, tearing flesh, breaking bones. They fell, their eyes filled with confusion. *Why didn't the spirits protect me?*

Slowly, shot by shot, stab by stab, faith crumbled. Men saw their brothers die, saw that the spirits weren't helping, that the prophet's words were just smoke.

One of the warriors, a Potawatomi, turned around in the fray, pointed at Tenskwatawa with bloody fingers, and shouted, "Liar!" Then he jumped back into the chaos and died between bayonets.

The prophet heard, but he only shouted louder. Words are cheap when blood is flowing. But the men no longer listened. Their eyes said: We need actions, not drums.

Meanwhile, Harrison pushed the lines forward. Slowly, step by step, but inexorably. His face was hard, but deep down he knew: This was not a glorious victory. It was a slaughter, a crushing.

Prophetstown burned behind the fighting. Roofs collapsed, flames licked at the beams, children screamed, women ran into the woods with bundles. Some soldiers chased after them, caught up with them, and made short work of them. No orders—just war.

The warriors continued fighting because they had no other choice. Every blow was desperate, every cry a final prayer. But the American ranks held, were not broken.

The sun rose higher, the fog dissipated, and the battlefield became visible: dead bodies, blood, smoke, burning huts. It was no longer a village; it was a pile of corpses.

The prophet lost his footing. His voice grew weaker, his drumming more confused. Men cast glances at him that no longer knew reverence. Some later said: "In that moment, his word died."

And Harrison? He rode through the ranks, saw dead bodies, saw smoke, and he knew: This was what he had marched for. Prophetstown would no longer exist.

But he had no idea that in doing so, he was not only destroying a village, but igniting a hatred greater than anything he had known before.

For somewhere far away in the south, Tecumseh would soon learn what had happened here. And his anger would not be smoke, but fire.

The sun was now high in the sky, but the light barely reached the ground. Smoke hung like a gray blanket over Prophetstown, flames devoured beams, causing them to kneel like old men. The cracking of wood mingled with screams, gunshots, the dull thud of bodies falling into the dust.

The warriors were tired. Their arms heavy, their voices hoarse, their muscles like lead. They still fought, but it was no longer an attack—it was a twitching, a wild rebellion, like an animal in its death throes lashing out once more. They threw themselves against the bayonets, they leaped from the smoke, they stabbed, they bit. But each blow was weaker, each scream shorter.

Harrison pressed his men forward. "No mercy!" he yelled, his face contorted. His soldiers, bloodied, exhausted, obeyed. They shot at everything that moved, drove bayonets into bodies, and threw torches into huts. It was no longer a battle; it was annihilation.

Some warriors tried to protect the women and children. They formed circles, positioned themselves in front of the fleeing men, holding spears, old muskets, and stones. They died where they stood, falling on top of each other, becoming part of a wall of flesh and blood. Some women fought themselves, with knives, with their bare hands. An old Shawnee woman knocked a soldier's rifle out of his hand before he struck her down with the butt.

Tenskwatawa was still standing on his hill. But his voice was hoarse, his arms heavy. "The spirits are with you!" he shouted, but no one heard him anymore. Men who ran past him only gave him looks full of hatred and contempt. "Liar," one spat. "Imposter," cried another. And the prophet saw his faith smothered in the smoke.

Harrison knew he had won. But he felt it not as a victory, but as an illness. Too many of his own men lay dead or wounded in the grass. Some whimpered, some cried for their mothers, some lay still, their eyes wide open. The stench of burning flesh mingled with gunpowder, blood, and smoke. It was a smell you can never get rid of.

By the time the sun was at its highest, it was over. Prophetstown was no longer a village. It was a pile of charred timbers, burned cornfields, and torn bodies. Survivors fled into the woods, frightened, exhausted, and hopeless. The Americans searched the huts, finding nothing but ashes, a few broken drums, and bones already blackened by fire.

A young officer approached Harrison. "Sir, we have won." Harrison looked at him, said nothing, just a curt nod. Because the truth gnawed at him: Yes, he had won—but over what? Over a handful of warriors, women, children? Over a village that was little more than a symbol?

The Prophet later sat alone by the river, his drum broken beside him. He murmured softly to spirits who didn't answer. He knew what he had lost: not only Prophetstown, but also the trust of his own people. He was naked, a man who had shouted great words—and seen them all evaporate in smoke.

And somewhere in the South, Tecumseh would soon hear of all this. Prophetstown, burned. His brother, exposed. His dream, weakened. But also: a new hatred, deeper, purer, deadlier.

Harrison rode through the rubble, stopping at a burned-out hut. He smelled the smoke, saw the ashes, saw a child's leg lying half-charred in the dust. He looked away, swallowed, and pressed his lips together. "Order restored," he murmured, as if he had to convince himself.

The Wabash flowed on, sluggish, indifferent. But it carried the smoke with it, carried it away. The smoke, which was more than burnt wood—it was burnt hope. Prophetstown, the city of dust and hope, had become dust.

And in the ashes lay the beginning of something greater. For every survivor who fled carried the embers with them—in their heart, in their memories, in their hatred. And hatred burns longer than any village.

The day after the battle, it was quiet. Too quiet. No drums, no screams, only the smoke that still hung in rags over the charred land. Prophetstown was now a black stain, a shroud of ash. Crows fluttered over the rubble, pecking at what remained.

Harrison had his men march through the village to "secure" it. But there was nothing left to secure. They found only burnt corn cobs, a broken pipe, and a few bones that looked as if they had tried to escape. Some soldiers stole what they found—a knife, a necklace, a pot. Trophies made of dust.

Then Harrison had the remains torn down. "Not a stone, not a beam shall remain," he commanded. "Prophetstown must never rise again." His voice was hard, but his face betrayed fatigue. Even in triumph, he looked like a man who knew he had cured a disease by killing the patient.

In Vincennes and further east, the story was different. Harrison wrote reports describing Prophetstown as a "major menace" that he had destroyed. Newspapers ran headlines: *The Governor of Indiana defeats Tecumseh's rebels!*—even though Tecumseh wasn't even there.

The settlers cheered. Finally, they said, the fear was over. Finally, they could plow fields without constantly staring for shadows in the forest. They celebrated Harrison, calling him a hero.

But not everyone believed this version. Some officers grumbled that the battle had been a massacre. Others reported that the "savages" had fought bravely, almost fanatically, while the prophet shouted nothing but empty promises. In Washington, Harrison was celebrated—but simultaneously viewed with suspicion. Was this truly a victory? Or merely a build-up to the next, larger war?

And he came.

For while Harrison waited for praise, while the newspapers praised him, Tecumseh rode back.

He came from the South, where he had tried to win Cherokee and Creek for his alliance. He came with hope—and found only ashes. Prophetstown, his symbol, his heart, lay destroyed.

The survivors came to him, one by one, from the woods, from the shadows. Women with blank eyes, men who had lost their weapons, children who were silent. They told how the spirits had failed to protect them, how his brother had screamed as bullets ripped through bodies.

Tecumseh listened, remained silent, and clenched his fists. He stepped through the ash, kicking at beams that shattered, charred. He saw the land that had once been full of voices, now full of silence.

Then he turned to Tenskwatawa.

His brother sat by the river, his eyes hollow, his drum broken beside him. He was still muttering, words to spirits who had long since stopped listening. Tecumseh stepped before him and stared at him for a long time.

"Your spirits have betrayed us," he said coldly.

The Prophet raised his eyes, blinked, and said nothing.

"No," Tecumseh continued, "not the spirits. You."

It wasn't a scream, a slap, or a spear thrust. But the words struck harder than any blade. From that day forward, Tenskwatawa was no longer a leader, merely a shadow, tolerated but despised.

But Tecumseh swore. Not quietly, not secretly. Loudly, in front of everyone. "That wasn't the end. That was the beginning. Harrison thinks he's won—but he's only lit the fire. We will fight back. With more men, more weapons. With every tribe I can still win. They will learn that Prophetstown doesn't die—Prophetstown lives in us."

The warriors raised spears, shouted, and stamped their feet. Even the women wept louder, children clung to their mothers. A new fire began to smolder in the smoke.

Harrison rode back to Vincennes, tired, sick with the stench. He wrote reports, boasted about his victory. But deep down, he knew: he hadn't removed a thorn; he had driven it deeper into his flesh.

And the thorn was called Tecumseh.

Prophetstown was dead—but at the same time, more alive than ever. A village of dust can be burned down, but an idea burning in the minds cannot be extinguished with torches.

For the Americans, it was over: a "nest of savages" destroyed, Harrison the great victor, Indiana safe. Newspapers wrote hymns of praise, governors sent congratulations, Washington nodded in satisfaction. "A brilliant victory," it read, "a proof of the superiority of civilization."

But in the forests, along the rivers, in the tribal villages, the story was told differently. They spoke of Prophetstown not as a burned patch, but as a sacrifice, a place of martyrdom. Children heard stories of warriors falling there like heroes, of their spirits still wandering over the Wabash, of every wisp of smoke rising over a village being a salute to Prophetstown.

Tecumseh himself fueled this myth. He knew that you couldn't move people with reports or numbers, but with images, with fire. He told everyone he went:

"Prophetstown lives. It lives in everyone who won't sell the land. In everyone who won't plow the white man's field. In everyone who holds a knife."

And the people believed. Not in Tenskwatawa—his reputation was ruined, his spirits ridiculed. But in Tecumseh, who emerged from the ashes like a man who was himself fire.

He traveled further, speaking to tribes that had previously hesitated. The Creek, the Cherokee, the Sauk, the Fox. He spoke of betrayal, of blood, of smoke. He painted Prophetstown not as a defeat, but as proof that the whites could only rule with fire. "Look," he said, "they call it peace—and burn villages. They call it order—and kill children. Do you want to see that happen, too?"

Many no longer hesitated. Prophetstown became a banner under which people could rally. A black banner of smoke, but a banner nonetheless.

Harrison, meanwhile, basked in the glory. Receptions, speeches, newspaper reports. He celebrated as if he had defeated Napoleon. He drank too much, grinned too broadly, and spoke of "my victory at Tippecanoe." The word stuck. Tippecanoe—a name that would carry him into history.

But as he grinned, he knew: victory hadn't made him any more secure. Scouts reported more movement in the woods, more warriors joining Tecumseh. "The battle hasn't broken them," they said, "it has united them."

And at night, when Harrison sat alone in his tent, the candle burning and the whiskey burning deeper, he heard the screams again. The screams of his own men, crying for help in the smoke. The screams of children screaming among the flames. He swallowed, drank, and wrote reports that sounded cleaner than the truth smelled.

Meanwhile, the prophet, Tenskwatawa, sank into oblivion. No one listened to him anymore. Men who had once believed in his words spat as he passed by. Women pulled their children away from him. Some called him a clown, others a traitor. He remained close to Tecumseh, but only as a shadow, as a reminder that even a brother can fall.

Tecumseh, however, remained unbroken. For him, Prophetstown wasn't a grave, but a starting point. "They thought they had defeated us," he said, "but they only showed us that we must fight. Real war. Not raids, not shadows. War."

His eyes were dark, his voice a knife. And the warriors who listened to him nodded, stamped their feet, and swore.

So Prophetstown lived on—not in beams, not in cornfields, but in hearts. A myth that was stronger than any village.

Harrison had his victory. But what he had really won was a war that was just beginning.

Prophetstown no longer existed—at least not in wood, corn, and smoke. But in people's minds, it grew larger the more it disappeared. A burned village has a habit of becoming a legend.

The survivors spoke not of defeat, but of martyrs. They recounted how men fought to their last breath, how women died with knives in their hands, how children screamed their names into the dust. They turned despair into heroic tales. And soon, Prophetstown was no longer a pile of ashes, but a symbol: *This is what resistance looks like.*

Tecumseh understood the power of such stories. He stoked them wherever he could. "Prophetstown is not dead," he said. "Prophetstown lives in all of us. Every village that doesn't sell, every woman who doesn't beg, every warrior who draws his knife—that is Prophetstown."

He made a banner out of ashes. And the tribes took it up. The Kickapoo, the Potawatomi, the Creek, even some Cherokee—they began to use Prophetstown as a name of honor. Whoever died in battle died "for Prophetstown."

Tenskwatawa, on the other hand, sank deeper. His faith was burned, his voice hollow. He still muttered, but no one listened. Some called him "the blind," even though his eyes still saw. To them, he was a fool, a man who shouted big words and delivered nothing. Tecumseh tolerated him because he was his brother. But nothing more.

Meanwhile, Harrison sat in Vincennes and wrote letters. Letters to Washington, letters to newspapers, letters to other governors. They all said the same thing: *Victory.* Victory at Tippecanoe. Victory over Tecumseh's Confederacy. Victory for the United States.

People swallowed it. Newspapers printed his face, calling him the "Hero of Tippecanoe." In taverns, men toasted his name, women sung him into songs.

Harrison grinned at the crowd, savoring the applause as if he had saved the world.

But outside, beyond the printer's ink, the truth was different. Scouts reported that the woods were full of movement. More warriors were gathering, not fewer. Prophetstown was gone, but the Covenant lived on. Harrison had destroyed the symbol—and by doing so, made it stronger.

And the tribes now had a leader greater than ever before. Tecumseh was not just a chief. He was the man who had survived Prophetstown, the Prophet's brother, who was wiser, tougher, more credible. Everyone knew: If anyone could truly unite the tribes, it was him.

The American press spoke of calm, of security. But along the rivers, drums could be heard that didn't sound like calm. Around campfires, men swore that the next battle would not take place in a village, but across an entire country.

And Tecumseh? He rode, spoke, swore. He became a storm born from the ashes. Prophetstown was dead, yes. But Prophetstown was also immortal.

Harrison still smiled at the crowd, while the next war was already growing in the shadows. He had won the name "Tippecanoe"—but he had also created the greatest enemy of his life.

The Wabash flowed on, calm, indifferent. But now something new was reflected in its waters: not just smoke, not just blood, but a dream that, despite everything, refused to die.

Prophetstown—a city of dust and hope—was now nothing but dust. But hope was stronger than ever.

[Tecumseh's Journey South – Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw](#)

After Prophetstown, there was no time for mourning. The ashes were still warm, the crows still pecking at the corpses, and Tecumseh knew he had to move on. The dream was bigger than a village, bigger than a confederation of a few tribes. If the whites could truly be stopped, it would only be with all nations, from the Wabash to the Deep South.

He saddled his horse, a skinny beast with scars on its neck, and set off. Behind him lay smoke and betrayal, before him dozens of tribes he had to convince.

One man alone against a sea of mistrust, traditions, pride, and hunger. But Tecumseh was no ordinary man. He was fire incarnated.

The journey south wasn't a ride through blooming landscapes, but a march through scorched earth. Everywhere he saw traces of the Americans: roads that crisscrossed the land like scars, fields that had been forcibly cleared, huts of settlers who built themselves from forest timber as if it were their God-given right.

In the villages he passed, he found trunks already broken. Men who had sold plots of land for a barrel of whiskey. Women covering their children with rags while traders peddled them with rifles with rusty locks. Old people crouching in the dust, muttering that there was no point in fighting anymore.

Tecumseh spoke nonetheless. He spoke until his voice grew hoarse, talking of Prophetstown, of betrayal, of Harrison, of the future. "Look," he said, "every treaty you sign is a noose around your neck. Every field you give up is the death of your children. Today they take a river, tomorrow they take your village, the day after tomorrow you yourselves are mere dust."

Many listened, some nodded, some wept. But not everyone believed. The South was not the Wabash. The Cherokee, the Creek, the Choctaw—they were more numerous, more powerful, prouder. And they were more cautious.

The Cherokee had long traded with the whites. Some of them dressed like them, built houses like them, and some even learned their language. "We can live with them," said their chiefs, "we adapt. We keep enough." Tecumseh looked at them, full of anger. "You'll see that you can't negotiate with a wolf when it's hungry. It will eat you anyway."

The Creek were divided. Some wanted peace, others wanted war. Their villages were large, their fields vast, their warriors numerous. Tecumseh knew: If he could win them over, his alliance would have an army the likes of which had never existed. He spoke to them in a voice that trembled like thunder. "You are warriors," he cried, "not farmers toiling in other people's fields. You are the guardians of this land! Look what has happened to Prophetstown. Do you want your villages to be the next to go up in smoke?"

Some jumped up, shouting that he was right. Others grumbled that he only brought trouble. The Creek Council was a place full of fire and distrust. But Tecumseh sensed that he had ignited sparks there that would later become flames.

The Choctaw listened to him, but coolly. They were traders, sober, cautious. "What do you have to offer us?" they asked. "We have land, we have fields. If we fight the whites, we will lose everything." Tecumseh clenched his fists, but he bit his tongue. "If you don't fight, you will lose everything more slowly," he said. "But you will lose."

He rode on, talked on, slept in huts, in swamps, under trees. Everywhere the same speech, the same rage, the same dream: One people, one land, one war.

Some laughed at him. Some threatened to kill him. Some wept and said they would follow him. But no matter where he went, Tecumseh left his mark. Like a passing storm, he left people different from how he found them.

The South was hot, full of mosquitoes, full of swamps, full of mistrust. But Tecumseh kept going. He knew he had no choice. Prophetstown was ashes. It couldn't be his dream.

And while Harrison shone in reports in the North, Tecumseh built something much more dangerous in the South: a fire that could ignite all the tribes.

Tecumseh's voice was his most powerful sword. No iron, no gun could do what his words could: raise men up, make women weep, and make children listen with their mouths open. In the South, he wielded this sword like a berserker.

When he entered a village, he gathered the people in the square, in front of the council fire, or in the shadow hall. He waited until it was quiet – and then he spoke. No long speeches, no hesitant clearing of the throat. He began like lightning: loud, clear, relentless.

"You sell land like old leather," he thundered among the Cherokee. "But land is not leather. Land is blood. Land is bone. Land is your heart. Whoever sells land sells themselves. And when you're done selling, there'll be nothing left of you."

The Cherokee chiefs sat there, finely dressed, with vests and canes, like little gentlemen from a white parlor. Some lowered their gaze, others hissed angrily. One growled, "We'll adapt. We'll learn their language, we'll take their clothes. We can survive."

Tecumseh jumped to his feet, his eyes like embers. "Survive? You survive like a dog sitting at the master's table, waiting for something to fall! But you're not dogs. You're warriors. Act like one!"

A murmur went through the crowd. Some Cherokee warriors nodded, clenching their fists. Others shook their heads. The council remained divided.

Things were even tougher with the Creeks. Their council was a cauldron of confusion. Men shouted at each other, some wanting peace, others calling for war. Tecumseh stepped forward, not waiting for silence, but drowning out the noise.

"You talk while the whites take your land! You argue while they clear your forests! You argue while they turn your children into beggars! You sit here, like men who are already dead, wondering whether you should fight. I tell you: If you don't fight, you are already defeated."

A riot. Some warriors jumped to their feet, shouting that he was right. Others shouted back that he was a troublemaker. It was almost a brawl in the council. But in this heat, in this chaos, Tecumseh set sparks. Sparks that would return months later as flames—in the form of the "Red Sticks," the Creek warmongers.

The Choctaw were colder. Their chief listened, arms folded, his gaze hard. Tecumseh talked, stamped, shouted. "Behold Prophetstown! A village burned, but not defeated! Behold our brothers, fallen, but not broken! If you don't fight, you'll be next. Your fields will burn, your children will starve, your wives will serve!"

The chief replied dryly: "Fine words. But words don't feed children. We need corn, not dreams."

Tecumseh glared at him. "Corn grows on land. If you lose the land, you can eat what the whites give you. And if they don't give you anything? Then you'll starve. Is that your plan?"

Silence. Only the crackling of the fire could be heard. Some Choctaw warriors looked at their chief as if to say: *He is not wrong*. But the council remained cautious. The Choctaw had learned that caution sometimes made people live longer.

So Tecumseh moved on, village by village, council by council. Everywhere the same mixture: jubilation, anger, rejection. Sometimes they wanted to kill him, sometimes they wanted to make him chief. Sometimes they spat in his face, sometimes they kissed his hand.

One night, somewhere deep in the South, he sat by the fire, alone. His horse snorted, the stars glowed. He spoke softly to himself, as if talking to the Wabash, so far away. "They're blind," he murmured. "They don't see that the house is already burning. But I'll wake them. I'll show them the fire."

His hands gripped the grass, tightly, as if he could grab the entire continent.

And that was precisely his goal: the continent itself. Not one village, not one tribe. But everyone. A single voice, a single blow.

Harrison could burn a town. But how could he burn an entire nation stretching from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico?

That was the dream Tecumseh spoke in the South—loud, wild, outrageous. And every time he left, somewhere a man or woman remained, their heart burning.

A heart that would later hold a knife.

Sometimes politics is nothing more than an old man saying "no." Tecumseh experienced it again and again in the South. Chiefs with bellies who had seen more corn than battles, with hands that had signed more treaties than held spears. They listened to him, nodded politely—and declined.

"We've seen enough war," said one of the Cherokee, sitting on a chair he had purchased from a white trader. "War only brings hunger."

Tecumseh glared at him. "And treaties bring what? Bread? Whiskey? Peace? They only bring more white people. Every treaty is a new tombstone."

The man shrugged. "Gravestones are better than burned villages."

Tecumseh exhaled as if someone had punched him in the stomach. But he didn't let it end there. He knew there was little to be gained from the old. The future lay with the young.

After every council meeting, he waited until the chiefs had left. Then he went to the warriors standing outside, to the young men who still bore scars from their first hunting accident, who still believed that blood meant something.

He spoke to them differently. Not like an orator, but like a brother. "Your chiefs are afraid," he said. "They fear what they might lose. But you—you have nothing to lose yet. You can still gain."

He told them of Prophetstown, of Tippecanoe, of the smoke that had hung over the Wabash. "Your blood is the same as our blood. If we fall, you fall too. If we fight, you fight too—or you will become slaves on your own land."

The boys listened. Some with open mouths, some with eyes that sparkled like knives. They whispered afterward, when he was gone. "This man—he speaks like fire. He speaks like someone who sees what we all feel, but no one dares to say."

Some followed him. Not officially, not in the name of their tribes, but secretly. They sneaked out of the fields, left their villages, and rode after him. When Tecumseh moved on, they were suddenly there—a young Creek with a rusty rifle, a Cherokee with a knife, a Choctaw with a drum. They said little, but they went along.

Thus, a movement grew, not made up of councils, not of protocols, but of hearts. Young men who had no desire to plow while white men stole their land.

But resistance remained fierce. Among the Creek, a chief spat at Tecumseh's feet. "You are a rebel. A troublemaker. If you come to our village again, you'll end up in the river."

Tecumseh didn't wipe away the saliva. He stared at the man for a long, icy moment. Then he said quietly, "If I end up in the river, I swear to you: the water will burn."

The men around him flinched. Because they knew he meant it.

Some Choctaws laughed as he spoke. "You want to unite all the tribes?" they sneered. "That's like herding cats."

Tecumseh growled back, "Then I'll be the dog that drives them."

The laughter died down, and a few warriors stood more serious than before.

His path wasn't a triumphant one. It was a chain of humiliations, threats, and doubts—punctuated by moments in which he won hearts. But Tecumseh was tough. Every setback only made him stronger.

At night, as he lay in the grass, he heard the snoring of the boys who had followed him. He sometimes smiled then, a hard, tired smile. "That's enough," he murmured. "I don't need old men. I need these. The future has no gray hair."

So he slowly, almost secretly, formed something new: not a council, not an alliance on paper – but a movement, young, wild, burning.

The old might laugh at him, but the young would follow him. And Tecumseh knew: A war is not decided in the council chambers, but in the fields, in the smoke, in blood. And there the young will always outnumber the old.

The seeds had been sown. Prophetstown had burned, but the new Prophetstown wasn't a place. It was a generation.

And while Harrison continued to polish his victory in the North, an army grew in the South that had no name—only a face: Tecumseh's.

Words are weapons—and weapons make enemies. The longer Tecumseh spoke in the South, the clearer it became: Some didn't just want to contradict him. Some wanted to silence him. Forever.

It started with the Creek. He had spoken there in council, incited them, and spat their cowardice in the faces of the elders. Some young warriors cheered, but the elders were seething. One of them, a chief, stood up after the meeting, approached him, and hissed: "Speak like that again—and you will fertilize the soil with your blood."

Tecumseh didn't retreat. "If my blood falls, it will be seed," he growled. "And the forest will be filled with warriors screaming my name."

They stared at each other like two wolves sparring. But Tecumseh left the hall alive. For now.

Another time, with the Choctaw, it was closer. He had given another of those speeches, invoking Prophetstown, the blood, the smoke, the dream. Some Choctaw warriors nodded, but a chief jumped up and roared, "Liar! You want to lead us to ruin!" He ripped the knife from its sheath and charged at Tecumseh.

For a moment, it seemed over. But Tecumseh was faster, stepped aside, grabbed the arm, and twisted it so hard that the knife clattered to the ground. Then he held the man tight, pressed his face into the firelight, and said coldly: "If you want to kill me, do it right. But if I live—then your grandchildren will whisper my name when they have to work in the dirt because you were a coward."

The man remained silent. Tecumseh let go of him. The knife remained. The council ended in chaos. But once again, Tecumseh was not dead.

The Cherokee were the most dangerous. There, he had gathered a circle of young men around him who were as passionate as he was. But the elders had had enough. They sent warriors out at night to finish him off.

Tecumseh wasn't sleeping soundly. He heard the rustling, the quiet cracking. He instinctively reached for the knife he had stuck in the dust beside him. Three men suddenly stood over him, faces painted black, eyes full of murder.

The first jumped. Tecumseh rolled to the side, stabbing blindly, feeling his knife find flesh. A scream, blood, a body crumpled. The second grabbed him from behind, but Tecumseh rammed his head into his face, heard bones break. The third raised a club—and suddenly there were hands stopping him. Young men who had been following Tecumseh threw themselves at him, tearing him down.

In the end, two attackers lay dead, one groaning with a shattered jaw, the boys gasping, blood dripping from their hands. Tecumseh stood there, his knife red, his face cold. "That's your answer?" he screamed into the night. "You send dogs instead of talking to me?"

The next morning, he spoke before the council, holding up the bloody hilt of his knife. "Thus ends your intrigues. If you wish to kill me, do it in the light, in front of everyone. But as long as I breathe, I will speak the truth. Your contracts are your death. And if you kill me—then my blood will haunt your children."

The older ones remained silent. Some out of shame, some out of fear. But the young ones cheered, shouting his name.

The more they wanted to kill him, the stronger his image became. From the north came news of Prophetstown, from the south came news that he himself had survived death. This made him greater, more untouchable. Some even said he was protected by spirits.

But Tecumseh knew it wasn't magic. It was just willpower. Willpower that was stronger than fear.

His journey was a dance on knives. Every day he risked that one of his speeches would be his last. But each time he survived, his reputation grew. A man who spoke against chiefs, against knives, against intrigues—and still rode his horse.

He rode on, unbroken. Behind him, the voices bearing his name grew louder. Ahead lay even more resistance. But in his gut, there was a burning sensation. Not just hatred, not just anger—but certainty.

They could hate him. They could want to kill him. But they couldn't ignore him.

And that was exactly his weapon.

The South was no place for romantics. It was hot, full of mosquitoes, full of swamps, full of trees that stood close together like soldiers refusing to budge. Every ride was a battle—against hunger, against sweat, against the fatigue that gnawed at their bones.

Tecumseh knew deprivation, but now it was wearing on him. Some days there were only a few handfuls of corn, sometimes nothing at all. He rode on an empty stomach, talked with a hoarse voice, slept on bare ground. But he didn't stop. He couldn't. Prophetstown was burned, and if he stopped, so would his dream.

The boys who followed him were no better off. Sometimes there were a dozen of them, sometimes twice as many, depending on where he was speaking. They came from different tribes, they barely knew each other, they spoke different dialects. But they all had the same look: tough, hungry, determined.

One was a Creek, barely over sixteen, who had left his village after his father traded land for whiskey. "I don't want to drink," he said, "I want to fight." He stumbled often, his musket was rusty, but he stayed.

Another was a Cherokee, tall and silent, who always held a knife in his hand, even while sleeping. No one knew his name. Tecumseh called him "Shadow."

Then there was a Choctaw who laughed more than he spoke, a restless spirit who drummed everywhere—on logs, stones, his own thighs. He said, "When we fight, we need rhythm." Tecumseh rarely smiled, but the corner of his mouth twitched at the sentence.

These boys became a small army. No discipline, no uniforms, no ranks—but a procession that grew ever longer. Wherever Tecumseh spoke, some stayed behind, but more followed.

The journey was hard. Nights filled with rain, days filled with dust. Sometimes they had to slaughter horses for food. Sometimes they lay in wait for days because scouts reported that American patrols were nearby. Once, they

crossed a river where the current swept away two men. Their bodies were found days later, bloated and hanging from the branches of a tree.

Despite everything, Tecumseh never stopped talking. Even when he was hungry, even when he was sick, even when he was tired. His voice was rough, but when he spoke, it sparkled like iron.

"Look at us," he cried one evening by the fire, "we come from different tribes. We don't eat the same, we don't talk the same, we don't pray the same. But we fight the same. If we can do this, then everyone can. One people. One country. One war."

The boys pounded the ground with spears, screamed, and stomped. Some even cried because they sensed he was right.

But the price was high. Many couldn't endure the hardship. Some sneaked away at night, back to their villages. Others collapsed, sick, or starved to death. They were buried in the forest, nameless, beneath stones that no one ever visited again.

Tecumseh accepted this. Not coldly, but firmly. He knew that not everyone could stay. "Those who stay," he said, "are the ones who count."

So, slowly, over weeks and months, a core formed. A group that wasn't large, but tough. Men who were prepared to march, to starve, to fight, to die.

And everywhere he appeared, he left traces. Some villages rejected him, chased him away. But even there, faces remained, those who thought, those who whispered, those who later perhaps picked up knives.

It was as if he were pulling an invisible thread through the South. Not a web of treaties, but a web of hearts. Thin, fragile—but real.

The old people called him a troublemaker, a madman. But the young people called him something else: *Brother*.

And every time they said the word, the dream grew a little further.

Sometimes Tecumseh came to a village and was welcomed like a king. Women placed pots of corn porridge before him, men offered him tobacco, children ran screaming after his horse as if the wind itself had brought him. He gave speeches, his voice like a storm, and they hung on his every word. He spoke of Prophetstown, of Tippecanoe, of blood and betrayal, and the crowd went wild.

Some called him a messiah, one the spirits had sent to lead them out of the dust.

And then, a few days later, things looked completely different again. He and his small group wandered through swamps, half-starved, without fire, without supplies. Mosquitoes devoured them, the rain made their clothes heavy as lead, and the ground absorbed every step as if it wanted to swallow them whole. They weren't an army, they were a handful of beggars with knives.

That was the journey: a series of highs and lows. Today, jubilation, tomorrow, misery. Today, a village swearing to spread his word, tomorrow, a chief threatening to tie him to a tree and hand him over to the Americans.

And yet, no matter how deep the valleys, his name grew. The longer he traveled, the more often he heard it before he spoke himself. Men whispered, "Tecumseh is coming." Women said, "He's like fire." Children played games in which one was Tecumseh and the others were Americans.

He wasn't there yet, and yet he was already everywhere.

His reputation preceded him like a storm. Sometimes in the form of stories—that he could catch bullets with his bare hands, that he was protected by spirits, that he had slain ten men himself in Tippecanoe. Sometimes in the form of threats—"If you're not careful, Tecumseh will come and burn you down."

The truth was simpler and harsher: He was just a man. Tired, hungry, covered in scars. But hardly anyone saw that. People only saw the legend, and the legend consumed the reality.

Sometimes he used this intentionally. When he entered a village, he didn't argue with the rumors, but let them sink in. "You've heard what I've done," he said, "and this is just the beginning." Then he let the silence sink in, as if he were truly more than flesh and blood.

His small group continued to follow him, despite everything. They were dirty, emaciated, but they didn't leave. Some truly saw him as a brother, others as hope, others simply as a last chance.

One night, deep in the South, he almost collapsed. He had barely eaten for days, his legs were unsteady, and his voice was hoarse. The boys saw him and whispered, wondering if the great Tecumseh was just a man.

He heard it, looked at them, knelt down, placed his hand in the dirt, and spoke softly: "Yes, I am human. I bleed like you. I hunger like you. But I won't give up. And if you stay, you won't give up either."

This was more powerful than any exaggeration. They no longer saw him as a demigod, but as someone who suffered with them. This bound them more closely than any myth.

Some villages gave him horses, corn, and weapons. Others chased him away. But no matter where he went, he left his mark. Either anger or hope, rarely indifference. And that was precisely his strength.

Because indifference is the death of a leader. Anger and hope – these are the two flames a war needs.

So his reputation grew like a storm. Sometimes sun, sometimes rain, sometimes cheering, sometimes hunger – but always bigger, always louder.

And far away in the north, Harrison heard the rumors. Reports from spies, letters from traders, warnings from officers. "Tecumseh is rallying the South," they said. Harrison growled, gritted his teeth, and muttered, "Then let him come."

But Harrison had no idea that Tecumseh wasn't coming. He grew.

Weeks had turned into months, and the journey had left Tecumseh with more dust and scars than he could count. His horse was emaciated, his coat full of holes, his face a map of fatigue. But in his eyes, the same fire that Prophetstown hadn't been able to extinguish still burned.

The South hadn't defeated him. It had scarred him, yes – but it had also given him what he needed: votes. Not all of them, not always loud, not always open. But votes.

The Cherokee had hesitated, the Choctaw had laughed at him, the Creek had nearly killed him. And yet, everywhere he had left his mark. Young men who secretly swore loyalty to him. Women who told their sons about him. Old men who, despite everything, began to murmur, "Perhaps he's right."

He didn't return with an army, but with something more invisible. A web. A web of whispers, of promises, of sparks lying in the dust, waiting for someone to blow on them.

His small band had shrunk and grown at the same time. Some hadn't survived the march, others had run away. But new faces kept coming. In the end, he had a handful of men who didn't look tall, didn't look impressive, but were tough. Men who had endured everything—hunger, attempted murder, rain, ridicule—and who still rode by his side.

"You are my blood," he said one evening as they sat by the fire, their bones thin, their eyes hollow, but the knife still in their hands. "If I fall, you keep fighting. If you fall, I keep fighting. We are Prophetstown, we are the Covenant."

They nodded, not like disciples, but like brothers.

The journey back north was not a triumphal procession. It was quiet, full of hardship. But in every village they passed through, they heard: "Tecumseh was here." Sometimes mockingly, sometimes reverently. But always in such a way that they knew: His name lived on.

And names are stronger than armies.

When he saw the Ohio again, the river of his childhood, he knew he hadn't returned empty-handed. Prophetstown was ash, yes. But now Prophetstown was everywhere.

In the South, they talked about him. In the North, they feared him. And Harrison, who called himself "Victor of Tippecanoe," had no idea that he hadn't ended hell, but unleashed it.

Tecumseh stepped onto the bank and saw the river glittering in the sun like liquid metal. He remembered his father, his childhood in the smoke, blood in the forest. And he murmured, "It's not over yet. Not as long as I breathe."

Then he swung himself onto his horse and turned north, back to the tribes, back to the men who were waiting for him.

He was no longer just a chief. No longer just the brother of a prophet. He was a storm that grew larger the further he moved.

And the storm wasn't over yet. It had only just begun.

An alliance of hunger and hatred

The North welcomed Tecumseh not with jubilation, but with emptiness. Prophetstown was dust, the villages along the Wabash suffered, fields burned, supplies plundered. Men looked at him with eyes that knew more hunger than hope. Women dragged themselves through mud with children, bones sharp beneath their skin.

They weren't a people waiting for war. They were a people fighting for survival. And yet, that was precisely their strength. Hunger eats away at pride, but hunger also makes you angry.

Tecumseh took advantage of it. He went through the villages, speaking to the people not with fire, but with iron in his voice. "Look at you," he said. "Your land burned, your corn stolen, your children starving. And why? Because you wait. Because you think treaties protect you. But treaties protect no one. They're knives stabbing you in the back while you sleep."

The people listened. Not all of them, not always with cheers, but they listened. They were empty enough that every word fit into them.

Some warriors stood up, their faces drawn, their hands shaking. "We have nothing left," they said. "Then we might as well fight."

Thus, the alliance grew not from strength, but from adversity. Tribes that had nothing left at least gave their men. "If we die," murmured an old Delaware, "then not like dogs. Then like warriors."

The boys Tecumseh had brought with him from the south were his core. They told what they had seen: how he had defied chiefs, how he had survived assassination attempts, how he had continued on despite hunger. This made him bigger, tougher. They called him not just chief, but "brother," and this word spread faster than any rumor.

The tribes that were devastated found their common language in hatred. The Kickapoo, the Potawatomi, the Shawnee, even scattered groups of the Miami. They hated the Americans not only for the land they took, but for the hunger they left behind.

Hate is a poor builder, but a damn good warrior.

Tecumseh knew this. He saw that he couldn't sell a dream of prosperity—too much had been destroyed. So he sold something else: revenge. "They have

taken your corn," he said, "take their blood. They have burned your lodges—burn their cities."

And they listened.

The alliance grew not like an organized army, but like a pack of wolves gathering in the forest. Lean, scratched, hungry—but deadly when they hunt together.

Harrison and the Americans saw the movement, but they didn't understand it. For them, hunger was weakness. They believed the tribes would disintegrate because they had nothing left. They didn't understand that it was precisely this "nothing" that bound them together.

Once, Tecumseh spoke to a group of men so emaciated they could barely hold their spears. He pointed at them and yelled, "You are stronger than they! You know why? Because you have nothing left for them to take! You are free! And free men are the most dangerous men there are!"

The men screamed back, their voices shaky but wild.

So he formed the alliance—not out of hope, not out of wealth, but out of hunger and hatred. Two things that alone make us weak, but together are explosive.

The Americans had believed Prophetstown was the death of the dream. But Tecumseh was building something more dangerous than any city: an army of desperate people.

And desperate people are the worst enemies you can have.

It started small. A raid here, a dead trader there. A few warriors sneaking into a settler village at night, setting fire to barns, driving away livestock. The whites woke up, flames consuming their supplies, screams echoing through the forest. By morning, men lay with slashed throats, women howling over the bodies.

For the Americans, it was terror. For the tribes, it was justice.

Tecumseh didn't observe every one of these acts. He didn't have to. He had unleashed the hatred, and the hatred found its way on its own. It was as if he had only thrown a candle into the hay—the rest burned on its own.

But he controlled it. He spoke again and again before revenge became blind. "Don't kill for the sake of killing," he warned. "Kill to make a statement. Kill so they know we haven't disappeared."

The warriors nodded, but the line was thin. Hunger turns people into wild dogs, and wild dogs kill more than they eat.

Some raids were brutal. Entire families disappeared, and no one could later say whether they fled or were killed. All that was found was rubble, blood, and ash.

The Americans called it barbarism. The tribes called it a response.

The Kickapoo were the first to strike in the pack. They burned down a new settlement that had just been built. Thirty houses, barely built, were all in flames. The settlers fled, some burned, some shot, some drowned in the river. The Kickapoo departed like shadows. They left behind black smoke that could be seen miles away.

"This is Prophetstown," they said, laughing. "Prophetstown is burning back."

The Potawatomi followed. They lurked along trade routes, attacked wagon trains, slaughtered the men, and took the supplies. Once, they left a trader alive—with his ears cut off and the message: "Tell Harrison we're still here."

Tecumseh himself didn't carry out any massacres. He knew he had to think bigger. But he blessed the revenge raids when they were targeted. He needed blood to make people believe the alliance was more than just talk.

And blood flowed.

Soon, rumors spread through the American towns: "The savages are gathering." "Tecumseh is leading them." "No one is safe." Women locked doors, men slept with muskets beside their beds. Traders thought twice before setting out.

That's exactly what Tecumseh wanted. Fear was a weapon, and he sharpened it with every blow.

But the alliance was fragile. It wasn't a solid army, but a patchwork. Sometimes the tribes argued over who would get the spoils. Sometimes they almost fought each other. Tecumseh had to intervene, using words like lashes. "You want to tear each other apart? While the whites eat you piece by piece? Fools! Save your hatred for the enemy!"

He was not a general, he was a tamer of wolves.

The Americans began to strike back. Small groups of soldiers burned villages they suspected. Often they targeted the wrong people: women and children, the elderly, the sick. It only made the hatred worse. Every dead man was a new recruit for Tecumseh.

Once he came to a Shawnee village that had been raided by soldiers. Huts smashed, corn burned, children's bodies in the dust. The survivors sat silently, their eyes empty. Tecumseh knelt down, grabbed a handful of ashes, and let them trickle through his fingers. Then he said, "This is what a treaty looks like. This is what peace looks like."

The men stood up and took spears. They had nothing left—so they gave themselves up.

Thus, the alliance continued to grow, not despite the suffering, but through it. Every blow from the Americans forged it closer. Hunger turned to hatred, hatred to courage, courage to blood.

It wasn't a regulated war. It was a flickering, a sea of flames, here and there. But slowly, very slowly, it became something larger. A network that spanned the entire Northwest.

And at the center of this network stood Tecumseh. Not as a ruler, but as its heart.

The Americans had thought the matter was settled. Prophetstown burned, Tippecanoe captured—finished. But now they received letters that smelled of gunpowder. Merchants reported raids, settlers ran screaming into the garrisons, soldiers sent messages with bloody fingers: *They're attacking everywhere. We don't know where next.*

Harrison read the reports, his face turning gray as ash. "Damn," he muttered, "we burned the nest—but the wolves are now running free."

He raged. He banged his fists on tables, sent orders, and demanded reinforcements. But reinforcements came slowly, from the East, from men who thought the West was nothing but forest and fog. They didn't understand that a war was being born there.

While Harrison roared, Tecumseh continued to build. He saw that raids weren't enough. They kept the fear alive, yes, but they wouldn't drive the Americans

away. "We need more," he told the assembled crowd. "We need war, not just revenge."

Some grumbled. "We're too weak." Others nodded, their eyes glowing.

Tecumseh stepped into the firelight, his voice like a knife: "They take us one by one, tribe by tribe. But together—together we are stronger than they will ever be. They think we are wolves without a pack. Then let us be a pack. A large one. One to tear them apart."

He drew plans in the dust. Not great battles, not like the whites fought them. He knew that cannons, lines, and drums were superior to them. But he understood the forest, the water, the fog. "We strike them where they are blind. We burn where they sleep. We disappear before they breathe."

It was guerrilla before the word existed.

And the warriors listened. They saw not a man who just talked, but one who was prophetic without being a prophet. Tenskwatawa had babbled about spirits—Tecumseh spoke of blood and soil. That was something men understood.

Harrison soon received the first reports of such attacks. Soldiers marched out to burn a village – and found only traps. Arrows from the forest, bullets from the fog, spears from the river. Men screamed, ran, and fell. Those who returned said only two words: "He was there."

Even if Tecumseh hadn't been there.

That was his new weapon: presence through absence. He didn't have to strike himself. It was enough if every blow was associated with his name. Soon he was everywhere.

In Vincennes, Harrison couldn't sleep at night. He drank more, smoked more, and stared at maps that meant nothing to him. The lines and rivers were dead, but in the woods lived an enemy he couldn't grasp.

"We need order," he shouted to his officers. "We need a big battle, or he'll eat us to pieces with a hundred little cuts."

But Tecumseh wanted exactly that: a hundred cuts. He knew the Americans needed order, lines, banners, drums. Without that, they were nervous, helpless, like children without lanterns.

The tribes that had once quarreled found a common language in the chaos. Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Shawnee, Delaware—they still quarreled, but when they went into the forest, they understood each other. Hatred was their common grammar.

A Creek warrior once said, "I hate the Shawnee, but I hate the Americans more." Tecumseh laughed harshly. "That's enough."

He knew he couldn't force brotherhood. But he could intensify hatred. And hatred was enough.

Thus, the alliance of hunger slowly became an alliance of strategy. No army, no general staff—but a spirit. Tecumseh's spirit.

And the spirit grew while Harrison almost drowned in his own whiskey at Vincennes.

They really started to bite. Not just individual teeth, but the whole dentition. First, it was torches in the night, then elaborate traps along the trade routes, then attacks on convoys that seemed so coordinated, as if they had been read from a map. And behind every blow now stood a name: Tecumseh. Even when he wasn't there, his breath carried the route.

The raids became larger. No longer just three or four men sneaking into houses, but hordes that rolled over small settlements like a bad tide. They came out of the woods with a plan, not just anger. Arrows that accurately sliced sails; laughter that echoed through burning roofs; men who leaped from the bushes and never disappeared. They took supplies, horses, everything a settler needed to survive—and left smoke as their calling card.

Harrison saw this, and his eyes narrowed. No more wild crying, no more idiotic anger; only the cold machine that had to follow up. He was used to solving problems with regiments: more soldiers, more colors, more lead. But these attacks weren't a matchstick problem. You couldn't just send more men; the men ran into traps, into the fog, into the flanks. It was like digging up worms: the deeper you dug, the more crawled out.

He ordered trains, patrols, ambushes. He demanded governors, sent urgent dispatches to Washington, and complained about the lack of supply lines. "We must hit them before they hit us," he yelled. But how do you hit something that lives in the forest, that works in small, deadly hands, that knows the ways like a

finger? Harrison didn't know, and that made him dangerous. Because when a man doesn't know how to solve a problem, he resorts to force.

Tecumseh, on the other hand, remained on the move. He wasn't a traditional general; he was a networker of violence. He sent signals, smiled into the faces of the chiefs, passed on the right idea, a tactic here, an ambush there. He didn't require victory parades—he wanted results: nights without mules, convoys that turned back, posts that remained deserted like ghosts.

The coordination wasn't perfect, but it was deadly. Some chiefs brought their best marksmen; others helped with local traps. Someone guarding the river crossing sent a small group to strike at the exact spot where the wagons slowed down. A young man observed the pattern of a delivery wagon; he knew when the men were tired and careless, and his group waited patiently. Precision, not size—that was their motto.

The whites responded with arson, fortification, and, worse, arbitrary acts of retaliation. They burned villages where they had previously witnessed trade. They hanged men they considered spies. Every act of brutality was a recruiting opportunity for the other side. People who previously wanted nothing to do with war now joined the ranks because someone had taken their wife, their child, their fields. Revenge has a silly geometry: it calls back, bigger, harder, more geometric.

Politically, things were heated. In Washington, letters poured in like a bad tide. Congressmen sitting in their shirtsleeves talking about investments received messages filled with brutality and fear. "The western border is burning," one wrote. "Harrison needs more troops, more money, more power," another wrote. And the debate, as so often happens, didn't become philosophical: it became practical. Funds were released, officers threatened, new generals appointed. It was like trying to catch fog with concrete.

The issue became more radical in people's minds. Small town meetings in the settlements transformed into lynch mobs, quick to shout and even quicker to act. Men who had never lifted a rifle now stood with eyes begging for blood. Women approached cartridge pouches for their husbands, and children learned to hate the sound of boots. The border became a place where morality was equated backward: those who didn't hit were weak; those who hit were saviors.

Tecumseh took advantage of this. He conducted targeted patrols that created the impression that the entire region was marching behind his voice. When he

spoke to a young chief, he didn't say, "We will destroy them." He said, "We will strike so hard that they will never sleep again." That was a different language. It was a language that cultivated fear without requiring a single major battle.

Then came the tactical escalations: traps where rifles were loaded and men waited in the grass; misinformation that led convoys astray; burning barns that served as a diversion while a plot struck elsewhere. One quickly learns to make do with little when the enemy has plenty. And the tribes were learning everywhere. Lumberjacks who remained hidden, traders who remained silent, hunters who suddenly functioned as scouts. The entire civil society on the border became the front line.

Harrison responded as was his way: he doubled down. More patrols, more punishments, more forts. He stockpiled men, looking like a frantic general. But that was exactly what Tecumseh wanted: he drew American power into view, to the places where it would have to pay. The army built camps, filled roads, and every camp was a target, every highway a river of supplies that could be cut off.

The war took on a face: not only Tecumseh, but also the young men who carried his banner. They emerged from the woods, swift as martens, deadly as winter. They wrote messages by stealing supplies and leaving corpses behind. Messages written in blood. They created a climate in which Harrison could no longer ask, "What is to be done?" but had to act, and acting meant making mistakes.

Mistakes came. They hunted on suspicion, burned houses, and hanged men without evidence. They imprisoned settlers who were presumed to be sympathetic. They intimidated traders, and trade networks collapsed. This triggered panic in the markets, and panic is a bad friend. The space for diplomacy disappeared like sugar in coffee: quickly, stickily, and without a solution.

And then, as always happens in such stories, there came a moment when the violence took on a physics of its own. A heavily laden American convoy was attacked in a narrow ravine. The attackers were precise; they set traps, loosened tire stones, and cut off horses' heads. The convoy fell apart, men running, falling, whimpering. The news of this flew to Vincennes like tinder: *They can even strike where we think we are safe.* Harrison was furious; he sent out a larger expedition—and the expedition ran straight into a lie spun by one of his own men. A trap, beyond good and evil, with blades in the undergrowth.

Washington cried out for answers. Political leaders debated whether to proceed with force or reason. In the salons of the East, essays were written about "the barbarians" and "the right of civilization." But it didn't change the mess outside. The West didn't see what they were writing. The West saw only men barricading their fields, waiting for the next blow.

And the war took on forms that could no longer be ironed out. Tecumseh was no longer a phantom. He was a planner, a myth, a metaphor, and at the same time a concrete threat. People who had previously had nothing to do with each other gathered under his call: Creek, Potawatomi, Shawnee, Kickapoo—names that now whispered. They were a patchwork, yes—but a patchwork with fire.

By the end of the block, everything became clearer: what had begun as uncoordinated revenge had transformed into a strategic problem that American politics could no longer ignore. Harrison, the victor of Tippecanoe, was no longer sitting in a quiet room; he was chasing a ghost through forests and swamps. And a ghost, if it's hungry enough, won't just bite—it will eat.

The border was now a hotbed of fire. And whoever starts a fire can rarely say where the sparks will fly. The lists grew daily; men died every day who shouldn't have appeared in any statistics. And even before the ashes had completely blown away, everyone knew in their gut: this is no longer a local event. This is war.

Things were beginning to slip out of control. Harrison could observe the smoke, collect reports, write orders—but he couldn't control every bush, every scout, every boy who was now playing with a knife as if it were a prayer. Violence had created its own climate; and you can't change a climate with decrees.

In Vincennes, men were now being hired, men who were being trained to do things they previously hadn't wanted to do. They learned to read traps, secure routes, and protect supply convoys. But the men Harrison sent into the woods were farmers, lads, men with more guts than sense. They tired quickly. They became angry quickly. And when anger and fatigue collide, brutality escalates.

The counter-strategy was brutal: settlements were fortified, paths fenced, sentries set up—but also executions, hangings, swift verdicts, and sometimes not even trials. Men suspected of dealing with "the enemy" were hanged because anger demanded that a head be hung above as a deterrent. The lesson was simple: if you deprive others of their dignity, you turn them into an object. And objects have no rights.

This led to more recruits for Tecumseh. Every hanged name, every burned cabin, was an invitation. Women wept in communities, and from the weeping grew determination. Men who had previously plowed fields now picked up rifles. Children learned faster than the elderly how to duck, how to cover their tracks. The war worked in generations.

Tecumseh, however, was not just an arsonist—and that was his most dangerous talent. He understood that violence without direction is soon suicide. Therefore, he trained those who wanted to follow him. He taught ambushes, coordination, and how to acquire supplies without provoking too much hostility against neutral villages. He clarified this: Looting alone is certainly a way to create food—but it also destroys support. Anyone who loots the merchant who sells bread in the village alienates the people who might become their allies tomorrow.

Thus, a community with rules formed in the forests—rude, yes, but with rules: no killing of women without reason; taking supplies, but not burning down houses that only house refugees; treating spies harshly, but not randomly killing innocents. A code amidst the chaos. Some adhered to it, some didn't. But the code was an instrument: it created morality—or at least internal discipline—in a world that otherwise only performed morality.

The American side didn't understand this. For Harrison, discipline was simple: more soldiers, more repression. He set wildfires, pressured militia leaders, and extorted loyalty with the simple logic: "Do as I say or get lost." The results were mixed. Sometimes it worked. They protected caravans, cleared camps, and arrested suspected men. But often they walked into a trap because the Indians knew the geography—and success quickly turned into humiliation.

Politics in Washington began to react. Letters turned into requests for funds; requests for funds turned into troop increases; troop increases turned into official campaigns. Senators spoke of "Indian barbarism," governors of "security needs." But politics toils slowly, while the forest ticked its clock in nights and traps. Though seemingly harmless, debates were a bid for time, and this time was exactly what Tecumseh needed to expand networks, break trust within the white trade routes, and gain supporters.

Then, as predicted beforehand, a turning point came: a conspiratorial attack on a large supply convoy. It had been observed for weeks, its route was known, its weaknesses were known. On a foggy morning, the convoy was ambushed in a narrow valley. Wagons were blocked, horses panicked, men separated. No open battle, only precision: two treacherously dug pit traps, strings that

frightened teams of animals, a hail of arrows from the undergrowth. It wasn't a carnage like at Tippecanoe, but a surgical operation on human logistics. Supplies were taken, the wounded were abandoned, and the news spread like a spark through the settlements: *Nothing is safe anymore.*

Harrison raged. He gathered men, he ordered revenge expeditions. These expeditions were what men of rage did best: a short, brutal strike on a village suspected of sympathizing with the attackers. Houses ablaze, supplies burned, arbitrary death sentences. This brutality had a function: to break morale. In truth, it did the opposite. The more houses burned, the more men withdrew from the field and sought meaning in Tecumseh's words in the woods.

And Tecumseh? He spoke, but he also did what generals do: he distributed leadership, appointed commanders, deployed scouts, and infiltrated merchant caravans to learn where ammunition was coming from and where the columns were stopping. He networked with traders and tribal chiefs, sometimes paying, sometimes promising. He acted and spoke at the same time. This dual role—preacher and strategist—made him dangerous.

Tensions within the alliance remained. Not everyone wanted depth, not everyone wanted risk. Some preferred small-scale raids; others demanded larger operations that seriously threatened American supplies. Tecumseh had to strike a balance: too many large attacks would force Washington to respond more forcefully; too small attacks would fail to maintain morale. The balance was a balancing act.

What made matters worse was a third force: the British. They weren't on stage like princes and field marshals, but they were voices in the background that couldn't be ignored. Traders who dealt with the British whispered messages, delivered munitions, or stoked hopes with promises. No open alliance yet, but indications that somewhere to the north, across the lake, there were interests that wanted to hinder American progress. For Harrison, this was poison: the possibility that an external enemy was helping to fuel his internal fire.

Slowly, without trumpets, the terrain changed. Not only the paths, but also the hearts of the people. Men who had previously not considered fighting made decisions: either field or forest, family or rifle. When your bread is gone and the answer is on the slope, bakers quickly become soldiers. War creates roles, and roles change identity.

At the center of this transformation stood Tecumseh. Not as a messiah, not as a fury, but as a man with an idea that made blood and hunger its infrastructure.

He formed a fighting force that was smarter than the sum of its parts: not all were well-armed, not all disciplined; but they knew the land, they knew the paths, and they now had a purpose.

And so the conflict dragged on through the world. Harrison chased the ghost, Washington agreed to the man-powered call for troops, traders fell silent in fear, women sealed doors. But in the woods, spears sharpened. In the darkness, young men learned how to assemble a camp, how to plan an ambush, how to disappear again. They also learned something else: that what they were doing wasn't just revenge—it was a response. A response that was deadly and cold, and that wouldn't stop.

The war spread like oil over water—slowly and insidiously. And the question that now hung in Vincennes, in Washington, and on the Wabash River alike: Who would be the first to make a mistake that could never be reversed? Who would pull the trigger that would explode what was already ablaze?

The frontier now had a heartbeat that never stopped. It pounded in kettles, in hoses, in the hands of the boys who lay awake at night, forgetting how to breathe. Harrison sent orders, wrote letters, and railed in cards; Tecumseh planted anvils in souls and pounded them with sentences until sparks flew. Every spark called new disciples.

Escalation became part of everyday life. People woke up, looked at what had been burned, and reorganized their lives. Some left. Many stayed—because they had nowhere to go. Those who stayed became witnesses, judges, and, over time, avengers. That's the simple, ugly way of things: If you don't give people food, you teach them how to fight; and if you beat them, you teach them how to murder.

Tecumseh reworked logic like a blacksmith reworks a knife. He made rules, however filthy, and turned chaos into discipline. Every raid now had meaning; every targeted blow carried a message. Not just "revenge," but calculated. Supplies, ammunition, horses—everything the whites needed, everything a campaign required. And where plunder couldn't be done, roads were destroyed. A cut-off road is no small annoyance; it is a respite for the economic life of the settlements.

The Americans were slowly realizing that this wasn't a rebellion that could be ended with a single battle. Harrison noticed it in the way men returned: not just with wounds, but with stories. Settlements they had thought safe were suddenly exposed. Traders who knew the way no longer dared to venture. And

the time it took Washington to react was no ally. Politics and bureaucracy are slow; but the forest moves fast.

With the slow anger came cruelty. The military and militias began to enforce a theory: deterrence through punishment. So they burned villages, hanged men, and did things that were meant to represent order but in reality fanned the flames. The great words about law and civilization smell of smoke here. When you hang someone, you declare that you are more than they are; but at the same time, you sow seeds that ripen into the bitter fruit of revenge.

And Tecumseh used this skillfully: When men sought revenge, he showed them where they could get it efficiently. He wasn't a barbarian who only wanted blood; he was an organizer, a networker of violence. He appointed small commanders to speak for him when he couldn't. He didn't just ask for force, he taught how to deliver it. His men learned lines of communication, signals, rendezvous points—things that look like tactics, not chaos. A civilization of war arose on the edge of a disintegrating field.

The British, who existed invisibly in the margins of the front, played their own game. Traders arrived with crates and offered ammunition, often in exchange for blankets or promises. Not all British were behind it; some were by chance, some coldly calculated: a wounded opponent of the American project today meant improved trade tomorrow. Tecumseh took what he could get—refilling ammunition, trading cards, establishing connections. It wasn't a closed alliance, more like a fleeting trade in shadows. But every bullet that fell into Indian hands in this way was a verse in a still-unwritten poem of violence.

In the woods, a new kind of courage grew. Young men trained night after night. They learned how to leave a camp without leaving a trace; how to set a trap that would stop not just one man, but a carriage; how to set a signal that would bring lines of men together at the right times. Discipline, they say in the White Army, is something achieved through drill. But in the forest, they learned discipline from scarcity: not to waste time when you have it; not to take risks when ammunition is scarce; to stab precisely, not to tear blindly. This didn't make them soldiers of the European persuasion, but it did make them more efficient, tougher, more dangerous.

The Americans responded with what they had: more men, more established posts. Harrison ordered a network of patrols to secure routes and disrupt communications. But each post was a wound that Tecumseh and his commanders punctured in a different place. Border defense became a hydra-like problem: you hit one head, two popped up somewhere else. It's ridiculous,

but brutal: a regular army is large, ponderous, and dangerous in an open field; but it is stupid in the woods. A light, swift, hungry warrior movement doesn't die; it withers under cover, and that is its cunning.

A dispute erupted on the political stage, further fueling the war. In Washington, some men called for toughness, others advised diplomacy—it was the same old story: strikes now or negotiations later. Harrison demanded more men and saw himself confirmed in a conception that confused war with domination. But others said: "If we continue to act as if this is just a bandit business, we will lose the West." This was pure irony: the man who wanted to "liberate" the West was on the verge of losing it to violence.

The messages to the Wabash told of the disintegration of everyday morals. Women organized clandestine supply networks; old people sent messengers with cowards like whispers; children grew faster, learning the salt of fear with their teeth. The long line of civilization—schools, markets, churchyards—began to rust at the edges where the fires raged. Every attack, every burned hut, didn't stop the next morning; it lived in people's minds, like a hole into which the entire area could soon collapse.

Tecumseh understood that war was also a psychological struggle. He spread stories: of ghosts that confused white gunners; of night attacks that sounded like the sudden closing of a door; of a man who once appeared alone before a fort and called his name; stories that weren't necessarily true, but had the effect of robbing the enemy of sleep. Fear is a catalyst. Even a rumor that a large group is on the way can cripple supplies, weaken morale, and sow panic.

In a village that wasn't large—a few families, a small chapel, fields little more than patches—the story coalesced into one act. The militia arrived and found a trap. Three men died, some horses were taken, the village lay broken. A boy, not yet twenty, swore revenge. What the militia didn't see: That boy crossed the river the next morning, met a small party of Tecumseh's men, and two months later, he was involved in a raid that stripped a settler post of everything but the ground it stood on. So the web grows: a breath of hatred, a change of hands.

Harrison noticed the chain, but he underestimated the mechanics: in a battle, you kill a man; you breed enemies. In a household, you destroy dinner—you breed families that fight because they have no other choice. A starving generation is a reservoir. A reservoir of hatred fills until it overflows.

And so the capital strategy developed: Responses to hatred were blows, and blows brought even greater responses. A spiral that knew no beginning and no end, except the exhaustion of one side or the other. The Americans can supply resources and men, but they can't buy hearts. Tecumseh can't build cannons, but he can force men to fight—men who might otherwise have remained farmers. Both sides feed each other without shaking hands.

By the end of the day—and the days piled up like decks of cards on the floor—it became clear: the war was no longer an event, it was a state of affairs. No victory would be decided in a week; the news that would now arrive in Vincennes testified to a new era. And at the center of this era stood a man whose name set the fields ablaze, and an army made up of children, hungry men, stumbling chieftains, and exiled warriors. No one could say how many of them were alive; but their number was felt—in the fear, in the silence before dawn.

Tecumseh wasn't a monster, he was a symbol: whoever destroys the community will one day reap its wrath. Harrison was no devil, he was a man with a mission; but his mission was so blunt that he made his fists his only tool, until his fists were no longer of any use. And between these two smoky figures grew a landscape that knew only one thing: survival.

It was late in the year, and the wind carried smoke. The front, however blurred, was moving forward. Before the next winter came, decisions would be made, mistakes would be avenged, and perhaps somewhere a battle would take place that no one would ever forget. But no one knew that for sure at the time. All they knew was: you have to be ready. And readiness is sometimes worse than the deed itself; it turns people into fighters, and fighters into enemies for life.

Winter crept in, as it always does—silently, relentlessly, coldly. Snow covered scorched fields, made ruins even more silent, swallowed traces of blood that had still glowed in the summer. But the hunger remained. And the hatred continued to devour, even under the ice.

Tecumseh knew: Hunger is not an enemy that will kill you instantly. Hunger wears you down, makes men tremble, women speak more quietly, and children die faster. But it was precisely this hunger that kept the alliance alive. For what the whites didn't understand—or didn't want to understand—was that misery sometimes binds people more strongly than abundance.

The tribes, who had hardly anything, were now chained together by want. No one had supplies, no one had rich hunting grounds—and that was precisely

what made them equal. The Kickapoo, the Shawnee, the Delaware, the Potawatomi—all sat in the same snow, all chewed the same thin deer meat, all drank the same broth made from melted ice. Equality through want, that was the new law.

Tecumseh took advantage of this equality. He moved through the winter camps, speaking not in thunder, but in a hoarse, ragged voice, like a man just as cold as the others. "You have nothing," he said, "but they have everything. They're sitting in their houses now, warm, fat, full, and they're laughing. They're laughing at you, at us. Do you want to continue to starve? Or do you want to force winter down their throats?"

Men stopped trembling when he spoke. Women straightened up as if he had briefly warmed them. Not because he brought them food—he brought them a reason. Reasons are sometimes worth more than corn.

The Americans understood that this winter was dangerous. Harrison ordered increased patrols, had additional forts supplied, and sent messengers through snow and ice. But soldiers in winter are sluggish animals. They freeze, they sleep badly, they stumble into forests they don't know. Every march was torture, every step difficult, every guard an invitation to death.

Tecumseh's men took advantage of this. They didn't strike in large numbers, they struck like pinpricks. A fort surrounded by silence, a sentry post that disappeared, a convoy caught in a blizzard and never arrived. They didn't need great victories—they only needed the Americans to feel that the forest itself was against them.

Tensions within the alliance remained. Some tribes wanted to plunder more, others wanted to retreat and conserve their strength. But again and again, Tecumseh came, stood in the middle of the circle, his eyes red with fatigue, and said: "We are not here to survive. We are here to fight. If you survive only to lose more land, then you are already dead."

He spoke it so clearly that even the old people nodded.

The rumors continued to grow. In American settlements, people said Tecumseh could command the snow, change the wind, and stop bullets. That he was in a hundred camps at once. That he was a ghost, not a man. Harrison cursed this nonsense—but deep at night, sitting alone at the table, he wondered if some of it wasn't true.

Washington kept talking. Money, laws, debates. But the border didn't listen to Washington. It only listened to the cracking of trees when an arrow came, to the howling of dogs when smoke rose.

During those months, Tecumseh gathered not only men, but souls. Everyone who joined him knew he might never return. But they left because doing nothing was worse. A boy, barely sixteen, once said to him, "I'd rather die with a knife in my hand than with an empty stomach in the snow." Tecumseh placed his hand on his shoulder and said, "Then you are already more of a warrior than many will ever be."

Thus, he forged the alliance not only out of hunger and hatred, but out of a stark choice: death in stasis or death in battle. And that is the choice that makes armies unbreakable.

Harrison wrote to his superiors: *We must strike it before it grows. Every day we wait makes it grow.* But he also knew that a major battle was difficult to force. Tecumseh was too wise to march into the open field. He was fog, fire, river—everywhere and nowhere.

And so the winter ended not with a victory, not with a battle, but with a condition: a fragile alliance, fed by hunger, steeled by hatred, led by a man they no longer saw as a warrior, but as a storm.

As the snow melted and the rivers began to flow again, Tecumseh stood on the bank, watched the water run, and murmured, "This is our year. This time we'll strike back."

White settlers, dirty axes

They came not as generals, not as armies. They came as families with wagon wheels, as men with calloused hands, as women with brats on their hips, as children who had already learned to scream in the dust. No uniforms, no drums—just axes, rifles, Bibles, and a hunger greater than any forest.

The white settlers.

They called it "civilization." But in truth, it was just the same old song: land, land, land. They wanted more fields, more timber, more space to raise their

cows and build their homes. A forest in which a people had lived for centuries was nothing but unused ground to them.

So they grabbed the axe.

The sound of metal on wood was the first signal. Trees fell as if the forest itself were collapsing. Every felled tree was a piece of land stolen from the tribes, but for the settlers, it represented progress. "Look, Mary," one called, "another field free." The wood became beams, the beams became huts, and soon small chimneys rose into the sky, smoke signals of a new world.

But beyond the chimneys came whiskey. The settlers drank to drown the fear that plagued them at night. Fear of attack, fear of hunger, fear of spirits in the forest they didn't understand. So they drank until their heads were dull. And a dull head strikes more easily.

Many of these men saw the Native Americans not as people, but as obstacles. "Savages," "beasts," "heathens"—the words flew faster than bullets. And every word was an excuse to raise a rifle.

Some settlers were honest farmers who simply wanted to survive. But many came with dirty hands, greed in their eyes. Traders who pushed cheap whiskey on the tribes to extort furs or land from them. Speculators who wrote treaties that no one understood but them. Men who grinned when they persuaded an old chief to give up land that didn't belong to him with the sign of the cross.

Thus, "civilization" spread like rust. Slowly, inexorably, ugly.

The tribes saw the axes and immediately understood what they meant: every felled tree was not just a tree, it was a piece of life lost. The forests were hunting grounds, medicine, and history. To the settlers, they were just lumber. This contradiction was more deadly than any musket.

And violence followed like a shadow.

Settler bands attacked villages when they thought there were supplies there. They shot men who were simply hunting. They took women, "as booty," as they said, and no one inquired about their fate. Children were chased away, mocked, sometimes beaten to death—simply because they had the wrong skin.

All of this was rarely talked about in the East. There, people spoke of "pioneers," of "courageous men who cultivated the land." They saw the gleaming new farms, the fields glimmering in the sun. They heard preachers

speak of God's commission to tame the wilderness. But in the West, on the frontier, it wasn't a divine commission—it was an axe handle, bloody and heavy, in the hands of a man who had drunk too much.

Some of these settlers had nothing themselves. They fled from debt, from hunger, from misery. But poverty doesn't make you kind—it makes you greedy. When you have nothing, you want everything. And that "everything" was the land on which others were already living.

Tecumseh understood this better than many of his brothers. He knew: The American armies were dangerous, yes. But the settlers were worse. An army marches, fights, and withdraws. But settlers stay. They plant corn, they raise children, they anchor themselves in the soil like parasites. And once they're there, they don't leave.

That's why he called it "the true plague."

But the settlers saw him only as a threat to their small future. A man who wanted to take away their "rightfully acquired land." They didn't understand that their very existence was war.

The conflict was therefore not just between armies, but between worlds. One world that had lived for centuries to the rhythm of river, forest, and animals. And another that came to cut through the earth with iron, as if it were merely a raw material.

And in winter, when wood became scarce, supplies dwindled, and fear outweighed hope, the settlers took more forceful action. With dirty axes, rusty rifles, and greedy hands.

They came, they stayed, and they destroyed. And Tecumseh's alliance knew: as long as these people roamed the forests with their axes, there would be no peace.

The stories always began the same way: a wagon train, a few families, a few axes. First they built one hut. Then two. Then a small picket fence around it. And as soon as the thing was built, the problems began.

The men went into the forest with their axes, felled more trees than they needed, hunted on other people's lands, and shot animals that had been hunted by the tribes for generations. For the settlers, this was a given—"free land," they called it. For the Shawnee, the Delaware, or the Potawatomi, it was theft.

Then came the whiskey.

A trader would move in, set up barrels, and sell the liquor to anyone who could pay—or who couldn't. Sometimes the tribes traded furs for the burning liquor; sometimes they gave up pieces of land, not realizing they were selling their homes.

Whiskey made men gullible, weak, and submissive. And the traders knew it. One grinned when he managed to sell a chief half a barrel for a piece of paper called a "contract." A contract the old man couldn't read.

"It says it all," said the merchant. "Just your sign here."

A line, a cross – and a piece of land was gone.

And if someone sobered up and objected? Then the axes came.

Once, the elders recounted, a group of settlers entered a Shawnee village at night. They claimed the chief had sold land. When the people protested, they drew their guns. Men died, huts burned, and in the morning the settlers stood there as if they had defended a right.

It wasn't armies burning villages – it was settlers with dirty axes, drunk on their own belief that the land belonged to them.

And if they didn't kill themselves, they made things worse. A merchant deliberately left barrels of whiskey open, right next to a village. He knew what would happen: Men drank, argued, fought, and lost the hunt. In the end, the village was left with nothing—and the merchant lost the land.

"Civilization," they called it.

Sometimes it was even dirtier. Tribal women were taken by settlers as "wives" or as "prey." Children disappeared. When asked about them, the men simply shrugged their shoulders. "Savages don't need children, they have enough." That's what they said as the screams faded into the night.

And everywhere, that sound of metal on wood. The axe crashing into the trunk was like a heartbeat, slowly killing the forest. Every blow said: "Your land is now our land."

Tecumseh heard these stories everywhere. In every village, they told of new blows, new losses. He saw men become angry but powerless. How the whiskey paralyzed them, how the axes drove them away.

"Don't you see?" he once shouted. "They don't need armies. Their axes are worse than cannons. They cut off your life piece by piece – and you sit there and drink!"

Some listened, some didn't. Alcohol had already broken too many. But the boys—the boys understood. For them, every settler with an axe was not a neighbor, but an enemy. They took the stories they heard and swore that they would answer the axes with blood.

Thus a new form of warfare emerged. No battlefield, no lines—just field against field, house against house, hut against hut. Every new settlement was a thorn in the side of the tribes. Every felled oak was a declaration of war.

And the settlers, so drunk, so confident, didn't see that with every tree they cut down, they were creating another enemy.

Tecumseh didn't have to invent fairy tales. The stories were there, lying like carrion in the villages. Everyone knew someone who had been ruined by whiskey. Everyone had heard how a trader had a contract in his pocket that left a village homeless. Everyone had missed a tree that had stood yesterday and knew that it hadn't fallen from spirits, but from a white axe.

Tecumseh just had to point his finger.

"Do you see this?" he shouted as he stepped into the circle. "This is no accident. This isn't a storm. This is deliberate. They don't come with cannons first, they come with axes. And when the axes are ready, then come the rifles."

The men murmured, women cried, children stared.

"You wonder why your brother is dead? Why your sister is missing? Why you have to trade corn for dirt? Here's the answer: the axe, the contract, the whiskey. These are their weapons."

It worked because it was true. He didn't need a ghost vision like Tenskwatawa, no grand promises from heaven. He only needed the ground they stood on and the scars they all knew.

Once, an old woman was brought to him who had been left behind in a destroyed village. Her sons had been shot, her husband slain, her grandchildren missing. She sat there, silent, her eyes empty. Tecumseh placed his hand on her shoulder and lifted her to the center of the camp. "Look at her," he cried. "That's not just a woman. That's every one of you, if you do nothing."

The crowd was boiling. Men grabbed spears as if they had to go immediately. Tecumseh let them. Hatred was his tool, but he had to use it in moderation, like fire.

He quickly learned that settler violence was his best recruiting tool. No preacher, no prophet could be as convincing as a burned cabin. Every village torn apart by whiskey brought him new men who swore never to drink again, but only to fight. Every felled tree was a cry answered in his name.

Even tribes that had distrusted him began to reflect. The Choctaw, who had laughed at him in the south, heard of new massacres. The Creek, who had nearly killed him, saw their hunting grounds disappear. Little by little, they understood: perhaps the Shawnee with the fiery gaze was not a fool, but the only one who understood.

Harrison noticed it too. His spies wrote reports that always said the same thing: *He is using the settlers against us*. Every new raid, every new treaty, every piece of land sold "legally" was fodder for Tecumseh's speeches. Harrison cursed, but he couldn't stop it. He could command his soldiers, yes, but he couldn't control the settlers' hunger.

Because the settlers didn't listen to orders. They wanted land, and land was everything.

Tecumseh knew: you could fight against armies, but you had to wage war against settlers. For they were the disease that wouldn't go away.

In a speech to Kickapoo warriors, he roared: "You say you are tired. But they never rest! Every night an axe chops. Every morning a new house devours your land. Will you wait until there is no more forest? Or will you stain their axes with blood?"

The men shouted back, throwing up their weapons as if they had just understood it properly for the first time.

Thus, every act of the settlers, every mess, every drunkenness, every child who disappeared, became part of his war plan. He didn't even have to lie—the whites supplied him with material every day.

And the legend grew. Some said Tecumseh was invulnerable because the spirits protected him. Others said he was simply the only one who truly gazed into the flames with his eyes open. Whatever was true, the men followed him because his words were born of their everyday lives.

To the settlers, he was a monster. To the tribes, he was a voice that said what they were all thinking, but no one said out loud: *The dirty axes are worse than the cannons.*

Harrison would have preferred to keep the settlers on a tight leash. Discipline, obedience, a clear line—that was his understanding of war. But the settlers wouldn't listen. They only listened to hunger, greed, and whiskey. He sent officers to protect the "pioneers" and at the same time found himself forced to defend them against their own stupidity.

A settler was cutting wood in a forbidden hunting area. The Kickapoo attacked. Harrison had to send men to retrieve the body, and the Kickapoo took it as an invitation to war.

A group of traders sold whiskey to the Shawnee. The village was falling apart, men were fighting, children were starving. Tecumseh came along, put his finger on the mess, and turned it into a sermon. More warriors for his alliance.

That's how it worked everywhere. Harrison wanted security, but the settlers themselves were the accelerant. Every treaty, every village, every damned cabin in the woods was a torch.

American newspapers wrote about "courageous pioneers" who were "brutally attacked." But they didn't mention that many of these "attacks" were provoked—that settlers took women, stole hunting grounds, and burned forests. For the public, the story was simple: white victims, red perpetrators. For those who lived in the forest, it was the other way around.

Tecumseh understood this dynamic and played it like a flute player. He knew he couldn't stop the settlers. But he could direct their violence—or rather, its consequences. Every burned cabin, every dead body, every crying child was a recruitment drive. All he had to do was show up and say the words everyone was thinking: "This is happening because you don't fight."

In this way, he fueled the wildfire without starting it himself.

Harrison was furious. In Vincennes, he sat among maps and whiskey barrels, cursing the settlers who were destroying his every plan. "How can you maintain order," he cried, "when your own people don't have any?" But he couldn't stop them. They were the backbone of his politics. Every settler was a voter, a taxpayer, a symbol of "progress." He had to protect them, even if they were ruining everything.

So he sent more soldiers. More patrols. More forts. And each new fort was a target for Tecumseh, proof that the Americans were afraid.

Tension rose like summer heat. A village burned here, a raid there. Children disappeared, traders were slain, settlers fell into traps, warriors died in ambushes. The ground soaked blood, and no one knew who started it.

For the tribes, it was clear: the settlers' axes were the beginning. For the settlers, it was clear: the warriors in the forest were the problem. For Harrison, it was clear: only a great battle could break the knot.

But Tecumseh didn't want that. He knew that an open battle would destroy them. He wanted to keep the fire small, but everywhere. Not a great sea of flames, but a thousand small fires that no one could extinguish.

But the settlers made even that difficult. They cried out for retribution, for security, for revenge. Every death became an excuse to strike even harder. Harrison heard the cries and knew: he had to deliver. Otherwise, he would be considered weak.

So it continued to burn.

An eyewitness later recounted: "It was as if the entire forest was sick. Every day brought a dead person. Every river carried blood. Every morning began with smoke."

The border was no longer a place where people lived. It was a place where they survived.

And in this chaos stood Tecumseh, smiling harshly, and knowing: the wildfire was his best ally.

It didn't take much to turn the spark into a sea of flames. A raid here, a murder there, and the entire forest was ablaze. It was no longer a war that could be

declared—it was a war that simply happened because no one wanted to retreat anymore.

A band of settlers found a Kickapoo camp on the river. They came with torches, whiskey in their veins, and rifles in their hands. They shot first, talked later. Men fell, women screamed, children ran into the water, where they drowned. By morning, nothing remained of the camp but smoke and ash. The settlers rode back, boasting: "We have brought order."

Three days later, Kickapoo warriors encountered a wagon train. They waited in a narrow passage, let the wagons roll in, and then the arrows crashed. Men fell, women screamed, children were thrown between the wheels. The supplies burst into flames, the horses collapsed, and in the end, the settlers lay dead in the dust. The warriors returned home and said, "We have brought justice."

So it went back and forth, like a pendulum that only shed blood.

The settlers organized themselves into militias. Every man with a musket became a soldier, every boy with a knife became a scout. They patrolled at night, built stockades around their fields, and posted guards on barns. But guards sleep, and stockades burn.

The warriors organized themselves into troops. They marched at night, struck at dawn, and disappeared into the fog. They took horses, supplies, and weapons—and left behind heads to make the message clear.

It wasn't a war with rules. It was a war with scores to settle. Every crime led to the next. Every death was a pretext for two more.

An eyewitness later wrote: "There was no longer any distinction between robbers and soldiers, between warriors and murderers. Everyone did what hatred commanded."

Harrison was furious. Reports piled up in Vincennes: burned settlements, ambushed convoys, vanished villages. He sent troops, but they always arrived too late. He built forts, but the forts were bypassed. He yelled for order, but the border no longer knew order.

And in the midst of this chaos stood Tecumseh. He saw the blood flowing, and he knew he couldn't stop it—and perhaps didn't want to. Every dead settler was a warning, every dead warrior a martyr. His alliance grew not despite the blood, but through it.

But he was wise enough to see the danger. Too much blood could tear his alliance apart. Some tribes were only interested in killing, without a plan or a goal. Tecumseh had to shout in their faces again and again: "You are not fighting to die! You are fighting to live!"

Nevertheless, the border didn't end there. It was a cauldron where no one could distinguish between friend and foe.

A Shawnee village was burned down by militia because they were mistaken for Tecumseh's men. But they were just farmers who wanted nothing but peace. Dead.

A wagon train was broken up by warriors who thought it was carrying weapons for Harrison. In reality, it was women with children who just wanted to leave. Dead.

Mistakes, misunderstandings, revenge – everything was one.

Newspapers in the East called it the "Indian War." Villages in the West called it "survival."

And Harrison knew he was losing control.

At some point on the border, the madness ceased to be an outbreak; it was the norm. Growing up, people learned it like others learn the alphabet. Children once knew how to plant corn—now they knew how to stuff a musket. Girls who should have still been holding dolls held small knives and knew where to use them if a stranger came too close.

The settler children heard stories from the adults: of "bloodthirsty savages" who came at night and burned down houses. They slept badly, woke up when dogs barked, and grabbed wooden clubs that were lying next to their beds. They learned early on that trust could be deadly.

The children of the tribes heard the same stories—only reversed. Of settlers who came at night and burned down huts. Of women who disappeared, of men who lay in the snow with broken necks. They, too, slept badly. They, too, woke up when dogs barked. They, too, grabbed wooden clubs or bows that lay beside the campfire.

Thus, a generation grew up that only saw itself in mirrors – hate against hate, fear against fear.

The adults were no better. Harrison wanted discipline, but what he got was paranoia. Settlers patrolled with muskets and axes as if they were already half-soldiers. Militias built log cabins, stacked timber, and created loopholes. Every stranger was considered an enemy, every Native American a spy, even if they were just a trader or supplicant.

It was the same in the tribal villages. A white merchant arriving with honest goods was immediately suspected. "Spy," the older people murmured. "Decoy," the younger people said. Suspicion was the one thing that no one lacked.

The border itself became a place where every face was a judgment. No proof was needed—skin color was enough.

Some later said the worst part wasn't the blood, but the habit. Leaving the house in the morning, already expecting someone to die. Gathering corn with one eye on the field and the other on the forest. No longer asking children, "What do you want to be?" but only, "Can you walk when they come?"

Harrison wrote in his letters that morality was at risk. But morality had long since died. It had drowned in whiskey, died in ash, and been torn apart by blood. What remained was a kind of blunt pragmatism: strike first, never ask, and maybe you'll survive.

Tecumseh saw this bluntness and exploited it. He knew: When people have nothing left to lose, they fight. So he repeatedly showed them what they had lost—forests, fields, women, children. He showed it not with tears, but with anger. "They have taken everything from you. Take back what you can."

The young men heard it and took bows, spears, and old rifles. The old men heard it and sent the young men forward. The war devoured itself.

A young Potawatomi warrior once recounted how he could no longer distinguish between dreams and reality at night. "I see houses burning, even when they aren't. I hear children screaming, even when none are there." The old man beside him nodded and said, "Then you're ready. That's war."

Across the street, in a settlement, a boy told the same story. "I hear them coming, even when no one's there." His father nodded and said, "Then you're alert. That's life here."

Thus, generations of mirrors grew up who never met each other – except with knives.

The border was no longer a place where one gained or lost land. It was a place where one lost one's mind.

A preacher later wrote: "I came to preach God's Word and found only corpses that no one was burying. They smelled, they were rotting, and no one stopped to bury them. They said, 'We don't have time. Tomorrow we ourselves may die.'"

That was the border: no place for burials, only for bills.

And in the midst of this madness stood Tecumseh. He wasn't drunk, not blind, not dull. He saw more clearly than most. But he knew: clarity alone wasn't enough. Sometimes he had to ride the madness like a horse because he couldn't stop it.

Harrison, on the other hand, became tougher. More patrols, more punishments, more revenge. But the harder he hit, the more people slid into Tecumseh's arms. It was like a grinder that drove both sides: hatred ground, and the children learned to swallow the dust.

The border was no longer a place where one lived. It was a place where one ceased to be human.

It was as if the forest itself had realized it was being lost. More and more tree trunks lay felled, meadows trampled flat, rivers dug out to make way for mill wheels. Where fog once hung over still waters, chimneys suddenly stood, vomiting smoke into the sky.

The settlers didn't stop. No massacre, no burned hut, no dead body held them back. On the contrary: the more they lost, the more determined they became. They came in new waves, like locusts. A wagon train was ambushed? Three more followed. A settlement burned down? Two new ones sprang up further upriver.

For them, retreat was synonymous with death. They couldn't return east, where poverty, debt, and hunger awaited. They had to go west, regardless of who lived there.

They had nothing – and those who have nothing eat everything.

Tecumseh looked at it with cold eyes. He knew he could fight soldiers, armies, generals. But fighting this endless stream of wagons, axes, and Bibles? It was

like fighting a river that never dries up. You couldn't defeat it. You could only hold it back—for a while.

And yet, it had to be stopped. For every new settlement was a cut into the heart of the tribes. Every tree stump was a scar, every felled forest a grave.

He said it in his speeches, harsher than ever: "As long as the axes are chopping, as long as the whiskey is flowing, as long as they write treaties we can't read—there will be no peace. Peace, to them, means we're dead."

The warriors nodded, the women nodded, even the old men nodded. They all saw that the battle was no longer about a village or a field. It was all or nothing.

The settlers, however, only saw their "progress." They spoke of God's mission, of "Manifest Destiny," even though the term hadn't been used at the time. They believed that the wilderness had to be tamed, that the Native Americans had to disappear—as if it were a law of nature.

They didn't look at the ashes, the corpses, or the screams in the night. They looked only at their fields, their huts, and their children, who would play on new ground.

It was a race, but not one that could ever end. Every step westward the settlers took was another reason for Tecumseh to wage war. Every arrow that flew was another reason for the settlers to strengthen their militias.

Blood became currency. Whiskey became religion. The axe became law.

And so, at some point, Tecumseh stood there, at the edge of a newly cleared field, saw the stumps, saw the smoke from a cabin, heard the laughter of settlers—and he knew: There will be no peace. Not now. Not later. Not as long as these people keep coming.

"We have to beat them," he said. "Not once, not twice—over and over again. Until they understand that this land doesn't belong to them."

But deep down, he also knew: Maybe they would never understand. Maybe they would only be held back for a while. Maybe his war was just a delay, a breath, a cry against an avalanche.

But sometimes a scream is all a person has.

So this chapter of the frontier ended: with smoke, with axes, with whiskey – and with a man who knew that he was no longer fighting for victories, but for time.

A time when his people could still breathe. A time when the forest still rustled. A time when the alliance was alive, before the flood of settlers buried everything beneath them.

And he wanted to give them this time at any cost.

Tippecanoe – Fire at Dawn

Prophetstown lay there like a wounded hope. The huts stood in the fog, plumes of smoke drifted lazily across the Wabash. Children ran barefoot through the mud, dogs barked, women gathered wood. It looked like a village—but it was more than that. It was a symbol, an attempt, a last rebellion.

Tecumseh wasn't there. He was in the south, talking with Creek and Cherokee, trying to expand the alliance even further. Prophetstown was in the hands of his brother Tenskwatawa, the "Prophet." And Tenskwatawa talked a lot—too much.

He swore the spirits would stop the whites. That no lead could penetrate them if only they believed in him. That Harrison, that dog, would go down in smoke before he even reached Prophetstown.

The people listened, some believing, some skeptical. Some saw the spark in his eyes, others only saw the weakness in his body. But no matter what – they stayed. Prophetstown was more than just a collection of huts. It was a promise: *Here the flood stops.*

But Harrison saw it differently.

For him, Prophetstown wasn't a village, but a threat, a thorn in the side of the young United States. Every report from the West, every settler's complaint, every rumor of raids—everything pointed to this place. Prophetstown was the nest, and if he destroyed it, then—he thought—there would be peace.

He gathered men: militia, volunteers, soldiers. Around a thousand marched with him, through rain, through mud, through forests. They moved slowly, cautiously, because they knew: the forest saw everything.

The men cursed, they froze, they hated the march. But Harrison urged them on. "Just a little further," he said, "and we'll finish this."

In the village, people had long known they were coming. Scouts had seen the columns, the plumes of smoke, the horses. The news spread faster than a river, and soon everyone in Prophetstown was ready. Men sharpened knives, women gathered children, the elderly prayed.

But Tenskwatawa smiled. "They can't do anything to us," he said. "The spirits are with us."

Some nodded. Others doubted. But what could they do? Tecumseh was gone. The prophet was there. So they stayed.

Harrison camped nearby, less than a mile away. His men built a camp, pitched tents, and posted guards. The ground was wet, the sky gray. They smoked, cursed, and kept their muskets dry.

"They might attack us tomorrow," an officer murmured. Harrison nodded, but he was certain the Indians wouldn't dare approach head-on.

He was wrong.

For Tenskwatawa had a vision that night—or a lie, depending on who you asked. He said the spirits had shown him that the Americans could be surprised while they were sleeping. That their bullets would ricochet off the warriors like rain on stone. That this was the hour.

So Prophetstown prepared. Men painted their faces, tied feathers, and tested spears and bows. Some had old rifles, rusty but deadly enough. They were all breathing heavily, as if before a storm.

At night, fires crackled and drums beat softly. Children were taken to the forest, women wept silently. The men looked at their weapons, at the sky, at the veils of smoke.

And somewhere in the darkness, Tenskwatawa grinned and murmured, "Tomorrow Harrison will burn in smoke."

The stage was ready.

The night was wet and heavy. The rain had stopped, but the ground still absorbed the water, as if trying to swallow every footstep. Harrison's men lay in their tents, some asleep, others staring into the darkness, their muskets beside them. Everyone knew something might happen—just not when.

There was no sleep in the village of Prophetstown. The drums beat slowly, like a heart preparing to leap. Men stood in a circle, painted, their eyes shining, their hands tightly gripping spears and rifles. Some murmured prayers, others spat in the dirt.

Tenskwatawa raised his arms, his voice shrill: "The spirits are with you! They deflect the bullets, they give you strength! Tonight we will break the Americans."

The warriors shouted back, a sound that echoed through the forest. But there was doubt in some of their eyes, even now. "If he's wrong," one thought, "we're dead." But no one said it out loud. It was too late.

Shortly before dawn, the troop set off. Quietly, like shadows. They crept through the forest, the wet grass muffling their footsteps. The only sounds were breathing, the cracking of a branch, the beating of hearts.

The American camp was silent. Only the snorting of horses, the crackling of a fire, the murmuring of a man in a dream. The guards trudged back and forth, shivering, rubbing their hands, staring into the fog.

Then, suddenly, a scream. An arrow whizzed, a rifle cracked. A sentry collapsed, blood spilling on the floor. And at that very moment, all hell broke loose.

The warriors stormed out of the forest like shadows made flesh. Arrows flew, rifles cracked, spears stabbed. Men in tents were caught asleep, stumbled out, half-naked, half-awake, only to fall in flames or blood.

Harrison leaped out of his tent, his face contorted, his sword in his hand. "To the line!" he yelled, "Hold the line!" But there was chaos. Men were running, screaming, firing blindly into the darkness. The camp was no longer a camp, but a battlefield.

The Indians penetrated deep, setting fire to tents, stabbing horses, and cutting down men before they could load their muskets. Cries mingled with trumpet calls, smoke rose, and the sky turned red even before the sun appeared.

An officer yelled, "Form up!" But what was one supposed to form up when the enemy was everywhere, between tents, behind fires, in the middle of the lines? The Americans shot at shadows, sometimes hitting their own men.

And the warriors? They fought like men who had nothing to lose. Every blow, every shot, every stab was a cry: *Enough!*

But Harrison was no fool. He yelled, hit, and shoved his men together. "Halt! If you fall now, you're all dead!" Little by little, soldiers gathered around their colors, formed lines, and began firing back.

Dawn came. The fog lifted, and suddenly the horror was revealed: men in mud, blood, fire, faces distorted. The Indians screamed, threw themselves against the lines, but the Americans' volleys repelled them.

It wasn't a clear victory for either side. It was a crushing, a strangling. Warriors fell, soldiers fell, the camp was a single battlefield.

And in the middle of it all, somewhere on the edge, stood Tenskwatawa. He roared that the spirits would win, that they were invulnerable. But the bullets whistled, and men died beside him. His words grew quieter as the dead screamed louder.

Harrison fought like a man who knew his name would be decided here. And his men, panicked and desperate, began to believe they might be able to hold on.

The sun rose, slowly, red as blood. The dawn fire was lit.

The sun had barely crept over the horizon when the camp was already covered in blood. Smoke burned eyes, the fog hung heavy, and death ran in circles between tents and fire pits.

The warriors screamed, a wild chorus thundering through the woods. They threw themselves at the lines, broke through, disappeared, and reappeared. One leaped at an American soldier with a spear, ramming him in the chest while the man was still loading. The rifle cracked uselessly in the air, then he fell, gasping, into the wet grass.

Another warrior crept between the tents, shot at close range, followed up with a tomahawk, and was gone before anyone could shout "Fire!"

But Harrison held his ground. With an iron voice, his sword drawn, his will unwavering. "Line! Hold the line!" he shouted, as if the word itself were a wall.

And the men who had just fled in panic gathered together. Shoulder to shoulder, bayonets drawn, they fired volleys into the shadows.

The effect was brutal. Where warriors had just charged out of the fog, they scattered, hit, screaming, blood at the mouth. One shot, two shots, the attacks broke.

But the Indians didn't give up. They attacked again, from the other side, screaming, throwing themselves at the weaker spots. Again and again they struck, again and again they tried to break the ranks.

It wasn't an orderly battle like in books, no dance of drums. It was a dogfight, wild, chaotic, dirty. Men bludgeoned with rifle butts, stabbed with bayonets, bit, screamed, and died. Horses neighed, ran through the camp in panic, and trampled the wounded.

An officer fell with a shattered skull, a sergeant roared until a spear pierced him. Harrison himself rode between the ranks, sword raised, his face covered in mud and sweat. "Halt!" he cried again and again. "Once more!"

And the men held on. Not all of them, not everywhere – but enough.

The warriors began to sense that the bullets weren't ricocheting after all. That the prophet's words were empty words. One fell, hit in the chest, his gaze frozen in disbelief. Another collapsed with a shattered hip, while Tenskwatawa, somewhere in the background, screamed that the spirits would prevail.

But ghosts were of no use when the musket fired from twenty paces away.

The fighting dragged on, hour after hour. Ever new attacks, ever new volleys. The ground was red, the smoke thick, the screams endless.

A young soldier stood trembling in the line, bayonet outstretched, as a warrior ran toward him. They clashed simultaneously, bayonet against spear, an ugly clash of flesh and wood. Both fell, both died, entwined, like brothers in death who were enemies in life.

That's what Tippecanoe was like: no victory, no glory, just blood and dirt.

The sun rose higher, the fog cleared, and slowly, slowly, the Americans gained the upper hand. Not because they were better. Not because they were braver. But because they had more—more men, more bullets, more time.

The warriors, exhausted and wounded, began to retreat. Not because they wanted to, but because they had to. Prophetstown was too close; the children, the women, the elderly were waiting there. If they fell, everything fell.

Harrison saw the gap appearing in the resistance and shouted, "Forward! Drive them back!"

The ranks began to move. Bayonets glinted, drums beat, the men advanced. And the warriors who were still standing retreated, gritting their teeth, furious, but without choice.

It wasn't a victory—not yet. But it was the beginning of the end.

The screams didn't fade, they only grew duller, heavier, like iron in the fog. The warriors retreated, one by one, shot to pieces, exhausted, but not broken. Every step backward was a cut in their own flesh, but they had to. Prophetstown was behind them, women and children in the shade of the huts, and they knew: If Harrison breaks through, everything will fall.

Harrison smelled blood. He was a soldier who had learned that an enemy is most dangerous when retreating. So he charged, shouting, brandishing his sword, urging his men forward. "No stopping! Forward! Push them back!"

The Americans pursued, bayonets drawn, musket reloaded, one step at a time. They felt victory, tasted it, and wanted to tear it apart with their teeth.

The warriors bit back, falling like wolves on individual lines, striking, disappearing, but they could no longer stem the flow. More and more men fell, fewer and fewer remained standing, and soon Prophetstown was only an arm's length away.

Women screamed, children cried, the elderly tried to save belongings. One carried a basket of corn, another a few blankets, a boy pulled a dog on a leash. But it was useless. You couldn't grab a village and carry it away. Prophetstown was a body about to be cut open.

Tenskwatawa stood amidst the chaos, his arms raised, his voice shrill. "The Spirits will save us! They will repel the bullets! They will destroy the Americans!" But all around him, men fell, hit, pierced, burned. His words sounded like a mocking song as the ground grew bloodier.

An old Shawnee, half-blind, spat at his feet. "Your spirits are liars," he growled before throwing himself into the fight with his last strength.

Then came the fire.

It started small—a burning tent, a spark falling into dry grass. But soon it ate its way through the rows, from hut to hut, as if the forest itself had decided that Prophetstown could no longer exist. Smoke rose, thick and black, drowning the sky. Flames licked at roofs, beams cracked, children screamed even louder.

The Americans saw it and laughed harshly. "Burn, you dogs!" one yelled as he set fire to another hut. Harrison himself glanced briefly at the flames and knew: This was it. No village, no symbol, no prophet would survive this day.

The warriors still fought, desperately, like men who know it's the last thing they have. But fire was a second enemy, more merciless than any musket. You could fight against men, not against smoke and embers.

Soon, Prophetstown was nothing but a scream. Women fled into the woods, children ran, warriors covered them with their blood. A man leaped back to retrieve his daughter, and both burned in the flames.

Tenskwatawa, the prophet, was dragged out of the village, half unconscious, half screaming. Some said he had been praying. Others said he had laughed like a madman. But everyone knew: his words were no longer worth anything. The spirits had abandoned him—or he had lied to the people.

But Harrison stood there, sword in hand, his face sooty, watching Prophetstown burn. "This is how you end," he murmured. "This is how your dream ends."

But he was wrong. What went up in smoke was only wood. The hatred left behind by this fire could not be extinguished by water.

By the time the sun was high, Prophetstown was dead. Only ash, charred timbers, and burnt corn kernels in the dirt. Harrison had the camp plundered, supplies burned, and left behind what was no longer of any use. "Nothing must remain," he commanded.

The Americans marched away, convinced they had won. But behind them, in the woods, men, women, and children swore that this was not the end. That Prophetstown may have fallen—but Tecumseh still lived. And as long as he lived, so did the war.

When Harrison left, the ground still stank of blood and smoke. Prophetstown was no longer a village, but a pile of corpses made of logs and ash. The flames

had consumed everything: huts, supplies, blankets, dreams. All that remained was burnt corn, bones in the mud, and the stench of defeat.

The few survivors wandered through the forest like shadows. Women with children, warriors with wounds, old people who could barely stand. They had nothing left except the memory of the morning the spirits had betrayed them.

Because that's how everyone saw it now: Tenskwatawa had lied.

He had screamed that bullets couldn't hit them, that the spirits were their shields. But the bullets had hit, had torn men apart, had struck down children. His voice had become hollow as the huts burned. And no one believed him anymore.

Some wanted to kill him. "You're to blame," snarled a Kickapoo warrior as he drew his knife. Only the intervention of others saved the prophet. "He is Tecumseh's brother," they said. "If we kill him, we both lose." But his eyes were full of hatred.

So Tenskwatawa lived on—but as a broken man. A prophet without faith, a leader without followers. His words were smoke, his hands trembled, and he knew it.

Tecumseh learned of this only weeks later, when he returned from his journey south. He had met Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek, had fought, recruited, and shouted. He returned full of hope—and found only ashes.

He rode into the burned village, dismounted, and knelt in the dirt. He picked up a handful of earth, blackened and charred, and let it trickle through his fingers. He said nothing. He said nothing for hours.

The survivors stood around him, silent, waiting. Finally, he looked up, his eyes full of fire. "What happened?" he asked.

An old warrior stepped forward. "Your brother said the spirits protect us. We believed him. We fought. We died. The spirits were silent."

Tecumseh stood there, his face hard as stone. Then he turned to Tenskwatawa, who stood at the edge, thin, pale, his eyes flickering.

"Brother," said Tecumseh quietly, "what have you done?"

Tenskwatawa stammered, talking of visions, of voices, of spirits that had deceived him. But Tecumseh was no longer listening. It was clear to him: the prophet had fallen.

From that day on, Tecumseh was alone. Not without a brother, but without faith in him. He knew: if the covenant was to survive, he had to uphold it. Only he.

He gathered the men who had remained and spoke to them in the burned village. "You say we're defeated," he yelled, "but look around! They burned huts. That's all! We're still alive! We can rebuild, we can fight again! But if we give up now, all your deaths will have been in vain!"

The warriors listened, but their eyes were tired. Many no longer believed. Prophetstown had been their heart, and that heart had burned.

But Tecumseh didn't give up. He rode from village to village, gathering, preaching, threatening, pleading. "Don't give up," he said, "for as long as we breathe, as long as we fight, they cannot break us."

He turned defeat into a seed. Prophetstown was dead, yes – but from the ashes something new would grow. An alliance, bigger, tougher, more determined.

For Harrison, Tippecanoe was a victory. For Tecumseh, it was the beginning of a war that would become even greater.

In the East, people wrote of a victory. Newspapers celebrated Harrison as the man who had vanquished the "savages," the hero of Tippecanoe. Politicians in Washington patted each other on the back. "The nest is destroyed," they said, "the border is secure again."

They didn't know the smell. They hadn't heard the screaming, hadn't felt the mud that stank of blood. For them, Tippecanoe was a play, Harrison the shining protagonist.

In Vincennes, Harrison drank whiskey like water. He wrote reports, thick with ink and self-praise. But when he was alone at night, he knew it hadn't been a clear victory. His men had trembled, had almost broken, and the enemy hadn't been destroyed—just scattered.

But politics needed heroes, and Harrison was happy to be celebrated.

Tecumseh, on the other hand, stood in the ashes of Prophetstown and saw history differently. For him, Tippecanoe was not a defeat, but a sermon.

He called the tribes together, speaking through the burned remains as if the spirits themselves stood behind him. "They say they have triumphed," he cried, "but what have they really done? They have burned huts, frightened children, crushed our corn kernels. This is their victory? Houses of wood? We can build new ones! Corn will grow again! But our hearts—they are not burned! Our souls—they are not broken!"

The men listened, the women nodded, the children held hands.

"They want us to give up. But we're still alive. We're still breathing. And as long as we do, we can fight!"

It wasn't a vision like his brother's, nor a witching hour. It was raw anger, pure will, and that's exactly what worked.

Some tribes that had already wanted to leave for Tippecanoe stayed. Others who had hesitated heard his words and came. Tecumseh turned the defeat into a torch. "Look," he said, "they are not invincible. They are many, yes. But they bleed like us. We have struck them, we have frightened them. And when there are more of us, when we are all one, then we can defeat them."

He used Harrison's "victory" as proof of his own narrative: that the Americans were only stronger as long as the tribes remained separated. "They hit us because there weren't enough of us. Imagine what happens when we're all together!"

In the villages, whispers of Tippecanoe circulated. Some said, "We fell." Others said, "We survived." But most said, "Tecumseh is right."

He knew he could no longer present Tenskwatawa as a prophet. So he belittled him. The "seer" became a marginal figure, a shaman who was still tolerated but no longer heard. The alliance now belonged to him alone.

And he understood: He had to think bigger. Tippecanoe had shown that a single village, a single city, a single alliance wasn't enough. He needed more. More tribes, more warriors, more weapons.

The British in the north sensed their opportunity. They sent messengers, traders, and promises. "You saw them burning your villages," they said. "With

us, you can fight back." Tecumseh listened. He knew the Redcoats had their own goals. But he also knew: guns are guns, and bullets don't ask for loyalty.

While Harrison was celebrated as a hero in the East, Tecumseh became a legend in the West. To the whites, he was a demon lurking in the smoke of Prophetstown. To the tribes, he was a leader who turned ashes into fire.

And fire was exactly what the West needed now.

Tippecanoe was told in two stories – one for the East, one for the West.

In the East, pictures were painted of Harrison standing with his sword drawn at dawn, a hero repelling the savages. Newspapers wrote of "civilization triumphing over barbarism." Preachers preached that God was on the side of the United States. Politicians clapped, the crowd cheered, and Harrison drank the applause like cheap liquor.

But in the West, they told it differently. No one spoke of heroes. They spoke of children crying in the smoke. Of warriors dying in the mud. Of women running through the forest with nothing but a bundle of corn in their hands.

For the Americans, it was a victory. For the tribes, it was a beacon.

Tecumseh understood this immediately. As he walked through the ashes of Prophetstown, it was clear to him: This was not an end, but a beginning. The Americans had thought they had excised the heart of the resistance. Instead, they had only opened the veins through which hatred now flowed more rapidly.

He rode from village to village, talking with Kickapoo, Delaware, and Potawatomi. "They think they've broken us," he said, "but look at me—I'm alive. Look at you—you're alive. And as long as we're alive, we can fight. Prophetstown was wood and earth. We are flesh and blood. We're still here."

And everywhere he spoke, eyes grew wider, fists tighter. Men who had lost heart found him again. Women who had lost children said, "Then fight for them." Old people who had already given up murmured, "Perhaps he's the last one who can save us."

Tenskwatawa, however, was now only a shadow. He stood in the background, barely speaking. When he did say something, hardly anyone listened. He was the prophet who had lied, the man whose spirits had fallen silent. Tecumseh

knew: From now on, he himself had to be the prophet—not with dreams, but with deeds.

In the East, Harrison was acclaimed. In the West, Tecumseh's legend grew. Two stories collided, like two streams flowing in opposite directions.

Tippecanoe was not a victory, not an end, not peace. It was the beginning.

The tribes began to understand: if they were to survive, they had to stand together, tougher, bigger, more determined than ever before. They had seen what happened when they relied on spirits. Now they wanted to rely on steel, muscle, and courage.

And Tecumseh was there to lead it.

He no longer spoke only of land, no longer only of hunting grounds. He spoke of a people, of a nation that must stand together. He spoke of how no tribe could be alone anymore. "For if you are alone," he cried, "you are dead. But if you are with us, you are the heart that never stops beating."

For the Americans, Tippecanoe became a chapter in history books. For the tribes, it became a stigma.

And for Tecumseh, it was the moment when he finally knew: There was no way back. No peace, no treaties, no compromises. Only war. A big war.

Betrayal in the smoke

After Tippecanoe, the West didn't lie still; it simmered. The tribes licked their wounds, the settlers built new cabins, Harrison wrote reports, and Tecumseh moved on like a restless wolf. But while smoke and ash still hung in the trees, something else crept through the woods: betrayal.

Not the quick betrayal with a knife in the back – the slow, insidious one, clothed in words.

The Americans were masters at this. They knew they couldn't subdue every tribe with a musket. So they came with treaties. With parchment, ink, handshakes. With smiling faces that said, "We want peace."

But peace always meant land.

They lured some to weaken others. "Sign here, and you'll get whiskey, guns, and protection." Whiskey—the sweet poison that made men forget what they were. Guns—the tools with which they would shoot their own brothers. Protection—from whom? From the whites themselves, who lurked like a shadow behind every promise.

Tecumseh saw it and was furious. "They're playing you off against each other," he shouted in the meetings. "One treaty for the Miami, another for the Delaware, a third for the Kickapoo—and in the end, you all have nothing. They give you whiskey, and while you drink, they steal your land. They give you guns, and while you fight, they laugh. They talk of protection, and while they protect you, they tie you up."

But not everyone listened. Not everyone wanted to listen. Hunger gnawed at them, winter was coming, and a barrel of whiskey was sometimes more tempting than a distant vision. Some chiefs signed. Some accepted the gifts. Some thought, "Perhaps this will save us."

That was the betrayal: not by strangers, but by their own people. Brothers who gave in, who signed treaties that Tecumseh spat into the ground with rusty nails.

And every time a log fell, a piece of his dream fell.

In the smoke of the burned huts, men joined hands with the whites. "Just this piece of land," they said. "Just this border." But borders were like waterlines in the sand. They were constantly being pushed further and further.

Tecumseh saw the alliance crumbling, and he swore he would hammer it back together with fury. "No tribe may decide alone," he said. "Land belongs to everyone. Whoever sells land isn't just selling their land, they're selling mine. Yours. Ours. Treason is treason."

But the Americans knew how to sow the seeds. They whispered into the ears of the weak, gave gifts, and promised protection. And suddenly the alliance was a little thinner, a little more fragile.

The smoke from Tippecanoe had not yet cleared when the next betrayal was already in the air.

The treaties didn't come from guns, they came from crates. Crates full of paper, seals, whiskey bottles, muskets, bolts of cloth. The Americans knew: Not every warrior falls on the battlefield. Some fall at a table, pen in hand.

A Delaware chief—old, tired, with gray hair—allowed himself to be persuaded. "Just a piece of land," he murmured as he placed the marker. "We need peace, we need supplies." The Americans nodded, smiled, and poured him whiskey.

When Tecumseh heard about this, he rode immediately. For days, until his horse foamed at the mouth. Then he stood before the chief, his eyes glowing.

"You signed?" he asked quietly.

The old man looked away. "Just a little bit."

Tecumseh grabbed him by the arm, pulling him so close that the whiskey breath crept into his nose. "Just a piece? It wasn't yours to give! Land doesn't belong to you alone! It belongs to all of us. If you sell your house, you can do so. But if you sell the land, you're also selling my house, my children's, my brothers'. You're no longer a chief; you're a traitor."

The words were like blows. Men standing around them murmured, nodded, and grumbled. The chief slumped, and there was more shame than resistance in his eyes.

But Tecumseh went further.

The Miami tribe was a different story. Their leader, Little Turtle, had once been a great warrior, had once destroyed the Americans in the wilderness. But the years had softened him; the white victories had weary him. He also signed.

Tecumseh publicly humiliated him: "You, who once sent soldiers to the dust, now sign paper? Your spears were once sharp, now your pen is blunt. You have forgotten who you are."

Little Turtle looked at him, old, tired, and said simply: "I've seen enough war."

"Then die in bed," growled Tecumseh. "But don't sell my children's bed."

It was merciless, harsh, and many turned away because they still honored the old warrior. But just as many nodded. "He's right," they said. "Whoever sells land betrays us all."

Tecumseh made no compromises. He knew that every treaty was a rift in the alliance, and he mended the cracks not with kindness, but with anger. He shamed the chiefs who had signed, exposed them, and made them warning examples.

Some hated him for it. "He's not a brother," they murmured, "he's a judge." Others adored him. "He's the only one who still has the courage to speak the truth."

In this way he sharpened his image: not as a friend, not as a comforter, but as a leader who tolerated no weakness.

The Americans watched this with a cold grin. They knew that Tecumseh's harshness not only exposed traitors but also lost friends. A man who knew no compromise stood alone—and they took advantage of this.

But Tecumseh was prepared to stand alone if necessary. For him, there was no middle ground, no compromise, no half-truth. Betrayal was betrayal. And smoke was smoke, no matter how sweet it smelled.

So he moved on, always searching for those who hadn't yet signed, always with the same words: "Think not of today, think of tomorrow. Whiskey is today, land is forever."

But the temptation was strong, and the Americans knew how to find weak spots.

The Americans knew that paper wasn't enough. Sometimes a rumor is enough to tear apart an alliance. A word can cut sharper than any bayonet.

So they used their second weapon: lies.

They sent spies into the villages, merchants with barrels who sold not only whiskey but stories. "Tecumseh is taking everything for himself," they whispered. "He doesn't want to be your brother, he wants to be your king." Others said, "He's in league with the British. He's selling you to the Redcoats." Still others, "He's sending you to your death while he sits in safety."

The words crept into the huts like smoke, taking root in people's minds. Some believed them immediately, others laughed, but the doubt remained. And doubt is like a knife that slides deeper the more you turn it.

Tecumseh noticed quickly. Men who had usually greeted him suddenly looked away. Women whispered as he entered the square. Children who would otherwise have run toward him stayed with their mothers.

He confronted them. "What did you hear?" he asked, and they remained silent. Silence was worse than insults.

So he gathered the people, stood before them, and yelled that the lies came from Vincennes, from the huts of the white people who wanted nothing more than to divide them. "They say I want to be your king?" He spat in the dirt. "I don't want to be your king. I want you to be free, for us to be together, for us to be one. A king? Who wants a king when we can be warriors?"

He screamed so loudly that the children cried, and some men nodded in conviction. But the doubts weren't dead.

Because rumors don't die with words, they die with time - and Tecumseh had no time.

The Americans were clever. They sent false messengers posing as allies, only to sow discord. They spread stories that Tecumseh was secretly negotiating with Harrison. That he was luring entire villages into traps. That he had long since given up.

And the most bitter part: Some tribes began to believe. Not because they were stupid, but because they were tired. When you see nothing but blood for years, you eventually believe any story that sounds like peace—even if it stinks like rotten fish.

Tecumseh fought against invisible enemies. He could tear up treaties, he could shout at traitors. But how do you fight smoke?

He took a tougher approach, threatening, cursing, warning. "Anyone who believes these lies is weaker than a child," he cried. "Anyone who spreads them is worse than an enemy." But he knew he couldn't shut everyone's mouths.

Thus the alliance became a shaky house: strong when he stood in the middle, but fragile at the edges, where rumors gnawed like rats.

Sometimes at night he wondered if the Americans even needed muskets anymore. Perhaps they could conquer the entire country with just whiskey and words.

And that made him even more determined.

"If they fight with smoke," he muttered, "then I will be fire."

Betrayal is worse when it comes from within your own ranks. An enemy who attacks you openly is honorable. But a friend who offers you a hand while hiding a knife in the other hand – that eats away at your heart.

Tecumseh knew this, but knowledge is no protection.

One of his closest confidants, a Shawnee warrior who had been at his side since they were boys, began to waver. His name was Menewa—tall, broad, with a voice like a felled tree. He had fought with Tecumseh in many battles, shared blood and fire with him.

But then came the whiskey.

Traders brought it, as always. One barrel, two barrels. One sip, two sips. And soon Menewa was speaking differently. "Perhaps we need peace," he murmured, raising the bottle. "Perhaps Harrison is right. Perhaps... perhaps you were wrong."

Tecumseh looked at him, horrified, as if he had seen a brother die. "Wrong?" he hissed. "I wasn't wrong. I saw them kill our fathers. I saw them burn our cabins. I saw them burn Tippecanoe. And you say I'm wrong?"

Menewa avoided his gaze. "I just want peace. I don't want my children to have to live like this."

"Your children won't live at all," growled Tecumseh, "if you give the white man your hand. They'll take your hand—and then they'll take your arm, your leg, your heart. They'll take everything. You know that."

But Menewa was already half lost. The whiskey spoke louder than Tecumseh. And at some point, he disappeared—not in battle, but in the smoke of a treaty. He signed, accepted gifts, and promised Harrison neutrality.

When Tecumseh heard about this, his heart was as heavy as stone. He rode to Menewa and humiliated him before everyone. "You were my brother," he cried, "and now you're a dog on the white man's leash!"

Menewa cried, said nothing, and the other warriors looked away.

That was the moment Tecumseh understood: Betrayal wasn't just politics, not just rumors. Betrayal was personal. Anyone could fall—friend, brother, perhaps even son.

And he swore: He would never blindly trust anyone again. Not even blood was protection from the smoke.

From then on, he became tougher. No more pity for the weak. No second chances for traitors. "Whoever signs," he said, "has sold their heart. Whoever sells their heart is already dead."

It was cruel, but perhaps it was the only way to keep the alliance alive. After all, if friends were falling, how else could one survive?

After Menewa, it was clear to Tecumseh: friendship was a luxury he could no longer afford. Too many wavered, too many gave in, too many sold themselves for a barrel, a rifle, a piece of cloth.

So he drew the line. No mercy. No second chances.

He made it clear publicly: "Whoever sells a piece of land is not just selling his land—he is selling the bones of our ancestors, the blood of our children, the future of our people. A man who does that is no longer a brother. He is a dead man who is still walking."

These words stung like a blade. Some tribes were frightened, others cheered. But everyone understood: Tecumseh was no longer a man who tolerated compromises.

In a Potawatomi village, a chief wanted to negotiate with the Americans. Tecumseh rode in before the men could leave for the meeting. He stood in the middle of the circle and yelled: "You think you can sell land that isn't yours? You think you're masters of the earth? You're not masters, you're guests. Guests in a house that belongs to everyone. And whoever sells the roof while we're still sleeping under it is committing treason."

The chief remained silent, the warriors around him murmured. Finally, he abandoned the negotiations. Not because he was convinced—but because Tecumseh's anger was sharper than any pen.

From then on, some called Tecumseh "the Iron Mouth." He no longer spoke with the warmth of a brother, but with the sharpness of a judge. And people listened because they sensed he meant every word.

The Americans noticed. Their tactic of pitting tribes against each other with treaties worked less well where Tecumseh appeared. No one dared to sign openly when he was around. He had turned shame into a weapon.

This made it more dangerous than any musket.

Harrison and his men cursed. "That damned Shawnee," one growled, "gives us more trouble with his mouth than with a hundred warriors."

Tecumseh knew he was walking on thin ice. Toughness could strengthen the alliance—or break it. But for him, there was no alternative. A weak alliance was dead anyway. Better it break now than fall apart later in battle.

He told his closest companions: "We must be like stone. Stone doesn't break; it only shatters if it's not strong enough. We mustn't become soft like wood, which rots. Those who are lazy must go."

Thus, treason became not just a stigma, but a death sentence. Men who signed treaties were ostracized, expelled from the villages, and sometimes killed.

It was cruel, but it worked. The alliance became harder, purer, more relentless.

The Americans soon realized they had created something different than they had planned. They wanted to weaken, divide, and drain Tecumseh's movement. But with every betrayal they sponsored, with every chief they bought off, they only made Tecumseh harder, more intransigent.

They had not created a broken man, but one whose hatred had turned into steel.

And steel can be bent, but not broken.

The harder Tecumseh became, the quieter the betrayal became.

In the past, a chief would sign openly, take whiskey and rifles, and everyone would know he'd sold out. Now, hardly anyone dared to do so directly. The fear of Tecumseh's wrath, of his cutting voice, of shame, was too great.

But betrayal found other ways.

One man remained silent when scouts arrived from Vincennes. Another gave information to the Americans but called it "negotiation." A third hid a bottle of whiskey under the blanket while swearing loyalty to the League in meetings.

It was no longer the grand betrayal with a seal and signature. It was the small betrayal, the quiet cracks that no one immediately saw.

Tecumseh sensed it. He had an eye for faces. He saw when a man squinted when he spoke. He heard when a silence was too long. He smelled when the whiskey rose from his breath, even though his mouth swore it was sober.

But he couldn't be everywhere.

So the smoke spread again—not as flames, but as fog. No one knew who was friend and who was foe. Not everyone who remained silent was a traitor. But everyone who remained silent could be one.

Thus, mistrust crept through the villages. Men watched their brothers. Women whispered if one of them was out too late at night. Children listened and knew early on that no one was completely safe.

Tecumseh fought against this invisibility by becoming even more visible. He spoke louder, traveled farther, held meetings, shook hands, and looked men deep in the eyes. He tried to drown doubt before it took root.

"You want peace?" he roared. "Then look at the white people! They talk about peace with their tongues and shoot with their hands. You want security? Then stand with me! Security only exists when we are together. Everything else is a lie."

Many nodded, many swore to be loyal to him. But at night he asked himself: *How many lie to my face?*

Because he knew: fear is a powerful ally of the whites. There was no need to buy every man—just enough to leave doubt.

Once a scout came to him and said, "They're talking, Tecumseh. They say you want to lead us into a war we can't win."

Tecumseh laughed coldly. "Maybe they're right. Maybe we'll lose. But what's the alternative? Live in chains? Die in the dirt? I'd rather die standing than continue breathing on my knees."

But he knew: Not everyone had that courage. Not everyone wanted to die standing up. Some just wanted to keep breathing, no matter what.

And that was the real betrayal: not in treaties, not in whiskey, but in the fear that made men weak.

Tecumseh realized he was fighting two wars: one against the whites—and one against the shadows in the hearts of his people.

The smoke still hung over Prophetstown, even though the ashes had long since cooled. It was no longer visible smoke, not from fire, but from people. From their lies, from their fears, from their weak hearts.

Tecumseh often stood by the river and stared into the water. The Ohio rushed indifferently, as always. But something else roared in his head: voices. The voices of those who had followed him. The voices of those who had fallen. And the voices of those who wavered.

He knew he could never completely banish the smoke. Betrayal was like fog—it crept through cracks, always finding a way. There would always be men weaker than hunger, thirstier than honor, who would rather drink a drop of whiskey than bleed for a dream.

But he also knew: smoke couldn't be caught, only drowned out. With fire.

And so he swore to himself that his fire had to be greater than any smoke. That his voice had to be louder than any whisper. That his anger had to be harder than any poison.

He gathered the survivors, the doubters, the faithful, and the half-hearted. He stood in the center of the circle, his face hard as stone.

"You've seen betrayal," he began. "You've seen men who sold our land. You've seen men who valued whiskey more than their children. You've seen men who lie, who are weak, who fall into the hands of the white man."

He paused briefly, letting the words hang like nooses.

"But you saw me too. I'm still standing. I haven't sold, I haven't drunk, I haven't lied. I stand here because I know: Our land belongs to all of us. Our blood belongs to all of us. Our future belongs to all of us. Whoever sells it doesn't just sell themselves—they sell all of us."

He drew his knife and rammed it into the ground. "This is the line. Traitors remain on the other side. Brothers remain on this side. Whoever chooses a side has chosen forever."

The men nodded, some hesitantly, some resolutely. Women held their children tighter, old people murmured prayers.

"The white men fight with smoke," cried Tecumseh. "I fight with fire. And I tell you, my fire will be greater. They may burn our huts, trample our fields, make our women weep. But as long as I live, as long as my heart beats, their smoke will not quench my fire."

It wasn't magic, no prophecy, no vision like his brother's. It was just a man swearing everything he had. But that was enough.

The men beat their chests, the women screamed, the children stared wide-eyed. For a moment, the smoke was gone. Only fire remained.

Tecumseh knew the smoke would return. Always. But he had decided that each time it would burn anew, harder, brighter, longer.

For betrayal in the smoke was powerful. But a fire that refused to go out was stronger.

And so this chapter ended not with victory, not with defeat, but with an oath: That Tecumseh would fight not just against armies, but against every shadow, every lie, every betrayal. That he would hold the alliance together not with parchment, but with blood and fire.

British promises, red uniforms

The first Redcoats looked as if they had fallen from another world. Their coats were blood red, so red that even in the forest mists they looked like glowing coals. Their boots gleamed, their rifles flashed, and they marched in ranks as if they had been trained by the forest.

For the Shawnee, the Delaware, and the Kickapoo, they were a sight full of contradictions. On the one hand, they were enemies—white men, like the Americans, with cannons, with flags, with drums. On the other, they were hopeful—for they hated the same people who had burned Tippecanoe.

Tecumseh saw them, examined them, and knew immediately: These men are not brothers. But perhaps they are tools.

The British were polite, smooth, and spoke in a language that sounded like iron. "You are warriors," they said, "we respect that. The Americans are rebels, thieves. We'll help you if you help us."

They offered weapons—muskets, powder, lead. Things Tecumseh needed. Things his men wanted. They also offered food, blankets, tea, rum. But the most important thing were the bullets. No vision, no smoke, no promise—just metal that killed.

Tecumseh listened, nodded, and remained silent for a long time. Then he said: "You give us weapons because you need us. Not because you love us. I know that. But I'll take what you give—and I'll fight. Not for you. For us."

The British nodded and smiled. They knew he saw through them. But what did it matter? A man who sees through you can still use you.

In the villages, people soon began talking about the red uniforms. Some saw them as a salvation, others as new chains. "What if they betray us like the Americans?" the old men asked. "What if their promises are smoke?"

Tecumseh responded harshly: "Perhaps they are liars. Perhaps they are robbers. But they are giving us what we need to defeat the Americans. I would rather trust a liar who gives me a gun than a liar who takes my land."

This is how the alliance began – not out of friendship, but out of necessity.

The Redcoats viewed Tecumseh with respect. They realized he was more than a warrior. A leader, a strategist, a man with fire in his voice. One said quietly, "He's more of a general than many who wear a uniform in London."

But they also realized he couldn't be bought. He took their weapons, but not their orders. He spoke to his warriors, not their officers. "We fight side by side," he said, "but not under their banner."

That was Tecumseh's way: he knew that alliances are only as strong as the common enemy. As long as Americans robbed land, as long as Harrison breathed, as long as the frontier burned, the alliance would hold.

But he also knew: When the war was over, the Redcoats would leave. And then all that would remain would be the forest—and the question of who controlled it.

But that was the future. Now was the present. And the present demanded weapons.

The British understood theater. When they entered a village, they never did so quietly. They marched with drums, flags fluttering in the wind, red uniforms

flashing like blood in the sunlight. They wanted to make an impression, they wanted to appear like men who had everything under control—even if they didn't.

They gave speeches that lasted longer than some children's hunger. "The British Empire does not forget its friends," they said. "We will protect you. We will stand by you. We will fight with you until the rebels are defeated."

The warriors listened, nodded, but there was suspicion in their eyes. They had already heard enough promises. Enough words that sounded like honey and tasted like ash.

Tecumseh stood beside them, his arms folded. He let the redcoats talk, let them shine, let the drums beat. But when the speeches were over, he stepped forward himself.

"You heard them," he cried. "They talk fine words. But words are nothing. Only weapons count. Only blood counts. They give us weapons – for that we thank them. But don't forget: We are not fighting for the king across the great sea. We are not fighting for their flag, which flutters like a leaf. We are fighting for our land, for our children, for our ancestors."

His voice cut through the officers' polished sentences like a knife. And the warriors listened because he spoke how they felt: clearly, firmly, without sugarcoating.

The British didn't flinch. They were polite enough to smile, even though they knew this man wasn't a subordinate. He was a partner, and a partner who couldn't be bought was more dangerous than an enemy.

After the speeches, the Redcoats showed off their gifts: crates full of shiny, oiled muskets. Powder kegs. Pouches of bullets. Blankets, brass buttons, rum. The warriors saw the rifles, held them in their hands, smelled the oil, and their eyes sparkled.

Because a musket was not a lie. A bullet was not a promise. A musket fired. A bullet killed. That was reality, not smoke.

Tecumseh raised a musket, held it high, and shouted, "This is what we need! Not words, not treaties—this! This is how we beat them. This is how we take back what they took from us."

The men screamed, the circle shook, and even the women nodded.

But when the enthusiasm had died down, he spoke quietly to his closest people: "Don't trust them. They're helping us because it benefits them. When the war is over, they'll disappear, and we'll be alone again. Use them. But don't give in to them."

His companions nodded. They knew Tecumseh was clear-sighted. They also knew that many warriors were easily seduced—by shining guns, by rum, by flags. Therefore, it was important that he repeatedly drew the line: "Take what you need. But stay true to yourself."

The British understood this attitude and hated it at the same time. They would have preferred Tecumseh as a subject, as an officer in a red uniform, perhaps even as a symbol of their power. But they only got him as an ally—and as a man who could stand alone at any moment.

And that made him more valuable. But also more unpredictable.

The Redcoats knew that weapons alone weren't enough. A rifle shoots, yes, but a promise shoots longer. So they added more.

They promised protection: "If you are with us, we will protect your villages. The Americans will not dare to attack you."

They promised land: "After victory, your borders will be secured. No one will drive you away again."

They promised glory: "You will be the allies of the most powerful empire in the world. Your names will be spoken in London, in the King's halls."

It was a web of golden threads, spun by men with polite voices and neat uniforms. Some warriors looked reverent, as if they had already sensed the promised safety.

But Tecumseh stood beside them, his arms folded, his face dark. When the officers were finished, he stepped forward.

"Protection?" he said coldly. "They promise protection. Who will protect us from them when they leave again? Where were the British when our fathers fell on the Ohio? Where were they when Harrison burned our cabins? Protection is a word. Not a man. Not a shield. Not blood."

The British didn't bat an eyelid.

"Land?" Tecumseh continued, his voice like an axe. "They promise land. But land doesn't belong to anyone who can't defend it. Do you think they'll give it to us? No. We must take it. With our hands, with our weapons. They can't give us land that's already ours. That's like a man giving you your own heart."

A murmur went through the warriors.

"Glory?" Tecumseh laughed harshly, a bitter, barking laugh. "Glory? What good is glory in London when my children are starving here in the forest? What good is a name in a king's ear when my wife is choking in smoke? Glory is a word for men who already have everything. We have nothing. We don't need glory. We need life."

He was silent, just for a moment, and the silence was harder than any speech.

Then he raised a musket the Redcoats had brought. "But this," he cried, "this is no promise. This is real. This is iron. This kills. This is what we need. Take their weapons. But don't believe their words. Use them—and when the day comes that they leave, at least we'll have this in our hands."

The warriors shouted their approval, stamped their feet, and called his name. The officers smiled thinly, politely, like men who had just been punched in the face and were pretending to smell flowers.

They knew Tecumseh had stolen the show. But they also knew that without him, they had nothing.

Thus a strange alliance was formed: the British with their red flags and big words, and Tecumseh with his harsh truths and his fire. They needed each other—but they didn't trust each other.

And that made this alliance dangerous. For both sides.

The alliance of red uniforms and warriors from the forests was tested not in speeches, but in blood.

The first skirmishes were small. American settlers who had advanced too far blocked outposts and patrols. For the British, they were sideshows; for Tecumseh, they were rehearsals. He wanted to see how the Redcoats fought, how they marched, how they died.

And he saw that they fought differently than his people.

The redcoats stood in rows, rigid, like trees driven into the ground. They fired in volleys, in order, with drums, with commands. It was like a theater, except that at the end, men died.

His warriors laughed at this at first. "They're like targets!" they said. "We'd fight like that and everyone would be dead!"

But then they saw how the ranks held. How the volleys mowed down entire groups of Americans. How the drums kept their spirits alive as the smoke grew thicker.

"They are fools," muttered one of his warriors, "but fools with discipline."

Tecumseh nodded. "Discipline is a weapon. Don't forget that."

But if the Redcoats had discipline, then his warriors had the forest. They moved between trees, appeared, disappeared, struck from the flank. They fought like shadows, not like lines. And while the British fired volleys, the warriors exploited the gaps, the screams, the chaos.

So they complemented each other – fire and smoke, order and wilderness.

In a skirmish on the edge of the Michigan Territory, American troops were surprised on both sides: by the Redcoats in their ranks and by Tecumseh's men, who exploded from the woods. The Americans broke, fled, abandoning wagons, rifles, and supplies.

A British officer approached Tecumseh after the battle and patted him on the shoulder. "You fight like the devil himself," he said.

Tecumseh looked at him coolly. "No. I fight like a man who has been stripped of everything."

The officers admired him. They saw how he led his men, not with drums, not with commands, but with looks, with gestures, with a few harsh words. They saw that he was in the thick of the fight, not at the rear, not on a horse that stood securely, but at the front where bullets flew.

And they understood: Tecumseh wasn't an ally to be moved like a chess piece. He was a force, a storm that could be harnessed—or consumed.

His warriors grew with every battle. They saw that the British were different, but not useless. They saw that red uniforms, while stupid in the forests, were powerful when combined with shadows.

And they began to believe in the alliance. Not in the words of the British, not in the king in London, but in the fact that guns and warriors together could bring the Americans to their knees.

But Tecumseh remained suspicious.

After each victory, he walked through the camp, saw the British drinking, laughing, officers writing. And he thought: *When the war is over, they will leave. And then?*

He knew this wasn't home. It was a workshop. A place where he forged weapons, gathered courage, and gained time. Nothing more.

But for the moment it worked.

And in the smoke of the battlefield, the British realized what they had in him. They didn't have a puppet, they had a lion. And you don't tie lions with ropes. You march with them—or you get eaten.

The British had understood that Tecumseh was more than just one chief among many. He was the knot that held the threads together. Without him, the net would fall apart. With him, it remained taut.

And so they tried to bind him to themselves.

One evening, after a skirmish near the Detroit River, the officers invited him into their tent. A table covered with cloths, candles, and glasses of rum. They had tried to make it feel like a piece of London—in the middle of the forest.

A major, with gold buttons and a face like stone, rose. "Tecumseh," he began, "you have more courage, more intelligence, and more leadership than most men I know. In His Majesty's name, I offer you a rank. A place in our army. You would be an officer, serving alongside us. Honor, glory, perhaps even a decoration."

The officers nodded as if this were a gift no man could refuse.

Tecumseh was silent for a long time. Then he let out a laugh that sounded harsh and bitter.

"A rank?" he asked. "A medal? Do you want to give me a red coat too, so I look like you? Do you want me to take orders from London while my people starve?"

The major cleared his throat. "It would be a recognition..."

"Recognition?" Tecumseh stepped closer, his voice a thunderous thunder. "I don't need recognition. I need land. I need our children not to die in the smoke. I need your guns in my hands when the Americans come. That's all."

Silence in the tent. The officers looked at each other. Some ashamed, some insulted, some simply astonished.

Tecumseh continued: "I'm not fighting for your king. I'm not fighting for your flag. I'm fighting for my people. If you don't understand that, you don't understand anything."

He reached for the glass of rum and tipped it out, letting the liquid seep into the ground. "That's what your medals are worth to me. Nothing. They'll disappear into the dirt like water."

The officers remained polite, they had to. But they knew: This man couldn't be bought.

Later, outside by the fire, Tecumseh told his warriors about it. "They wanted to give me rank," he said. "They wanted me to be an officer of their king."

The men laughed loudly, mockingly. One shouted, "Maybe they'll give you another crown!"

Tecumseh nodded seriously. "They want to bind me. But I won't be bound. I'll take their weapons, yes. I'll take their bullets. But I remain free. We all remain free. No red cloak, no medal, no rank can save us. Only ourselves."

This was passed on among the warriors like an oath: "No rank. No medal. Only land."

And so it came to pass that the British had an ally—but never a subject. Tecumseh remained Tecumseh, and the red uniforms could not color him.

For the British, it was frustrating. For his people, it was proof that he would never give in.

And for Tecumseh, it was clear: if he was going to form an alliance with an empire ruled across the sea, he would do so only in his own way. With open eyes, without illusions.

For medals only shine in the light. But the land also shines in the shadows.

After the small skirmishes, after the speeches, after the theater of medals and ranks, the moment came when the words had to stop. It was time for blood.

The British had their sights set on an American fortress, an outpost of stockades and blockhouses, somewhere in the Michigan border region. Not large, not impenetrable, but a symbol. If it fell, it would show the Americans: The border is burning.

The officers drew maps, discussed cannons, routes, and supplies. They thought in lines, in commands, in drums. Tecumseh thought in trees, in shadows, in shouts.

"You strike from the front," he said. "We strike from the sides. If they aim at you, we'll come out of the woods. If they chase us, they'll run into your volleys. They shouldn't know where death comes from. From ranks or from shadows. From drums or from silence. From both."

The British nodded, impressed. One murmured, "He thinks like a general."

The days leading up to the battle were tense. Tecumseh's warriors prepared with rituals, painted their faces, and chanted war cries as if they wanted to awaken the spirits themselves. The British polished their rifles, formed their ranks, and rehearsed their drums as if they were on parade. Two worlds, two ways of fighting—and yet, at the edge of the battlefield, two blades of the same axe.

When morning came, the fog was heavy, and the grass was wet with dew. The British drums began, dull and steady. Rows of redcoats began to move, rifles gleamed, bayonets flashed.

Tecumseh's men lay in the trees, motionless as shadows.

As the first American shots rang out, as bullets pierced the ranks of redcoats, Tecumseh rose with a cry like thunder. His warriors burst from the woods, like shadows suddenly made flesh. They struck flanks, backs, leaving behind screams, smoke and arrows, bullets and knives.

The Americans were confused. They knew how to fight against the Redcoats—rank against rank, volley against volley. But how do you fight when death comes from all sides?

The British pressed forward, their cannons fired, the wood of the stockades splintered. Tecumseh's men swarmed around, burning the huts, chasing the soldiers from the trenches.

It wasn't a long fight. It was a hard blow, swift, deadly. The American fort fell, the flag was torn down, and the smoke rose, this time not from Shawnee huts, but from American blockhouses.

After the victory, the warriors cheered, shouted, sang, and danced around the fires. The British stood at attention, blew trumpets, and held flags high. Two ways of celebrating, but both knew: It was a sign.

The Americans had thought the tribes were alone. Now they knew: the Redcoats were with them. And worse still, Tecumseh was with the Redcoats.

The officers approached him politely, shaking hands with him, using words like "brave" and "irreplaceable." One even said, "With you, Tecumseh, we could conquer the entire frontier."

Tecumseh just nodded. He knew they needed him now, and that he needed them now. But he didn't forget: they would leave eventually.

He later spoke to his men around the fire: "Look what we can do. Together with them, we have won. But don't forget: when the war is over, they will take their flags and go home. Our home is here. We fight for ourselves. Never for them."

And the men nodded because they felt that this was the truth.

The smoke above the captured fortress still hung in the trees when the British raised their flag. Red on gray, a linen banner fluttering in the wind like a victory anthem. The trumpets sounded shrill notes, the drums pounded. For the Redcoats, it was a triumph, a piece of history to be told in London.

Tecumseh's men watched, silent, their faces still painted, their hands still covered in blood. Some grinned, some roared, some just stood there, watching the fire they had set. For them, it was not a triumph—just revenge. A settlement. A step forward.

The British talked of honor. Tecumseh talked of land.

In the days following the victory, officers repeatedly returned to him. "This was just the beginning," they said. "With you at our side, we will push the Americans back to the Ohio. Perhaps to the Mississippi."

Tecumseh listened, nodded, but inside he thought: *They talk about borders, but not ours. They talk about maps, not huts. They talk about lines on paper, not fields we plow, rivers we fish in.*

At night, when the camp grew quieter, he sat by the fire with his closest men. "Look at them," he said, pointing to the British tents, to the flags fluttering like shadows in the moonlight. "They are strong, yes. They give us guns, yes. But they are not here because they love us. They are here because they hate the Americans. If the Americans are weak, they will go back across the sea. And then we will be alone again."

The men nodded. They knew he was right. But they also knew the weapons they held in their hands were real, heavy, deadly. "As long as we need them, we'll take them," one said. "After that, we'll see."

Tecumseh nodded. "Exactly. We are not servants. We are allies—as long as it benefits us."

The British didn't like to hear it, but they knew it. Some officers whispered in their tents, "This man is uncontrollable." Others said, "That's precisely why he's useful."

Thus, an alliance was born that shone on the outside—rows of redcoats next to warriors in war paint, cannons next to tomahawks. For the Americans, it was a nightmare: two worlds united against them.

But deep down, it was a trade. A trade in weapons, in blood, in mistrust.

Tecumseh knew he had danced with the devil. But he also knew that without this dance, there would soon be nothing left. No villages. No rivers. No children.

So he danced on, hard, relentless. He took the rifles, he took the powder, he took the cannons. But he never took the flag.

And that made the difference.

For no matter how brightly the Redcoats shone, no matter how much they drummed, the heart of the Alliance beat not in London, not in the officers' tents. It beat in Tecumseh. In his anger, in his fire, in his unbroken voice.

The British may have thought they had an ally. But in reality, they had unleashed a storm.

And storms cannot be tamed.

Whiskey for Cannons – the Alliance with the Redcoats

The British knew the price of tribes. They had learned it through years of trade, years of cunning. Some tribes demanded furs, others demanded protection, still others just a few shining knives. But the easiest way to do it was with whiskey.

Whiskey was the key. Whiskey turned warriors into supplicants, leaders into clowns, men into wrecks. The British knew this, and the Americans knew it too. And so whiskey was always in the game.

Tecumseh despised it. He had seen men who had fought bravely turn into drooling shadows after a few sips. He had seen entire councils collapse because whiskey was placed on the table. For him, it was worse than any bullet—because it killed from within.

But he also knew that whiskey was a currency. One he couldn't always avoid.

The British brought it in barrels, rolled them into the villages, and placed them next to crates of guns. An officer once cynically remarked: "You can tie more logs with whiskey than with a hundred cannons."

Tecumseh was there, heard it, and his eyes darkened. "You can kill more men with whiskey than with a hundred cannons," he said coldly. "I don't need drunken warriors. I need warriors who can shoot."

The officers laughed politely, but they understood that he was serious.

But the temptation remained. His own men quarreled, because some wanted the barrel, others the powder. Some said, "If they give us weapons, what harm will a little whiskey do?" Others said, "Whiskey makes us weak. Tecumseh is right."

So every barrel became a fight – not against the British, but among each other.

Tecumseh found his way to deal with it: He took the barrels, had them opened—and poured them out. In front of everyone. The whiskey seeped into the ground, and the men stared, some with anger, some with shame.

"This," he said, "is poison. You want to fight? Then drink water. You want to fall? Then drink this."

It was brutal, uncompromising, but it made an impression. Some hated him for it, but even more respected him. Because everyone knew: A man who turned down whiskey was a man who couldn't be bought.

The British viewed this with mixed feelings. One of their traders whispered, "He's destroying our best tools." Another said, "No, he's making them stronger. And when they're stronger, they're more useful to us."

Thus the alliance was formed: cannons for whiskey, rifles for blood. Tecumseh tried to destroy the whiskey while keeping the cannons. The British knew they had to give him weapons to keep him happy. And both sides knew: this wasn't an alliance based on trust, but a business deal.

A shop that stank of iron and alcohol.

Tecumseh later called it "the bill." He said, "For every musket they give us, they demand blood. For every barrel of powder, they demand we send our men. For every cannon, they demand we stand beside them. It's not friendship, it's trade. Trade in corpses."

And yet he accepted it. Because he knew: without guns, without bullets, without cannons, his dream would die.

The first barrels of gunpowder had sparked excitement. The first crates of muskets had brought jubilation. Men held the weapons in their hands like children hold toys. They smelled the oil, weighed the weight, felt the explosion. For many, it was a promise: Finally, they could meet the Americans on equal terms.

But they soon realized: every box came with a price.

The British never gave anything without a demand. For a barrel of powder, they wanted twenty warriors as scouts. For a cannon, they wanted an entire village to help transport it. For every musket, they wanted men to fight in their ranks.

Tecumseh saw it clearly: "They give us weapons so that we will die for them."

His warriors grumbled, but many accepted it. "We need the weapons," they said. "What should we do? Fight with arrows against rifles?"

Tecumseh nodded, but his eyes remained hard. "We'll take their weapons, yes. But we're fighting for ourselves. Don't forget that. Every shot you fire is for our country, not for their king."

But the British pressed on. The more successes the alliance achieved, the more they wanted control. They wanted Tecumseh to take orders. They wanted his men to become part of their strategy, not just allies.

Once, during a meeting, a British officer slammed his fist on the table: "If you want our weapons, then you must obey our orders!"

Tecumseh stood up, slowly, with a look that froze the entire room. "I'll take your weapons," he said. "But I won't take orders. I won't follow any man who isn't my brother. I'll fight with you if you fight the Americans. But I won't fight for you. Never."

The officer started to object, but another placed a hand on his shoulder and whispered, "Leave him alone. Without him, we're blind out here."

Thus, the alliance remained a balancing act: the British gave, Tecumseh took. But with every gun they delivered, they bound him more tightly to themselves.

And Tecumseh knew it. He called them "the chains of iron." Not the chains of slavery, but the chains of dependence. "Every bullet we fire," he told his men, "binds us more closely to them. And yet—without bullets, we die faster. So we fire. But we don't forget who forges the chains."

Sometimes at night he wondered if he wasn't making the same mistake as those who had signed treaties. They had sold land to buy time. He took up arms to buy time. Was that so different?

But he calmed himself with a single thought: "The difference is that I will turn their weapons against themselves if necessary."

And so he swallowed his anger, took the crates, took the cannons, and let his men learn to kill with them. But in his heart, he knew: any deal with the Redcoats was a deal with the devil.

A deal he only made because the alternative was worse: having nothing at all.

Tecumseh took the weapons like a man takes a dagger: not out of love, not out of zeal, but because he knew that without the metal, his hand would remain empty. He took the crates of muskets, the barrels of powder, the cannons, and didn't simply lay them in rows. He distributed them like fates. No one received more than they could handle. Every man who received a rifle also received lessons. No schoolboy nonsense—shoot, load, aim; that was all. In the days after Tippecanoe, people learned at night because they had no time to practice during the days.

The British demanded allegiance, maps, coordination. They wanted Tecumseh's men to ride on command, march in line, and raise signal flags. They dreamed of an army that obeyed them like the red lines in Europe. Tecumseh smiled and showed them what they really needed: variance. Lines and shadows. Drums and silence. He had his men practice volleys in organized fire—but only so they knew how the other side thought. He also had them sneak in the bushes, lay hatches, dig traps, appear suddenly, whistle, and disappear. He didn't make his men British. He made them deadly half-breeds.

And he outplayed the British. Not with sycophancy, but with logic. When the officers demanded that his men participate in an advance, he agreed, but he set conditions: certain paths would be secured by his men, certain houses were not to be looted, and most importantly—his men would fight where it hurt the Americans, not where the British command thought proper. The officers growled, for they hadn't imagined an ally would impose conditions. But they had no choice: without his warriors, their ranks were thin, and the border was large.

Thus began the campaigns that no general staff in Europe would have appreciated: moving fire at night, paralyzing fogs of smoke and rumor during the day. Tecumseh stole between the lines like a hand stealing a man's watch, without him noticing. He waged small fratricidal wars with his tomahawks, let the British fire the big salvos, and gathered the loot that fell from drifting wagons and fleeing convoys. The British watched, sometimes indignant, often relieved, and slowly learned that war is not just about cannons and marching formations.

In one of these skirmishes, on a river arm, Tecumseh's skillful use of the new weapon became apparent. The British traditionally open fire, setting their lines in motion, and when the enemy fell into chaos, the woodsmen leaped like shadows across the flanks. Tecumseh's men first fired in precise volleys, just

enough to break ranks, then rolled out of the undergrowth in a swarm, muskets in hand, tomahawk at the ready. American lines splintered; wagons were looted; the British took over the open positions, collecting prisoners. Afterward, little revenge was taken—only the bare minimum. Tecumseh taught parsimony in anger, because raw rage cost men who could not be replaced.

The British learned to respect his tactics; they learned that the combination of British discipline and Indian cunning was a machine that could kill better than either alone. One major noted in his notebook: "*Tecumseh is not a chief like the others. He is a leader; he sees war as a river, not a road.*" And that was a compliment that shone through like rusty steel: admiration seasoned with fear.

But Tecumseh remained suspicious. Suspicion was his second weapon. He ordered that British crates be inspected, that rifles be marked, and that men caught with too much rum be punished—not only with shame, but sometimes with beatings. He had traders who appeared in the villages with whiskey monitored; anyone caught a second time lost the right to trade. This wasn't popular. Many were hungry, many were starving for the effect of rum on fonal tongues. But it kept the men together.

And Tecumseh wielded politics like a knife. He mixed talk, threats, rewards, and cunning. If the British demanded he hold a post, he let it be held—but only with his men on the flanks. If they demanded he send men to their standard, he sent just enough to give their plan credibility, not enough to diminish his fighting power. He was a wick: it was allowed to burn, but not so much that the house was on fire.

Some of his men grumbled. "Why do we share? Why not take everything?" asked a young warrior. Tecumseh sat down, rubbed his eyes, and said, "Because then we'll lose everything. We are not blind. We are hungry, but we are not stupid. We take the weapon, we learn its song, but we master it. When the king leaves, we no longer need the songs; we need hands that can shoot."

The British realized that while they were giving ammunition and rifles, they were also getting loyalty in the heat of battle, and that was worth more than a barrel of rum. An officer once said, half grinning, half resigned, "He's hard to buy, but easy to appreciate when he's not against you."

Yet the chain of dependence remained. Tecumseh juggled it like a tightrope walker, but he knew that every iron band he accepted could become a noose. Whenever a British cannon barrel was fired, it garnered the attention of the entire region; convoys changed their routes, settlers retreated, and

Washington wrote threatening letters. The world changed because cannons rattled.

So he learned the game more deeply: he used the British to force the Americans to make mistakes. He let the British appear at key points, but he ensured that the consequences of his actions cost the Americans more than the British themselves. He caused losses among them, destruction in settlements, panic in the ranks—and while the British celebrated the victories, he chalked up the bill at the Chalice: *For every victory we win with their weapons, we pay with sons, with men, with blood.*

At the end of this section, one night after rain, Tecumseh sat alone, his rifle beside him like a new tabernacle. He stared at the scar on his hand, from a bullet that never fully came out, and thought how close to the devil one comes when one dances with him. He took a sip of water, not rum, and muttered, "We use their weapons. But we will not become their masters. Never."

And so he continued—with guns, with ruses, with blades, with a willingness to exploit the alliance as long as it served him. He played the British as if they were playing cards, but he knew: cards could change. And he was ready to throw the cards away when it was time to fight in the shadows again—without flags, without medals, with only what his people needed: land, life, a future.

That was the strange thing about alliances: on the outside, they looked like treaties, on the inside, like wounds. Lines and names were written on the maps; hands were shaken and medals exchanged in tents—and yet, at dawn, it was always the men with the dirtiest hands who left everything covered in blood. Tecumseh had long since understood that war wasn't won only on fields. It was decided in villages, on riverbanks, in huts—and in people's minds.

The British supplied muskets, cannons, and powder. They supplied officers with batons and pencils, maps that made their terrain look perfect on the smooth paper. They also supplied traders who waved shining knives and cloth, and riot policemen who rolled bottles of brown liquid around the camp's belly. All together, they were a machine—and Tecumseh was the man who rearranged the gears.

He took the cannons and set them up, but he didn't let them fire blindly at villages. He didn't want his people to become mechanical instruments of murder, shooting down every wooden fence and every hut. He instructed the British to aim their shots, not to destroy blindly. "Destroy the strongholds, not the women's food supplies," he once said so sharply that the British officer

paused. "You want to break them? Then break the weapons. Not the children's lives."

Some British flushed with anger; others saw it as a clever tactic. On their maps, the villages were dots. In Tecumseh's eyes, they were people. This separation was the reason why he simultaneously needed and despised the British. They could shoot, but they could not mourn; they could not repair, could not assess what could still be salvaged.

As campaigns unfolded, he meticulously balanced his actions: he sent riflemen into the redcoats' ranks to counter discipline with fire; he deployed his men where cannons were insufficient; he ensured that convoys panicked, not disorganized. His warriors became not just soldiers; they became thieves of supplies, rescuers of women, gatherers of intelligence. Every step was calculated.

The British saw that this combination made their manpower superiority astonishingly effective. One major wrote in his notebook: "If Tecumseh leads his men alongside our lines, we have insurance against surprises. He gives us views we don't have. We give him cane he can't build." It was a dirty trade from both sides: we give ammunition, you give us knowledge of routes no cartographer has.

But foreign policy is a theater, and in a theater, everyone plays a role. The moment Tecumseh let his men fire their rifles, sensitivities began to grow. British officers wanted prisoners, rituals, breadcrumbs that could be presented as victory. Tecumseh wanted back what had been sniffed out, stolen, and destroyed. When the officers demanded that certain hostages be held or handed over—for example, men considered "negotiators" or who had supposedly switched allegiances—Tecumseh gritted his teeth. He knew that political games often ended in the blood of innocents.

One boost that did work was the practical, everyday life: ammunition expires, rifles break, cannons overheat and need maintenance. Tecumseh ensured that the men learned how to repair the weapons, maintain the shotguns, and clean the barrels. British engineers helped, showing them how to burn out a barrel, check a bullet, and how to measure the charge. This knowledge was dangerous—because knowledge remains, even when people leave. When the king went home, men remained who knew how to adjust cannons.

Nevertheless, the more knowledge accumulated in the hands of the tribes, the more Tecumseh saw the other side: that his warriors could now do things that

had been foreign to them years before. A young Shawnee who had once lived with a bow and arrow now became a man who loaded a shotgun and fatally shot a rider before throwing the tomahawk at its target. The mixture of old cunning and new iron was deadly, and it changed the culture of war. It didn't make the men younger, but it did give them power.

And power breeds vanity—a danger Tecumseh guarded against. He saw that some men fell in love with the shining chests, that they spoke to a new musket as if it were an idol. He crushed this as soon as he saw it: those who treated weapons as jewelry, who posed with them, were punished, deterred, or assigned special tasks—far from their settlements, where temptation was great. He separated martyrs from pageantry. It was necessary, brutal, and it earned him dislike from some and respect from others.

The British, for their part, would see what they could, what they pushed for, how they could fit into the network. They wanted strategic bases, corridors, control over supply lines. Tecumseh knew that if he conceded territorial claims too readily, he would betray the work of centuries—of hunting, of plazas, of ancestral sites—with pen strokes on foreign maps. He used their maps as tools, not as books of destiny.

Occasionally, there was confrontation. An officer, accustomed to rigid European logic, ordered the capture of a village that, according to the map, was a "neutral point." Tecumseh stormed in, stood before the British men, and, in a voice that could be even louder than the drums, pointed out that "neutral" often only thought what Americans wanted—and that the people there didn't deserve it. The British, annoyed and disgusted, nevertheless rolled their eyes and eventually went along because their logic translated from day to day into their guns: a quick victory through cooperation was more valuable to them than moral debates. Sometimes it broke, but not often.

The frontier learned that blending both forms of warfare was effective. It also learned that the combination of tribal ritual and British discipline created something difficult to read. Whites in the East began using the word "dangerous" more frequently in their reports. Washington wrote letters in which one read of "coordinated Indian actions supported by the British"—and since time immemorial, alarmism has had more impact in politics than sober facts.

Tecumseh watched all this with two eyes. He saw progress. He saw blood. He saw children sharing supplies, men supporting each other in the rituals of waging. But he also saw that every battle, every victory, every cannon they

now used, extended the bill. Victory was paid for with sons. They would have to pay for the weapons they had now later, at the expense of their people, in a future where neither the British nor the Americans would have the same rules.

And he began to forge plans that went deeper than the next battles. He trained men, stationed skilled craftsmen with the British, and had young artisans study mechanics. He had lists compiled: who had received ammunition and when, who commanded which group, which supply routes were vulnerable. All of this was part of something that went beyond tactical victories. It was a plan with the goal of building an infrastructure—not in the name of London, but for the survival of his people. Today a cannon, tomorrow a gunpowder depot, the day after tomorrow perhaps even the ability to hold a remaining fort if the king disappears.

But by the campfire, at night, when the laughter of the British sounded more subdued in the tents and the drums were farther away, the truth lay like a heavy lump of metal in his chest: he was dancing with a devil whose steps he knew. He used his allies, but he would not end up the soldier under a foreign banner. When the time came, he would pick up the tools and use them—or destroy them. He would not go away and say, "Thank you, my king." He would go with weapons in his hand, ready to turn them on anyone who wanted to further plunder the land.

So the trade continued: Whiskey was rolled in barrels, sometimes opened and poured, but often enjoyed secretly; cannons roared, muskets fired, men fell, sons died. The British received victories in their accounts; Tecumseh received time and iron. Everyone played their game—but only one knew that in the end, no one would truly win if the child of the West didn't remain theirs.

One evening, as he once again looked at the men he led—rough, bloody, dirty, but with new knowledge in their hands—he said quietly: "We use their weapons, yes. But our goals remain ours. We build knowledge so that when you go home, we are not powerless. We build schools for those who can fix it. We learn not to forget. If you stay—good. If you leave—also good. But we are not your soldiers. We are our own men."

That was his pact with the devil: take without selling; learn without enslaving; kill without succumbing. And for the moment, as long as the guns still sang and the cannons still smoked, that was enough. It was enough to keep going.

The hell at the edge of the camp was quieter when the cannons fell silent. Then one could hear the crackling of ashes, the swallowing of stale bread, the quiet

cursing of the men as they dug their hands into the mud, searching for something that was no longer there. Victories clung like syrup to the rim of a glass—sticky, sweet, but quickly gone. Tecumseh didn't drink. He smelled the victories like one smells tinder: useful, but dangerous.

Trade with the British became more subtle, but remained crude. Goods came in crates; in the crates were muskets; in the muskets was death. It was that simple. And yet everything was as complicated as clockwork with broken gears: every delivery a promise, every demand a calculation. The British would send a few cannons, the traders would eat, the officers would praise them—and a month later, Tecumseh would be demanded to provide men to secure a corridor so a caravan could pass through. Without that caravan—no supplies. Without supplies—no war. That's how it all worked. "Businessman with a gun," Tecumseh once said sarcastically.

Dependence eroded through the ranks. It wasn't just a question of "to take or not to take." It was a question of who pays the price? Who goes out when the British say, "Send ten men, we'll strike there"? Who is willing to throw their sons into the fire so that an officer in a red uniform can write the glory in his diary? You can't win with foreign words; you can only win with blood.

Tecumseh made the inevitable his plan. He didn't say, "We'll take everything you give and thank you." He said, "We'll take, but we won't give everything. We are not your musketeers." And he wrote rules—not in parchment, which only white people loved anyway, but in blows, facial expressions, punishments that would not be forgotten. Anyone found with a case of rum in their tent was insulted, exposed, in the worst case, expelled, or sent to a place where temptation was far away. His men agreed: Rum is a bondage. Muskets are tools.

The British had their own reasons for pursuing the issue. In London, people thought in terms of opportunities, not morale. An officer arrived one evening with a list that read: *Bases, geographical points, possible sales channels*. His mouth smelled of tobacco, his eyes slid over the words like knives. "If we open this route," he said, "we can deliver two weeks faster. Then we'll be on the move." Tecumseh nodded, but he was thinking about other things: Who will pay for the long marches? Who will protect the women left behind? Who will plant corn when the men are gone?

He played the long-term strategy. He built small workshops where young men learned to clean shotgun barrels, test primers, and forge bells. He hired British engineers and had them teach the boys—secretly, strictly. Knowledge didn't

stick to uniforms. Knowledge stayed in the hands. When the British one day packed up their tents and marched away, something would remain: men who understood how a barrel worked, how to stop a cavalcade, how to ration ammunition. Tecumseh wanted this knowledge to stick to his men like resin to his hand.

But between the exercises, there was life: men who drank even small victories like medicine. An officer boasted about a village that had been burned to the ground as if it were a tangle of wood, not human life. A merchant—an animal with gold teeth—offered cloth, needles, sugar. A chief took it, and the camera of the time captured an image: a man holding a piece of cloth like a talisman, thinking he had won. Tecumseh spat on such images. One has often seen men sell themselves out because they had the feeling of something new in their hands. A rifle in the hand feels like a new statue of a god. Anyone who didn't know it was quickly considered stupid. Anyone who did became a priest.

But there was something worse than dependence: morale slowly crumbling into crumbs. If men who first fought out of pride later went for pay, it would no longer be the same war. Then they would no longer fight for the country. Then they would go for sleep, for the piece of bread that a feather would stop rustling. Tecumseh watched this with cold eyes: the souls of his fighters were the currency he couldn't yet risk.

When the British demanded that villages be "cleansed"—a fancy euphemism for burning farms—he sparkled. "Killed so an officer has less to worry about?" he once asked in a camp where the flames were still licking. "No. We are not destroying what we are defending." He was no humanist in the modern sense. He was a man who knew how to lose. But he was too proud to treat his people as mere material assets. He wouldn't allow that.

The British understood this, eventually. They were aware that this leader was different. They liked him nonetheless. Because a man who cannot be bought is often the most useful: he provokes respect, he commands loyalty, and he creates unity, things that no money alone can buy. But they, too, played their game: they realized that if Tecumseh accumulated too much power—if knowledge, weapons, and loyalty remained in his hands—then their usefulness would melt away. So they carefully scattered their own men: traders with lists, officers who asked for "strategic bases," as if a river only counted if it carried a flag.

Espionage didn't begin with dark figures in hoods, but with handshakes. A trader, laughing as he emerged from a tent, tucked notes into his vest. An

officer spoke to a chief while two men counted outposts. "Which roads are the roads?" one of the Britons asked casually. "Which bridges are old?" another asked. The questions were like water slowly eroding a castle. Tecumseh beheaded this calm when he saw it. He built exculpatory strategies: false roads, changed camps, messengers bringing different messages. If the enemy spies, make him the spy of his own choosing—or so he thought.

And then the bills. War devours. Not just people, but everything. Food, tools, blankets. The British delivered, yes, but not enough. Often the shipment was late; sometimes powder arrived instead of gunpowder, a mistake that cost lives. Men starved, women hammered a mortar, children nibbled on bark. This poverty was the real battlefield. Tecumseh had learned that you couldn't just fight skirmishes; you had to secure supplies. He organized ambushes on convoys, corn thefts, quick raids that retrieved food before the British could fill their coffers. It was messy logistics. But it worked.

And then, amidst the planning, the bloody realities: young men who rose up and never returned. Every death made the calculations heavier. Every mother who wept was like a bad balance sheet. Tecumseh reckoned in entire families. If ten men fell, twenty new hearts were needed to fill the gaps. The British had no idea how this mechanism worked. For them, a shot was a victory; for Tecumseh, a shot was often an empty seat at the table.

His response was two-pronged: he used the British, and he defused them. He taught men, bound them with honor, with duties, with paths they kept. He placed men in positions otherwise reserved for smugglers: guards of supplies, schools for gun maintenance, craftsmen. He built a small network that was more independent than it looked. This network would carry him when the colors receded.

Yet he knew: all this was just a breath of air. A breath that prolonged hope. If the British were to turn their backs one day—and they would, if politics in London chortled differently—then he wanted his people to still be breathing, not dying. So he formed a calculation harsher than any balance sheet: For every barrel of powder, an apprentice; for every cannon, a gunner; for every musket, a man who could repair it. Thus, not only would death come. There would also be survivors.

In the end, the realization remained that you can dance with the devil as long as you know his steps. Tecumseh knew the steps. He knew when to pull, when to release, when to let the enemy walk into a trap. And he knew that gold and

rum could never buy the life that lay in a cornfield. He knew that as surely as he knew his father's name.

So the trade continued: cannons fired, rum flowed secretly into corners, men trained, and the bills came in the night. Some repented, some laughed, some died. But Tecumseh, quietly, ceaselessly, was building something that was more than an alliance: a form of resistance that no king could buy. And that was perhaps the most dangerous weapon of all.

The alliance now had a rhythm. An ugly song that was hummed through the teeth: Britons bring crates. Shawnees take crates. Blood flows. New demands. New crates. More blood.

A deal like a heartbeat. Each blow pumped iron into the alliance and life from their bodies.

The British were masters of give and take. They knew how to hold the reins tightly without the horse noticing that it was already being led. "Ten rifles for you," they said. "In return, you will help us besiege this fort." "Two cannons," they said. "We need your men as a vanguard."

Tecumseh listened, nodded, agreed—but only in his own way. His men were not a vanguard, they were ghosts. No vanguard marched, no vanguard drummed. His men glided through the woods, struck from behind, slit throats in the fog. And when the British later said, "Our vanguard was fearless," he grinned to himself. *We were never your vanguard. We were merely our own storm.*

There were moments when anger almost boiled over. Once, a British officer ordered Tecumseh's warriors to storm a hill head-on, directly into the American rifles. Tecumseh stepped so close to him that their foreheads almost touched. "I will not send my men to die for your medals," he hissed. "We fight wisely, or we don't fight at all." The officer glared, but he knew: without Tecumseh, he would be blind in the forest. So he gritted his teeth and remained silent.

The British had to learn that Tecumseh was not a farmer who could be bought with coins. Not an officer who wore a red jacket and saluted orders. He was a man who held land and blood in his hands. And land could not be bought with coins, and blood could not be converted into medals.

Whiskey remained a constant poison in the game. The British rolled barrels as if they were drums. Sometimes in barter, sometimes as a bribe. Some tribes

immediately grabbed them, drank, fell, snored, gave their last shirt for a swig. Tecumseh fought it like the plague. When he found barrels, he had them cracked open. The brown poison ran into the ground, and the men watched like children being robbed of their candy. Some hated him for it. But everyone knew: he was right. Drunken warriors are dead warriors.

So he found himself caught between two fronts: between the British, who lured them with whiskey, and his own people, who were sometimes too weak to say no. And every time he poured the poison into the ground, it was a small victory—not a victory against the Americans, but against the creeping death from within.

The fighting with the British on his side wasn't always clean. Some battles were victories, others were just massacres. American settlers fled burning houses, children screamed, women were abducted. It was war without kid gloves. Tecumseh hated the part when everything got out of control. "We are not like them," he told his warriors. "We kill soldiers. We take back land. We won't be like them, burning down villages and driving children into the smoke." Some listened. Some didn't. War always eats more than you want to feed.

But even in the darkest nights, Tecumseh had a goal in mind. The alliance with the Redcoats was only a means, never an end. He took their cannons, their bullets, their logistics—and while the British thought he was fighting for the king, he knew he was fighting for no king. Only for the land, for the rivers, for the smoke that would no longer rise over Shawnee villages.

After a battle, as the British raised their flags and beat their drums, Tecumseh sat by the fire with his men. "Look at them," he said. "They're celebrating as if they've won the world. But when the war is over, they'll pack up their flags and sail home. Then we'll be alone again. So take their weapons, take their bullets—but never forget: this is our war. Not theirs."

And the men nodded. Some grumbled. Some whispered his words like an oath.

That was the core of the alliance: whiskey for cannons, blood for steel, talk for smoke. A deal with the devil that Tecumseh accepted because he knew that without this deal, there would soon be nothing left to trade.

Smoke hung heavy over the camps. Not just cannon smoke, but also the smoke from the whiskey some men had secretly drunk, even though Tecumseh had the barrels smashed. It was like an invisible enemy creeping through the ranks: the sweet intoxication that made everything easier—and everything weaker.

Tecumseh looked at the men slurring their words, saw their faces gleaming in the fire, saw how intoxication diminished them. For him, whiskey was worse than any American musket. One bullet killed a man, whiskey killed an entire nation, slowly, with a smile, with sips.

He had no patience for it. Whenever he found a barrel, he had it opened, kicked it over, and the brown stream seeped into the earth. His men grumbled, but they knew: this was the price of fighting under Tecumseh. He tolerated no weakness, no poison.

The British watched him, half amused, half irritated. For them, whiskey was a commodity, a lever, a currency. For Tecumseh, it was war—a war he took just as seriously as the one against the Americans.

And so the alliance was: useful, deadly, but rotten from the start.

The cannons fired, the muskets cracked, the lines marched. Tecumseh's warriors fought like shadows, and the British like red walls. Together they could burn American forts, tear apart convoys, and make entire territories unsafe. Together they created fear.

But every time the smoke cleared, Tecumseh saw what truly remained: corpses, hunger, strife. For every musket they won, a warrior fell. For every cannon they captured, a brother died. For every victory the British celebrated in their accounts, he had mothers who lost their sons.

That was the bill. Whiskey for cannons. Blood for steel.

One night, as the moon hung like a gray eye over the camp, he spoke to his closest men. "Hear me," he said. "The British give us what we need to fight. But they give us nothing left. Their cannons are heavy, their flags are empty. They fight because they hate America. We fight because we want to live. There's a difference."

The men nodded silently. They knew he was right.

"We take what they give," he continued. "We take their bullets, their powder, their cannons. But we never forget that they are not brothers. When the war is over, they sail away. But we stay here. And then all that matters is what we have learned. How to fight. How to survive. Not their flag. Never their flag."

It was a speech like an oath. It went from fire to fire, from tent to tent. The warriors repeated his words, some as a prayer, some as a threat.

The British celebrated victories, drank rum, and wrote letters. Tecumseh didn't celebrate. He sat at the edge of the camp, staring into the darkness, and thought about the future. About the children who were still laughing now. About the rivers that would one day flow freely again. About the villages that must not be allowed to disappear into smoke again.

He knew this alliance was fragile. He knew it would end as soon as the king had had enough, as soon as London decided the war was becoming too expensive.

But until then, he would use it. Until then, he would squeeze the British dry like one squeezes a sponge—weapons, knowledge, cannons. He took everything that was useful. But he never accepted the lie that this was friendship.

And so the chapter of this alliance ended not with jubilation, not with a treaty, not with a medal. It ended with a man who looked into the darkness and knew: *This is a deal with the devil. But sometimes you have to make the devil dance until he gets tired.*

Whiskey for cannons. Blood for steel. That was the alliance with the Redcoats. And Tecumseh knew: it was only as strong as his will to one day leave it behind.

The War of 1812 begins in the stench

War is never clean, but when it becomes official, it stinks even more. The summer of 1812 brought not only sunshine over the rivers, but also the putrid stench of politics, diplomacy, and gunpowder.

The Americans declared war. Great Britain was officially the enemy. Newspapers printed headlines, politicians gave speeches, flags were waved. In Washington, they roared that they would conquer Canada. In London, they wrote of "insurgents" who had to be put down again.

For Tecumseh, it was all theater. Big talk from men who had never smelled the smoke of burned cabins. Men who had never seen children lying in blood. For him, war wasn't politics. War was hunger, smoke, cold nights when you didn't know if you'd still be alive in the morning.

But the official war changed everything. Suddenly, the border was no longer a shadowy land. It was a battlefield with flags, drums, and marching orders. Suddenly, there were more red uniforms, more cannons, more officers with

shiny boots and fake smiles. Suddenly, the Americans believed they could oust the British in a few weeks.

Tecumseh saw this and just thought: *Now things are getting dirty.*

The British lined up, formed lines, loaded ships, and sent messages across the Atlantic. Everything was organized like clockwork—but a clockwork that creaked and stank because it ran on blood.

And in this stench stood Tecumseh. Not as a subject, not as an officer, but as the man who saw through both sides. He knew that the Americans believed they were fighting for freedom. Freedom to steal land. He knew that the British pretended to protect their colonies. In truth, they were protecting their businesses.

His men laughed bitterly. "Now they're fighting each other openly," they said. "And we're the ground they're treading on."

Tecumseh nodded. "Yes," he said. "And that's why we use it. If two dogs fight, the wolf can jump in between them."

But he felt the stench. It was more than smoke. It was politics, lies, treaties signed in cities far from the forest. It was whiskey in the stomachs, rum in the barrels, money in the pockets of men who would never fight.

The War of 1812 didn't begin with a major battle. It began with small advances, with soldiers drawing lines on maps, with generals sweating at tables. But you could smell it in the woods even before the cannons thundered.

It was the stench of leather boots, of sweat, of rotting flesh, of gunpowder that got wet in the rain and stank again in the fire. It was the stench of fear that hung in every camp because no one knew who would still be standing in the morning.

Tecumseh stood in the middle of it all, the only man not fighting for a flag. For him, this wasn't nation against nation. For him, it was a war for survival.

And he knew: This war would either save his people's world – or destroy it forever.

The Americans were loudmouths. "We're marching into Canada," their politicians yelled. "In three weeks, it'll be ours." Men in suits drew lines on maps as if war were a walk in the park.

But maps lie. Maps show lines, not forests. They show rivers, but not the swamp that will swallow you up. They show distances, but not hunger.

The first American advances were ludicrous. Militiamen who barely knew how to hold a rifle marched into the woods as if they were on a Sunday stroll. They laughed, sang, and carried flags until the first shot rang out. Then they ran.

Tecumseh viewed this with cold contempt. "These men want to conquer land?" he scoffed. "They can't even survive a night in the woods."

The British laughed too, but nervously. They knew that the Americans were foolish, but there were many of them. And that behind every failure stood a new recruit marching.

The first battles weren't battles, but chases. American troops advanced, stumbled, were ambushed, cut to pieces, and scattered by Tecumseh's men. The forest was no room for their lines. They became tangled, lost their bearings, and fired into the void.

Once, Tecumseh led only fifty men against an American vanguard of two hundred. They lay down in the mud, waited until the flag fluttered through the thicket, and then fired simultaneously. The chaos was complete. The Americans screamed, fell over each other, and ran, while Tecumseh's men pursued them like shadows. In the end, more shoes were left behind than rifles.

The British were impressed. One officer whispered, "He's worth more than an entire battalion." Another murmured, "He makes war out of nothing."

Tecumseh just thought: *I make war out of what they wanted to take from us.*

But as much as he ridiculed the Americans, he didn't underestimate them. He knew they would learn. Everyone who fled told stories. Everyone who survived took with them fear, but also experience. Tecumseh knew: They were clumsy, but not eternal.

The British, on the other hand, appeared weak in the first few weeks. Their officers argued over who was in command. Some wanted to wait, others to advance, and still others preferred to write reports to London. They had cannons, yes, but cannons are heavy, and the forests devoured them.

Tecumseh became the only one who saw the forest as a chessboard. For him, every tree was a piece, every river a bank, every fog a veil. He knew where to strike, where to disappear, where to keep the enemy squirming.

"War is not just cannons," he told the British. "War is deception. War is making the enemy run until he stumbles. War is making him starve before he even fires his musket."

They nodded politely, but they didn't understand. They knew battlefields, open fields, drums, lines. The forest was foreign to them.

And that's exactly what made Tecumseh so dangerous.

The Americans smelled of sweat, fear, and bad whiskey. The British smelled of tobacco, leather, and damp gunpowder. But over all of it hung the stench of war, now official but still like the same old game: men dying, officers writing, women crying.

The difference was that now more men were dying, more officers were writing, more women were crying.

And Tecumseh knew: This was just the beginning.

Humiliations are like burns: they hurt, but they also heal with scars, and scars make you stronger. The Americans lost in the first few weeks like peasants too drunk to hold an axe. But they learned.

They sent officers who not only drew maps but also drilled men. They brought in cannons, and they had militia practice how not to drown in the mud. They were still loud, still stupid, but less naive. And a naive enemy is easier to defeat than a patient one.

Tecumseh saw this early on. He knew people like that: fall, get up, and carry on. He had seen enough battles to know that a man who returns crying will return angrier the next day.

His warriors felt it too. "They don't run as fast anymore," one murmured after a skirmish. "They shoot more accurately."

Yes. The amateurs became soldiers.

And the British? The British were as always. Order, orders, discipline—and conflict in the background. Some wanted to advance, others waited, and still others were only concerned with their positions and medals. Tecumseh had no patience for their intrigues.

He knew: If he waited, they would lose. If he acted, they could survive. So he held his men together, closer than ever before.

He began to drill them harder. No long speeches, no chants—drill. Marching at night, lining up in the fog, retreating without panic. "We don't just fight like shadows," he said, "we also fight like lines, if necessary. We have to be everything. Shadows, lines, storm, wall. Otherwise, the war will consume us."

Some grumbled. They were warriors, not soldiers. But Tecumseh tolerated no weakness. Those who complained were given the toughest tasks. Those who refused were denied weapons. This is how he kept them in line – with severity that hurt, but worked.

And then came hunger. Hunger is an enemy worse than any cannon. Supplies were running low, the fields were burned, the women were hauling, the children were chewing bark. The British delivered supplies, but too little, too late.

Tecumseh knew: If his men were hungry, they would collapse. A warrior without food is a warrior without aim. So he organized raids. Not just against soldiers, but also against convoys, supply depots, even against his own allies, if necessary. He took what he needed, no matter where it was.

"We can't eat honor," he once said when one of the British criticized him for an attack on a camp train. "My men need corn, not medals."

The British hated this, but they also knew that without Tecumseh, they would have lost long ago. So they swallowed it.

And while the Americans grew stronger and the British quarreled, Tecumseh forged his alliance tighter. He spoke of the future, of land that must remain free. He spoke with a voice worth more than all the drums.

"If we fall apart," he said, "we're dead. If we stay together, we're dangerous."

And they stayed together. For now.

But he could already smell it: the war was getting harder, dirtier, bigger. The stench that hung over everything was getting thicker. It was no longer just smoke and sweat. It was the stench of nations sinking their teeth into the flesh of the earth.

Tecumseh knew: Soon there would be no more small skirmishes. Soon the forest would echo with cannons, and the game would be deadlier than ever.

The drums came first. Then the flags. Then the stench of gunpowder, sweat, and fear.

The Americans had learned their lesson. They no longer sent peasants who got lost in the woods. They sent regiments with cannons. Wheels rattling over mud. Men marching as if they had finally understood that war is no picnic.

The British became nervous. "They want to take the fort," they said. "They have numbers, they have artillery." Yes, they had everything—except intelligence.

Tecumseh laughed when he saw the columns. "They're marching like oxen to the slaughter," he said. "They think a fort falls because they put cannons in front of it. But a fort isn't just wood and stone. A fort is hunger, cunning, and night."

The British stared at him as if he had witchcraft in his mouth.

The Americans lined up their cannons, aimed, and began firing. Thunder echoed through the forest, smoke rose, the earth shook. Boards splintered, men screamed, and the British ducked as if the sky itself had split.

But Tecumseh saw only a stage. He knew: cannons are loud, but blind. They kill those who stand in the way, but they don't hit those who lie in the shadows.

So he sent his men into the shadows. Small groups, five, ten, never more. They crawled through the mud, sneaking around the American lines. They attacked not head-on, but from the rear, at the wagons, the supplies, the gunners.

The first shots didn't hit the front, but the horses pulling the cannons. Animals screamed, carts overturned, gunpowder exploded. Chaos ensued. American soldiers ran to the rear to save their supplies. And that's when Tecumseh's men struck.

It wasn't a battle of honor. It was a battle of nerves. Every cannon that fell silent because there was no one left to load it was a victory. Every burning wagon was worth more than ten dead.

The British were amazed. "He's not fighting the front," murmured one. "He's fighting the belly of the army." "Yes," said another. "He's cutting it open from the inside."

The Americans continued firing, but each shot cost them more. Their ranks grew restless. They had learned to march. They had learned to position cannons. But they hadn't learned to fight shadows that emerged from the woods, struck, and disappeared.

After three days, the fort still hadn't fallen. The Americans had more men, more weapons, more noise. But they had less courage.

On the fourth day, they withdrew. No great victory, no proud drumming. A retreat, stinking, battered, with more corpses than they could carry.

The British cheered, patted themselves on the back, and wrote reports to London. "We have held the fort!" they cried.

Tecumseh sat by the fire, rubbing his forehead, and said nothing. He knew this was only the beginning. The Americans would return. Stronger, tougher, hungrier.

And each time the smell would get worse.

The defeat at the fort burned the Americans' skin like hot iron. They had thought they could achieve a quick victory with cannons and columns, but instead they had brought home only corpses and shame. Such shame cries out for revenge.

And revenge came quickly.

The Americans changed their tactics. No more proud marches, no more drums echoing through the forests. Instead, fire and conflagration. They burned villages, destroyed supplies, and tore down cornfields, all to starve Tecumseh's men. It was no longer a war against soldiers. It was a war against life itself.

Tecumseh understood immediately. "They've learned," he said bitterly. "They're not just hitting guns anymore. They're hitting our children."

That was worse than any cannon. A warrior who dies is a victim. A child who starves is an entire future that dies.

The British responded with reports and protests. Paper, letters, signatures. But paper doesn't catch flames. Paper doesn't protect a hut. Only blood protects blood.

So Tecumseh pulled his men closer together. No more loose groups, no more warriors fighting on their own. He needed discipline almost as strict as that of the British—but without the stench of uniforms.

"You think you're warriors," he said by the fire, his voice like a knife. "But warriors who fight alone die like dogs. Together we are a wall. Together we are a storm. You stay in line, you hold the line, you don't go off alone. Whoever does that dies—and takes the rest with them to the grave."

It wasn't advice, it was an order.

Some grumbled. They were used to fighting freely, proudly, unfettered. But Tecumseh gave them no choice. Anyone who objected was dealt with harshly, given no weapons, no horses, no supplies. Discipline wasn't a plea; it was survival.

And he knew: discipline alone isn't enough. Men don't fight with just their muscles. They fight with what burns inside their heads. They had to believe. In something bigger than their own guts.

So he spoke to them of land, of rivers, of ancestors. Of the children who would otherwise see nothing but ashes. "You're not just fighting for yourselves," he said. "You're fighting for every tree that grows here. For every child not yet born. For every grave we won't allow to be trampled under the boots of the white man."

His words were like nails, rusty and sharp. They didn't go smoothly into the heart; they dug in and stuck. Some men wept, others clenched their fists. Everyone knew: He spoke the truth.

And so he held them together. Not with rum, not with gifts, not with medals. But with raw faith. With hatred for what had been taken from them. With the promise that there was still something to defend.

But the Americans became more brutal. They burned entire crops, left women screaming, and children freezing. It was a war with the scythe, not the sword. Everything that wasn't theirs was to fall.

Tecumseh saw this and knew: This wasn't a war that could be won with tricks alone. Tricks held the enemy back, but faith kept his own men alive.

And he swore: As long as he breathed, he would wield this faith like a weapon. Harder than any musket, deeper than any knife.

The war ate deeper into the country, like a rat that can't find its fill. The Americans had understood: battles alone don't bring victory. You had to strike at the heart of the enemy. And the heart of a people is its women, its children, its supplies, its faith.

So they burned whatever they found. Not just villages, but fields. Not just storehouses, but boats. They let animals rot, cut nets, and poisoned wells. Every step was intended to weaken Tecumseh's men. It was no longer a war between armies. It was a war between life and destruction.

The British responded with curses, protocols, and reports. Some officers wanted to strike back, others warned of "attacks." Attacks! Tecumseh laughed bitterly when he heard that. What was worse: an attack or a starving child? For him, it was a given. But for the British, it was politics. And politics stinks.

His own men were torn between anger and despair. They saw their fields burning, heard the cries of their families, and they wanted revenge. Immediately, without planning, without waiting. Tecumseh had to slow them down, had to make it clear to them: a war of pure anger is a war you lose.

"You want revenge," he said, "but revenge blinds you. Blind, you stumble into bullets. I tell you: patience. We strike where it counts. We don't kill for the thrill. We kill for survival."

But that didn't make him popular. Some considered him too strict, too cold. Some whispered that he listened to the British too much. Others said he was too cruel because he punished traitors without hesitation. He was not just a chief, not just a warrior. He was a judge, a leader, a father—and an executioner, when necessary.

This was the new burden. He used to be the best warrior. The one at the front, the one who shouted, the one who led. Now he also had to decide who lived, who died, who received supplies, and who went hungry. It made him hard. Harder than stone.

Once, a group of young men came to him, demanding an immediate march against an American encampment that had burned down a village. Tecumseh saw their faces: young, full of hatred, full of courage, full of stupidity. "You're not going," he said. "Not yet." They screamed, they cursed, they called him a coward. He stood up, grabbed the nearest man by the collar, yanked him up, and roared: "I've seen more blood than you have hair on your face! You want to die? Die. But you'll take us all to the grave with you. And I won't allow that."

It was brutal, but they fell silent.

He had to be both father and executioner. He had to shackle their hatred and guide their courage. Without him, they would have disintegrated. Without him, they would have died.

The British saw this and were amazed. They didn't understand how someone without a medal, without a crown, without a uniform could have such power. One officer wrote: "He commands with his eyes. No drum roll, no drill—just his gaze and his voice. And the men obey."

But obedience wasn't what Tecumseh wanted. He wanted survival.

The Americans continued to advance, ever deeper, ever more brutally. And Tecumseh knew: time was against them. The British were not invulnerable. They had their own problems, their own scores to settle in Europe, their own doubts. Already, he sensed that some officers were talking about retreat, about "reorganization."

He knew that if the British fell, they would fall too.

So he forged his men even closer together. He made them swear that they would fight not only with the British, but also without them. He said: "If they go, we won't go. If they fall, we'll still be standing."

That wasn't an oath to a king. That was an oath to the earth itself.

But in quiet moments, when the smoke cleared and the screams died down, he knew: the war was now bigger than him. He could no longer control everything. He could only lead, so hard, so unyieldingly, that no one dared to run away.

He was no longer just a warrior. He was a strategist, a judge, a father—and that was more difficult than any musket.

And always, the stench hung over everything. The stench of burnt corn, of dead horses, of men rotting in the mud. The stench that said: This is no longer just a war. This is a curse.

The war had long since acquired its own stench. Not just of gunpowder and blood, but of fatigue, mistrust, and hunger. It was a stench that ate into your skin until you could smell it yourself, even when standing in the clear wind. A stench that said: We are no longer clean.

Tecumseh sat at the edge of the camp, his knees drawn up, his face in shadow. He saw men who had once been full of fire, but now chewed silently as if crushing stones. He heard children coughing, women whispering, Britons laughing in their tents. He felt the air itself grow heavier.

"That's it," he thought. "This is what war smells like when it's no longer new."

The Americans continued to burn. Every week a new village, a new field, a new scream. The British vacillated between jubilation after small victories and panic after every defeat. They were allies, yes—but allies who could pack up camp at any time.

Tecumseh saw this more clearly than anyone else. He knew the Redcoats would only stay as long as it was worth it. As soon as London decided the war was becoming too expensive, they sailed away. They left behind burned villages, starving children, and him—the man who had promised his people to save them.

That was the stench he feared most: betrayal, abandonment, the slow suffocation as the great armies departed and the Americans returned with redoubled fury.

But he swore that he would not give up.

One night, as the rain poured down and the fire in the camp was barely burning, he stood before his men. Water ran down his face, his voice like thunder.

"Hear me," he cried. "The Americans are burning our villages. They are starving our children. The British are helping us, but only until their king blows his whistle. Do you think I trust in their flag? No! I trust only in you, in our land, in our rivers. As long as we stand, as long as we breathe, we fight. If the British leave, we fight. If they fall, we still stand."

His words echoed through the rain. Some cried, some screamed, some beat their fists against their chests. But everyone knew: there was no way back.

The British heard him too. One officer later murmured, "He's not an ally. He's a separate nation." And that was the truth that frightened everyone.

For Tecumseh was more than a warrior. He was the very stench that hung in the ranks. The stench of determination that doesn't disappear, even when everything burns.

And so this chapter ended not with victory, not with defeat. It ended with a vow, spoken in the rain, in the smoke, in the stench:

No matter who leaves. No matter who stays. Tecumseh doesn't stop.

The War of 1812 had officially begun. But for Tecumseh, it was already long gone.

And he knew the stench would get worse before it ended.

Detroit falls – Tecumseh laughs

Detroit was not a village, not a small fort. Detroit was a fortress with walls, cannons, and a garrison. A symbol of the American presence in the Northwest. Whoever held Detroit held the key to the land between the Great Lakes. Whoever lost Detroit saw their house of cards collapse.

The Americans boasted that Detroit was impregnable. General William Hull, an old man with a gray face and heavy breathing, was in command. He sent letters full of threats, talking about "ten thousand men" ready to burn down anything that stood against him. Words like drums, louder than the bullets.

But words don't hold walls.

The British, under General Isaac Brock, saw the opportunity. They had cannons, they had soldiers—but not enough. What they really had was Tecumseh.

Tecumseh knew that Detroit wouldn't fall by assault. Too many walls, too many cannons. But walls only hold men, and men only hold courage. But courage breaks when it believes the enemy is everywhere.

So Tecumseh played a game.

He made his warriors appear within sight of the fort—sometimes twenty, sometimes fifty, sometimes a hundred. They ran through the forest, revealed themselves, screamed, and disappeared again. They changed clothes, wore different feathers, and made it seem as if they were countless. A specter, a shadowy army.

The Americans looked out from the walls and whispered, "There are thousands. They are everywhere."

Hull panicked. He had heard what Tecumseh's men had done at Tippecanoe, what they were doing with supplies, with convoys, with settlements. He saw not just warriors. He saw ghosts that would tear his garrison apart as soon as he gave the order to open the gate.

Tecumseh laughed to himself. "A man who has already fallen in the head no longer needs to be killed with bullets."

General Brock understood the game. He wrote a letter to Hull full of threats: if he didn't surrender, the Indian allies—Tecumseh's men—would storm the city and burn everything to the ground. Women, children, no one would be spared. A bluff, but one that stuck like a knife.

Hull collapsed. On August 16, 1812, without a single shot being fired in a major battle, Detroit surrendered.

The Americans surrendered—more than 2,000 men, cannons, supplies, everything. An entire fortress fell—not by cannons, but by fear.

And Tecumseh? He stood there, arms crossed, and laughed. It wasn't a happy laugh, but a laugh like rusted iron. "They had walls," he said. "We had shadows. And shadows are stronger."

The British cheered, Brock rode proudly through the gates, the drums thundered. London received reports of a great victory. But everyone knew: Without Tecumseh, without his cunning, without his shadows, Detroit would never have fallen.

It was one of his greatest triumphs. Not because blood was shed, but because none needed to be. Because he had shown that more could be won with fear than with cannons.

And in the nights that followed, as the fire burned and the men sang, the same phrase was heard again and again: "Detroit fell—and Tecumseh laughed."

The fall of Detroit was like a slap in the face for Americans. Not just militarily, but also in their pride. Newspapers in Washington could not hide the shame: a fortress, thousands of men, dozens of cannons – abandoned without a major battle.

Things were different in the British camps. Cheers, drums, barrels, chants. Brock rode through the streets of Detroit like a king without a crown, his red

uniforms gleaming as if they'd just arrived from London. They praised her discipline, her strength, her leadership.

But deep down they knew: Without Tecumseh, without his play of shadows, without his warriors who appeared and disappeared like ghosts at the edge of the forest, Detroit would not have fallen.

The soldiers saw him, the Shawnee standing beside Brock, not in a red uniform, not in medals, but in leather, with eyes sharper than any blade. They knew: This man had planted more fear in the hearts of the Americans than their cannons ever could.

But Tecumseh didn't celebrate. He didn't drink rum, he didn't sing songs. He sat by the fire, chewed dry meat, and gazed into the flames. For him, Detroit wasn't a celebration, but a warning.

"They'll come back," he murmured. "They'll be angry. Shame makes men dangerous. Shame burns hotter than hunger."

His men nodded. They didn't laugh like the British. They knew that a victory without blood was often more expensive than one with. For blood quenches anger, shame feeds it.

And the Americans devoured their shame. General Hull, an old man who had given away an entire fortress, was mocked within his own ranks. Some called him a coward, others a traitor. Soldiers spat out his name like poison.

In Washington, the hawks cried. "Revenge!" they cried. "Detroit back! More men, more guns, more fire!"

Tecumseh knew what that meant. They wouldn't rest until the shame of Detroit was erased. They would return stronger, harder, more brutal.

The British, on the other hand, sipped their victories. Barrels rolled, cups clinked. "We humiliated America," they laughed. "We showed that London still has teeth."

Tecumseh saw her and thought: *You idiots. You think the war is a game on paper. But this is only the first round. The Americans are still hungry. We've only irritated their mouths.*

He gathered his men. "Don't look at the British," he said. "Don't look at their flags. Look at the country. Detroit is a victory, yes. But it's just a stone in a river. The river will keep flowing, and it will run red."

His words sank into hearts like hooks. Some felt pride, others fear. But everyone knew: He was right.

The British celebrated, the Americans frothed, and Tecumseh just laughed quietly. Not a laugh of joy, but a laugh that said: "You think you've won something. But what we've gained is only more time. And time alone saves no one."

Detroit had fallen. But the war had only just found its rhythm. And Tecumseh knew that this rhythm would soon beat louder—like drums driving men to their deaths.

Detroit reeked of victory. But not the sweet smell of a just victory—it reeked of rum, of smoke, of arrogance. The British drank, laughed, and wrote reports in which they made themselves heroes. "General Brock, the Lion of the North." "The Discipline of the Redcoats." Words that glittered like medals.

Tecumseh sat at the edge of the camp and watched the spectacle. To him, it was like children playing with shiny coins while dogs howled outside. Without his warriors, without his shadows, without the fear he had sown, Detroit would never have fallen. But his name barely appeared in the reports from London. A passing phrase. A "brave Indian ally."

He laughed softly, bitterly. "Ally," he spat. "They call me ally as if I were a dog running beside their wagon."

But he knew he was using them just as they were using him. He was taking their cannons, their powder, their supplies. They were taking his warriors, his knowledge, his fearlessness. A trade, dirty, but necessary.

The difference was: Tecumseh didn't need a flag.

He began to tell the story of Detroit differently. Not as a British victory, but as proof of his cause. "Look," he said to his men. "We have fallen a fortress, without blood, without a storm. The Americans fear us. They fear our shadows. They fear our voices in the woods."

He told the story in such a way that his warriors felt: It wasn't London that triumphed. It was the alliance of nations he was forging. Every hesitant tribe,

every wavering chief, now heard of Detroit. Of the Americans who surrendered an entire fortress because they feared Tecumseh and his men.

That was his weapon. Not the British cannons, but the legend he was building.

In the villages, they whispered, "Tecumseh has taken Detroit." Not Brock, not the Redcoats. Tecumseh.

And that made him bigger, more dangerous than the British could have wished. A man without a crown, without a title, who had more influence than their generals.

The British noticed. Several officers cast suspicious glances at him. One said quietly, "He's growing in excess of us." Another replied, "As long as he's fighting the Americans, it's fine. But if he turns against us..." – and left the sentence open.

Tecumseh heard such things. He knew that friendship with the Redcoats only lasted as long as it was useful. But he smiled coldly. *Let them distrust you. As long as they give us weapons, I'll take them. As long as they give us gunpowder, I'll take them. And if they betray us, then they'll know that we can also frighten them in the dark.*

Detroit became a symbol. Not for the British, not for London, but for Tecumseh's dream: that the peoples of the forests could stand together, that they could make a difference, that even a fortress of stone and iron could buckle under the weight of their shadows.

His warriors now saw him differently. No longer just as a leader in battle, but as a man who could bring down cities. A warrior who could show his teeth to the whites without having to shed blood.

And the Americans? They hated him now more than ever. In their newspapers, he was the devil, the savage barbarian, the terror of the frontier. For them, Detroit wasn't a disgrace to the British. It was a disgrace that an Indian chief had brought them to their knees.

And that's exactly what Tecumseh liked. He wanted to be her nightmare. Not just a name, but a shadow that haunted her dreams.

At the fire, he spoke to his men: "Detroit doesn't belong to Brock. Detroit belongs to us. It's proof that they fear us. Keep this proof in your hearts when

they come back. Because they will come back, and they will be angry. But we have shown: They are not invincible."

His words were harder than stone. His men nodded, some shouted, some punched the air. The legend was born.

Detroit fell – and Tecumseh laughed. But this time he wasn't laughing at the shame of the Americans, or at the stupidity of the British. This time he was laughing because he knew: From this victory, he could build something greater than walls. A dream. A union. A name that even his enemies would never forget.

Detroit was more than a victory. It was a stigma. For the Americans, a stain on their image, for the British, a medal, for Tecumseh, a tool. But every tool cuts both ways.

Anger raged in Washington. Newspapers screamed, politicians spewed venom. "Hull is a coward!" "Hull has disgraced us!" They weren't just talking about the general, they were talking about the nation. Detroit was not just a fortress. It was a symbol, and symbols are more dangerous than cannons.

The Americans cried for revenge, and revenge means men, money, cannons, ships. "We'll take Detroit back!" they roared. "And if it burns, half of Canada will burn with it!"

Tecumseh heard about it. A scout brought a newspaper, torn and stained by rain, but the words were clear. He laughed harshly. "They have fire in their bellies," he said. "Good. Then they'll burn faster." But a shadow flashed in his eyes. He knew that angry men were harder to deceive.

While the Americans sharpened their teeth, the British looked nervously at their new "ally."

General Brock was dead, fallen just months after Detroit. A hero to the Redcoats, but a loss to Tecumseh. Brock had understood him, at least better than most. Now new officers were coming, men with less courage and more paperwork. They saw Tecumseh not as a partner, but as a risk.

"He's becoming too powerful," they whispered. "The Indians see him as king. If he turns against us, we're lost."

Tecumseh felt their gazes. They celebrated him in his face, but behind his back they spoke of control, of chains. He knew that kind of way. White people who

always believed they could tame an Indian as long as they gave him enough sugar.

But Tecumseh wasn't a tamed dog. He was a wolf who ran alongside them—as long as the hunt was right.

His own men sensed the tension. "The Redcoats fear you," they said. "Let them," Tecumseh replied. "Fear is better than forgetting."

But he knew that fear could make the alliance fragile. One crack, and the whole thing would fall apart.

So he proceeded cautiously. He laughed with the British when they laughed. He nodded at their plans, even though he knew they were foolish. And secretly, he forged his own strategy.

"We take their weapons," he told his warriors, "but we do not follow their hearts. Our hearts beat for our country, not for their king."

This is how he held the alliance together – an alliance of gunpowder, mistrust and necessity.

And the Americans, oh, the Americans were already preparing their counterattack. They built boats, they recruited men, they promised land, glory, money. Everyone who could fight was given a rifle. Everyone who could still stand was lined up.

Tecumseh saw this coming like a storm on the horizon. He said, "Detroit was a laugh. But their laughter will cost us dearly. They're coming back, and they're bringing more fire than we've ever seen."

His men wanted to believe that victory was stronger than revenge. But Tecumseh knew better. Victory is sweet, yes, but it only makes the enemy hungrier.

And in quiet moments, he wondered if his own fame wasn't more dangerous to him than the Americans' bullets. Because fame makes one lonely. Fame makes one's allies nervous. Fame consumes trust like fire consumes dry wood.

Detroit had fallen, yes. But with it, a new shadow had grown—the shadow of mistrust.

And Tecumseh knew that the next battle would not only be against the Americans, but also against the cracks in his own alliance.

The Americans came back like a man who's been slapped in the face and now kicks down the door with an axe in his hand. No more long speeches, no more grand threats—just anger. Detroit was their shame, and shame can only be washed away with blood.

They sent new troops, young men with hard faces, men who had heard of the shame and wanted to erase it. They brought cannons, ships across the lakes, supplies in wagon convoys. They didn't come like peasants who had to march. They came like soldiers who wanted to march.

The British became nervous. "There are many of them," muttered an officer. "They have more cannons than we do. We must be careful." "Careful?" growled Tecumseh. "Careful means you hesitate. Hesitation means death."

He knew: caution is good for maps and reports, but not for the forest. The forest devours the cautious.

The Americans advanced, built camps, posted sentries, and let drums ring out. But the forest was not a field. The forest is no place for flags. And that's when Tecumseh struck.

He led his warriors like shadows. No battles, only cuts. They attacked supply trains, cut off boats, and caused horses to flee. They shot at sentries and disappeared into the fog. Every day brought losses, not great ones, but constant, gnawing losses. A war like a thousand mosquito bites.

The Americans cursed. "Those savages," they growled. "They don't fight like men." "No," Tecumseh laughed. "We fight like ghosts. You punch the air, and we cut your legs."

But the Americans didn't give up. Every blow made them angrier. Every raid made them send more men, more cannons, more wood for bridges, more supplies. They were like an avalanche—the more they were smashed, the wider they rolled.

The British panicked. Some wanted to withdraw the line, others wanted negotiations. "We can't waste our men," they said.

Tecumseh heard this and spat into the fire. "Your men? What about our villages? Our children? You talk about men as if they were coins. I'm talking about blood. We can't go back. Whoever goes back loses everything."

He knew the British would never understand. For them, land was something you could move around on maps. For him, land was life. Not a piece of paper, but earth, water, breath.

And while the British discussed things in tents while the Americans brought more and more men, Tecumseh was the only one who truly understood the forest.

He knew the paths, the swamps, the rivers, the shadows. He knew how to dismantle an army in the darkness without ever directly defeating it. He knew that a war in the forest was not decided by cannons, but by patience and cunning.

So he drew his men closer together, sharpened their senses, kept them awake at night, made them march in the rain. He turned them into shadows, into voices in the wind, into screams in the night.

And the Americans began to feel it. They had numbers, they had weapons. But they had no security. Any night an arrow could whizz, any street could end in blood.

That was Tecumseh's War. Not a clean war, not a war of drums and flags. A war of sweat, dirt, smoke, and shadows.

And while the British doubted, while the Americans fought back, Tecumseh was the only one who laughed. Not loudly, not joyfully—a laugh like a knife.

A laugh that said: *You march into my forest. And my forest devours men like you.*

The Americans were like a river that never dried up. Bridges were cut, supplies were burned, and they were sent into the mire—and yet new columns arrived, new ships crossed the lakes, new men with faces that were not yet tired.

Detroit had humiliated her, but humiliation doesn't diminish an enemy. It makes them angry. And anger was now her weapon.

The British saw it and flinched. Every report from Washington, every column marching from the South, brought them closer to the point where they said, "We must give in. We cannot risk everything."

Tecumseh seethed. "Give in?" he roared in a council meeting, while the red-uniformed soldiers sat silently. "What do you want to give in to? Your land? Your kingdom? You have a sea between you and your enemies. We only have this earth. If we lose it, we have nothing. No ships to take us back to London. No castles to hide in. We lose everything."

The officers stared, some with cold eyes, others ashamed. But they didn't answer. They had orders, reports, paper chains. Tecumseh had only the land—and that was enough for him.

His men saw the British weakness. They sensed that the alliance could crumble. "Why are we fighting with them?" some asked. "They want to go back. We want to go forward."

Tecumseh knew that a rift would be fatal. An alliance formed by hunger, mistrust, and foreign flags could only be held together with an iron fist. So he took tougher measures.

He didn't talk much anymore. Those who grumbled got jobs. Those who wavered were sent to the front. Those who fled were despised, sometimes even worse. Tecumseh knew: fear of him was better than no fear of the Americans.

But he wasn't just tough. He was also a voice. At night, he spoke to his men, not with anger, but with fire. "Look at them," he said, "these white men. They march, they drum, they drink their rum. But they don't know the forest. The forest is our brother. It protects us, it feeds us, it makes us invisible. As long as we have the forest, we are stronger."

And so he kept them going, between fear and hope, between hunger and pride.

The Americans have become stronger, yes. But stronger doesn't mean invincible. Stronger just means they're harder to fall.

But the British were growing weaker, not in weapons, but in courage. Every victory was too small for them, every defeat too great. They saw numbers, statistics, and balance sheets. Tecumseh saw only earth, blood, and smoke.

"You count men," he told an officer, "as if they were coins. I only count what remains when they are dead. And this is our country."

He knew that if he didn't hold on tight, everything would fall apart. The British would retreat, his warriors would be scattered, and the Americans would devour the land like fire devours dry wood.

So he took a harder line. Harder into hearts, harder into minds. One man alone couldn't win a war, but one man alone could hold a war together if he didn't let go.

Tecumseh swore that he would be that man.

And if he had to spit in the face of the British to do it, so be it.

Detroit hung like an echo in everyone's mind. For the Americans, it was a curse, for the British, a medal, for Tecumseh, a weapon. But the longer the echo reverberated, the more distorted it became.

In Washington, the hawks raged on. "Revenge, revenge, revenge!" They wrote new laws, throwing money into the war like wood on a fire. Newspapers spewed inflammatory rhetoric, preaching hatred of "the barbaric Shawnee" and his "horde of savages." Detroit hadn't just turned Tecumseh into an enemy—it had transformed him into a bogeyman, a name that inspired nightmares.

Things were no better in the British camps. The officers toasted each other, telling legends as if they alone had taken the fortress. But behind the curtains of the tents, they whispered about Tecumseh. "He's getting too big." "His men obey him more than us." "What if he turns against us?" Tecumseh smelled the distrust. It stank of cold sweat and fear of uncontrollable power.

And in his own ranks? There, too, there was unrest. The victories had brought pride, but also hunger. Some warriors wanted more plunder, others wanted to return to their families, and still others whispered that the British were leading them to their deaths while they themselves drank rum in tents.

It was a bond of bone fragments and nerves. And Tecumseh stood in the middle, reins in hand, more firmly than any human should bear.

"Detroit was a victory," he told his men, "but a victory is not an end. A victory is only a beginning. A victory is a stone in a river. If you think the river will stop now, you will drown."

He spoke harshly, but he had to. If he gave them hope, they would rest. Rest was death.

The Americans advanced, built new camps, and sent new officers. They had sworn that Detroit would not be the last word. And Tecumseh knew they kept their oaths—not with honor, but with blood.

The British wavered. Some wanted to keep fighting, others wanted to negotiate, and still others just talked about saving their own skins. They had ships they could jump onto in an emergency. Tecumseh only had the land.

So he spoke to them, with a voice like a blade: "You want to negotiate? Negotiate with your enemies, not with my people. We have nothing more to give. You have islands, we have land. If you leave, then leave. But we will stay. And we will die here if necessary."

They were silent, and in their silence there was fear.

Tecumseh knew he would never have any of them completely on his side. But he also knew they needed him, just as he needed them. A deal that only worked as long as everyone was still alive.

And so Detroit's victory wasn't a clean one. It was a splinter that dug deeper into the flesh. A triumph that raised more questions than answers. A laugh that sounded like mockery in the ears of the enemy and like a threat in the hearts of the allies.

Detroit fell – yes. But what came afterward was not peace, not an end. It was just the next round of a war that was getting bigger and dirtier.

At the end of this chapter, there was no hero, no celebration, no song. Only Tecumseh, walking into the woods, smelling the night, the stench of smoke, rum, and fear, and laughing quietly to himself.

Not because he had won. But because he knew:
The game has just begun.

A general with dirt in his beard – Brock and the Warrior

Brock was no ordinary Brit. He wasn't one of those people who sat in tents with powdered wigs, writing reports while others died. He had dirt in his beard, sweat on his brow, and enough courage to stand where the bullets flew.

Tecumseh liked him immediately. Not because he loved him—Tecumseh didn't love men in red uniforms. But because Brock was a man who saw the truth. Not a chatterer, not a procrastinator, not a trader with empty promises.

When they first met, Brock looked at him for a long time, and Tecumseh looked back. Two men who knew that words are of little use after seeing blood in the mud. Finally, Brock nodded and said, "We're both fighting for land." Tecumseh growled, "I'm fighting for my land. You're fighting for a king you don't even know." Brock grinned. "Perhaps. But as long as our enemies are the same, we'll fight together."

It wasn't an alliance based on trust, but on respect. And respect was worth more than most contracts.

Detroit had been the proof. Brock had understood Tecumseh's plan, supported it, not held it back. He had seen that Tecumseh was more than a warrior. That he had strategy in his blood, cunning in his head, and fire in his heart.

Other Britons spoke of "savages" and "auxiliaries." Brock called him "partner."

Tecumseh remembered an evening by the fire, shortly after Detroit. They sat side by side, whiskey flowing, but Brock didn't drink much. He spoke softly, raspy, with a voice that came from battles. "You know they'll come back." "Of course," Tecumseh replied. "Shame is a stronger horse than hunger." "Then we'll face them again." "We?" Tecumseh grinned crookedly. "Are you sure your king wants this?" Brock looked into the fire. "Screw the king. I'm here. And as long as I'm here, we'll fight."

So spoke a man who didn't just follow orders. So spoke a man who, even in the stench of war, still had some honesty.

Tecumseh respected that. He didn't respect an empty coat, an officer who threw orders like dice. But he did respect men who were willing to put their boots in the same mud as he was.

But war has no regard for respect.

In October 1812, at Queenston Heights, Brock confronted the Americans. He led his men himself, not from a tent or behind a wall. He rode in front, his beard dusty, his eyes sharp. And that was precisely what made him vulnerable.

A bullet hit him. A simple, damned bullet. No heroic death in an epic battle, no roar of cannons hurling him into history. Just a bullet that knocked him off his horse.

Brock died there, in the middle of the fight.

Tecumseh heard the news and remained silent for a long time. He was not a man for many tears, not a man for prolonged lamentations. But his silence was heavier than any outcry.

"A general with dirt in his beard," he finally said. "One who wasn't like the others. Now they're sending us scribblers and drunks again."

And he was right.

With Brock's death, a hole appeared. Not a hole in the ranks—they were filled with men. A hole in trust. Because none of the other British officers had what Brock had: the courage, the clarity, the ability to see Tecumseh as an equal.

For Tecumseh, Brock had been more than an ally. He had been proof that a Briton could not only shout orders, but also listen. That there were men who understood that war was not won with maps, but in the smoke, in the blood, in the scream of a dying man.

Now he was gone.

And Tecumseh knew: With Brock, more than just a general had fallen. With Brock, the last shred of trust he could ever place in the Redcoats had also fallen.

After Brock's death, the air changed. It was as if someone had put out the fire and left only smoke.

The new British officers didn't arrive with dirt in their beards and sweat on their brows. They came with papers, maps, and ribbons on their hats. Men who had seen more ink than blood. Men who waged war on paper, with lines and numbers, not with earth and death.

Tecumseh saw her and knew immediately: This won't work.

They didn't listen to him. They saw him only as an "Indian leader," useful for scouting and skirmishing, but not for the "grand plan." An officer once said to an assembled group of men, "We will guide these savages in the right direction." Tecumseh stood up, stepped closer, and looked him so deeply in the eyes that the officer turned pale. "Guide?" he growled. "I guide my men myself. You guide your sheep."

The British grumbled at his impudence, but they didn't dare openly break him. They knew that without Tecumseh, the forests would once again belong to the Americans.

But in their eyes he saw what they really thought: *He's dangerous. He's too proud. He's not one of us.*

He had missed Brock. Not because Brock was a friend, but because he was a man. One who knew the smell of gunpowder, one who knew that respect was worth more than orders. Now all he had were scribes sitting in tents, talking about "dispositions" while men were dying outside.

The new officers wanted numbers. "How many warriors can you bring?" they asked. "How many arrows? How many rifles?" Tecumseh answered in a cold voice: "I'll bring men. Not numbers." They didn't like that. They wanted Excel spreadsheets before there was Excel.

Once, at a meeting, a young officer laid maps on the table and spoke of "logistical lines" and "strategic depth." Tecumseh looked at the map, then spat on it. "Those lines don't help you when you have a knife in your throat at night."

Silence in the tent. The officers stared at him, insulted, outraged. But no one contradicted him. Because they knew he was right.

His warriors sensed the tension. They realized that the British didn't like him, that they feared him. Some asked, "Why do we stay with them? Why not fight alone?" Tecumseh replied, "Because we need their weapons. Because we need their powder. But we don't follow them. We fight for ourselves."

He knew it was a balancing act. Without the British, they would barely have enough bullets to wage war. With the British, they had bullets—but also chains of mistrust.

And every time he looked at one of these officers, he thought: *Brock, damn it, why are you dead? You were the kind of guy you could talk to. These guys are talking to walls.*

The British celebrated themselves in their reports, writing of "the loyalty of the Indian allies." But they didn't write of Tecumseh's anger, his silence, or his cold gaze.

He knew they wanted to keep him down. That they didn't want his name to grow too big. That they needed him, but at the same time, they feared him.

And so, for Tecumseh, Brock became not just a loss, but a benchmark. Every Briton who came after him paled in comparison, like a shadow before a fire.

Brock was a general with dirt in his beard. The others were generals with dirt on their fingers from endlessly writing on paper.

And Tecumseh knew: With men like that, you couldn't win a war. You could only delay it.

Brock's death left more than a void. It created a vacuum. And a vacuum in war means chaos.

The new British officers gave orders, drew maps, and talked about supplies and discipline. But something was missing in the field: someone who wouldn't just shout commands, but would make the men feel like they weren't dying in senseless filth.

Tecumseh saw it immediately. The British soldiers—ordinary men, not officers—looked at him with respect. Some secretly, others openly. They had seen how he fought, how he marched with his warriors, how he didn't stay behind the lines, but rather stood at the front in the smoke.

Once, a young redcoat came to him, his uniform covered in mud, his face haggard. "Sir," he stammered, "you're not one of us, but... when you talk, the men listen. More than when they listen to our own."

Tecumseh just nodded, but deep down he knew it was true. He had no crown, no medals, no scrolls. But he had eyes that had seen what men need in war: faith, direction, toughness.

So he began to take on Brock's role himself. Not officially, not with a title. But in the field, where blood dripped onto the ground, it was his voice that counted.

He deployed men, not according to the British pattern, but according to what worked. Small groups that struck quickly, then disappeared. He took advantage of the terrain, the darkness, the rain. He even persuaded British soldiers to abandon their rigid lines and crouch in the woods like his warriors.

Some officers hated this. "That's not discipline!" one shouted. "No," Tecumseh replied, "that's survival."

And when he spoke, the soldiers listened to him more than to their own superiors.

His warriors sensed it, too. They saw that he wasn't just speaking for them, but also for the Redcoats. That he wasn't just a chief, but a general without a uniform.

But that also made him vulnerable. The British officers, still clutching their papers, saw him as a threat. "He's undermining our authority," they whispered. "He's a savage acting like an officer."

Tecumseh didn't care. He had no time for their pride. He only wanted men to live—and to fight until the Americans realized the land didn't belong to them.

But in quiet moments, he thought of Brock. He thought of what it would have been like if Brock had still been alive—two men, side by side, both with dirt in their beards, both with fire in their hearts. Instead, he now had to bear the burden alone.

And he bore them. Harder, heavier, more relentless.

He spoke to the men around the fire, not with long speeches, but with sentences like fist bumps. "We have no crown. We have no London. We only have this country. And this country will die if we don't defend it."

It wasn't rhetoric, it was truth. And the truth burned more fiercely than any medal.

The British wrote their reports. They drew maps. But when it came down to it, when the smoke was thick, when blood lay in the dirt, it was Tecumseh who led the men.

Brock was dead. But his spirit lived on—not in the Redcoats, but in a Shawnee warrior who refused to be small.

The British had their lines, their plans, their drums. But plans fall apart when the first shot is fired. Lines break when the ground is wet. Drums fall silent when bullets whistle.

Tecumseh knew this. He had always known it.

Once, when the Americans attempted a foray, the Redcoats almost stumbled to their doom. An officer had positioned the men too rigidly in the middle of an open clearing. "Discipline!" he shouted. "Hold the line!"

Discipline, yes. But discipline doesn't protect against snipers in the forest. The Americans lay down in the grass, aimed, and fired. Men fell like stalks. The line wavered.

The officer barked orders, but his voice sounded like a rooster on a dunghill. No one listened. No one trusted him anymore.

Then Tecumseh stepped forward. No red cloth, no drum, just him. He didn't shout, he didn't command. He called out only one word: "Follow!"

And they followed.

He pulled the men out of line, chased them into the woods, and positioned them between trees. "Here!" he shouted. "Not in the open field! Here you live, here they die!"

The men were breathing heavily, but they obeyed. And suddenly it was no longer a massacre. It was an ambush. The Americans, who thought they had easy prey, suddenly found themselves caught in the crossfire.

The battle turned. Chaos turned into a chase.

The Redcoats saw Tecumseh save their men. They saw him seize command, without decorations, without rank. They fought because he fought. Not because an officer told them to.

In the end, there were more Americans lying in the dirt than British. The camp breathed again. Men laughed with relief, patted each other on the back. And many looked to Tecumseh, not to the officers.

An old sergeant muttered, "Without him, we'd all be dead." Another said loudly, "He's more of a general than the generals."

The officers heard this. And they hated it.

After the battle, they sat in the tent, their faces red with rage. "He's undermining order!" one said. "He's making the men dependent on him!" "The men follow him because he saves them," another answered, more quietly. "Would you rather let them die?"

But they knew: every victory Tecumseh won made him greater. Every victory made the men listen less to the officers and more to him.

Tecumseh himself wasn't seeking a title. He didn't want a crown, a medal. He only wanted his people to survive and for the Americans to stop them from eating everything. But he also knew his influence was growing. He sensed the stares, the gratitude of the soldiers, the distrust of the officers.

It was a strange feeling: celebrated around the fires, feared in the tents.

His warriors saw it too. "The Redcoats follow you," they said. "You are their leader, not their generals." Tecumseh growled, "I am not their leader. I am the leader of my people. If they want to follow me, let them. But never forget who we serve: our country, not their king."

But he knew: every day he spent fighting made him stronger—and lonelier. Because power always attracts distrust.

Thus, he became more and more what Brock had been—and something more. A general without a uniform, a chieftain with more influence than an entire garrison.

And he knew: This couldn't go on forever.

After the battle he had turned, everyone was talking about Tecumseh. Not just his warriors, but also the redcoats around the fire. They whispered his name as if they had seen a demon on their side at just the right moment.

"Without him we would be dead," they said. "He saved us." "He fights like one of us—no, harder."

The soldiers began to listen to him. More than to their own officers. When Tecumseh spoke, when he raised his hand, they fell silent. He had no drum, no fife, no rank—only a voice that sounded like a weapon.

The officers hated this. They saw their authority crumble, bit by bit, not through mutiny, but through respect for the wrong man. For the savage. For the man who was no part of their world.

In the tents, they discussed. "He's making us weak," one growled. "The men follow him, not us." Another replied: "The men follow the one who keeps them alive. Perhaps we should learn what he knows." Silence. No one wanted to hear that. Because learning would mean admitting that the savage understood more than they did.

Tecumseh knew what was going on. He saw the cold stares, felt the sweaty hands as officers greeted him. Friendly in their mouths, venom in their eyes.

But he just laughed. "They fear me," he said to his men. "Good. Better fear than indifference."

But his warriors grew restless. They saw that Tecumseh was not just a chief, but more. They saw that he had power over the redcoats. And power always brings danger. "If they hate you," one asked, "won't they betray you someday?" Tecumseh nodded. "Perhaps. But until then, they need us. And we need their powder. That's war: everyone uses everyone else."

In the villages, they spoke of him as if he were a ghost. "Tecumseh, who gives orders to the Redcoats." "Tecumseh, who drives the Americans away." The stories grew, becoming bigger than he was.

And he felt it: the legend was beginning to overtake him.

That was dangerous. Because you can't control a legend. It grows, consumes, makes friends suspicious and enemies more determined.

The British wanted to downplay him. They spoke in reports of "the valuable contributions of the Indian allies," but never of him. They knew that if his name became famous in London, they would become mere extras in his story.

But no matter how they wrote, in the camps he was already bigger than any of them.

One evening, a British sergeant came to him, drunk but honest. "Sir," he slurred, "I have more faith in your hand than in all the officers' noses put together. If you would lead us... we might have a chance." Tecumseh stared at him for a long time, then said quietly, "I don't want to lead you. I just want you not to die like sheep."

But he knew that was exactly why they followed him.

The tension was like a rope. On one side, the soldiers who loved him pulled. On the other, the officers who feared him. And he stood in the middle, the rope in his hands, knowing it could break at any moment.

In quiet moments he thought of Brock. *You had understood it, he thought. You were a man who knew that respect was more important than rank. Now I'm alone. Now I'm the general they never wanted.*

He balanced between two abysses: betrayal by the British or the fragmentation of his own people. Every step was dangerous. Every step was difficult.

But he kept going. Because there was no alternative.

For Tecumseh knew: He wasn't just a man. He was a legend in the making. And legends can't stop, even when they know the abyss is approaching.

The tension had to burst at some point. Too many nights filled with cold stares, too many reports with half-truths, too many officers who thought they were kings because they wore a piece of cloth on their hats.

The outbreak came on a gray morning. Rain was falling, the camp was wet, and men were sitting wearily around the fire. Tecumseh was talking with some of his warriors when a British officer—young, fresh from England, his uniform clean despite standing in the dirt—approached him.

"Chief," he began loudly so everyone could hear, "you are interfering too much. Your men don't obey us, they only obey you. This is dangerous. You are undermining our order."

The soldiers fell silent. Even the rain seemed to quiet down.

Tecumseh turned slowly. He said nothing. He just looked at the man. A stare, cold as a knife.

The officer felt his knees trembling, but he continued, knowing he would look ridiculous otherwise. "If you continue to act like an officer, I'll have to report. We can't allow a savage..."

He couldn't go any further.

Tecumseh stepped forward, hard, fast, like a bear. In one breath, he grabbed the officer by the collar and pulled him so close that their foreheads almost touched.

"Savage?" he growled. "I've seen more blood in the mud than you've seen ink in your life. I've led men while you were still hanging on your mother's coattails. I undermine nothing. I save what you kill with your arrogance."

The officer stared, unable to move. All around him, the soldiers remained silent.

Then Tecumseh let go, stepped back, but his voice echoed through the camp like thunder. "You say I'm subverting order? Your order is to send men into the open field like cattle. My order is for them to live. Ask them whom they will follow."

And he pointed with his hand at the soldiers.

No one spoke. No one moved. But their looks said it all. The men didn't trust the officer. They trusted him.

The officer saw it too. His face turned red, then white. He wanted to shout, to give orders, but the words stuck in his throat. Finally, he turned around and walked into the tent, humiliated, broken.

Tecumseh stood there, silent, proud, his shoulders hard as stone. Then he turned back to his warriors as if nothing had happened.

But the camp was no longer the same.

From that day on, it was clear: Tecumseh was more than just an "ally." He was a leader, even for men who were not his people. He had shown it, not with papers, not with titles, but with truth, spoken before all.

And the officers now knew they could no longer belittle him. Not in front of the men.

That didn't make him safer. It made him more dangerous.

For men who have power without officially possessing it are always targets. Officers whispered more, their pens scratched faster on paper. In London, one might soon read reports describing Tecumseh as "difficult" or "unreliable."

But for the men in the dirt, who smelled the smoke, who knew that the next shot could be aimed at them – for them he was a general with a beard, without a uniform.

And they followed him. Not out of duty. Out of survival.

Tecumseh himself wasn't thinking about titles. He was thinking about the land, the next battle, the next step. But he also knew: with every day he lived like this, the rope grew tighter. One step in the wrong direction, and it would break—not just for him, but for all who followed him.

But he smiled coldly. *Then let it break. I'm not here to save their order. I'm here to keep my people alive.*

After the incident with the officer, nothing was the same again. No one spoke openly about it, but everyone knew what had happened. A savage had silenced a British officer in front of the men—and the camp had agreed with him.

For the ordinary soldiers, Tecumseh was now more than a chief. He was their invisible general. When he spoke, they listened. When he walked, they followed. And when he laughed, they laughed with him—a harsh, short laugh that gave them more courage than any drum.

The officers, however, not only hated him now. They feared him. They knew they could only maintain the men's discipline as long as Tecumseh tolerated it.

And Tecumseh? He felt the burden growing heavier.

He was not only the leader of his warriors, not only the voice of the Shawnee. He was now also the man foreign soldiers looked to when bullets flew. He was no longer one of many—he was the one everyone saw.

That made him strong. But it also made him lonely.

On quiet nights, when the fire crackled softly and the smoke rose into the sky, he thought of Brock. *You had dirt in your beard, and you had backbone. With you, I wasn't alone. Now I am.*

He remembered Brock's words: "Screw the king, we're fighting here." Words that were worth more than any orders from London. Words he now missed.

For the men who now gave commands had no dirt under their nails, only ink. No scars on their skin, only medals on their chests. They weren't born in the dirt; they were raised in the smoke of cigars.

Tecumseh saw them and knew: They were not generals. They were shadows of generals.

So he became one himself. Not on paper, not in reports—but in the smoke, the noise, the blood.

His warriors felt it. The Redcoats felt it. Even the Americans felt it when they marched into the woods and their knees went weak because the Shawnee were out there somewhere.

But the bigger he grew, the thinner the ice became. The British couldn't officially elevate him—they would have made a "savage" a general, and that would have caused scandals in London. So they let him operate, silent, suspicious, like a knife kept in their belt, even though it was against their own rules.

And Tecumseh knew: As long as he was useful, they would tolerate him. But one day, when he grew too big, when his name was louder than their reports, they would abandon him.

But he just smiled, that cold, brief smile. "Then let them try," he murmured. "I'm not a man of paper. I'm a man of earth. Earth doesn't fall with ink."

At the end of this chapter, Tecumseh stood alone. Not weak, not broken—but greater than ever. But greatness doesn't bring friends. Greatness only brings more eyes staring at you—some full of hope, others full of fear.

A general with dirt in his beard had died. A new one was born—without a beard, without a uniform, but with fire in his chest and shadow at his back.

Tecumseh. The warrior. The general no one officially wanted – yet everyone needed.

The dream grows, the stomach remains empty

A dream is easy when you're full. Any idiot can talk about a great tomorrow when they have a full mouth at night. But Tecumseh knew: A dream that survives in hunger is a real dream.

His alliance grew. Tribes came, chiefs listened, the stories of Detroit had had an impact. They saw in him the man who had overthrown a stronghold without bloodshed, the man even the Redcoats feared. They saw in him the dream of a united people who could withstand white hunger.

But as the idea grew, the pots became emptier.

The winters were harsh. The land they were trying to defend was the same land that fed them—and the land was sick. The buffalo numbers were dwindling, the fields were burned, the forests were plundered. The settlers cut swathes through the heart of the earth, and with each swath, a piece of food disappeared.

In the camp, stomachs growled. Children cried at night because there was no milk. Old men chewed leather to have something to eat.

Tecumseh saw it. He saw how faces grew harder, how men grew thinner, how women tried to survive on thin soups. And he knew: A dream alone cannot fill a stomach.

But he continued speaking nonetheless. He stood up when the men were sitting together, and his voice cut through the night. "Don't look into your pots," he said, "look to the future. Yes, your stomachs are empty. But if we fight, if we stand together, then we will fill the stomachs of our children. If we give up now, they will never be full again."

Some believed him. Some didn't.

A young warrior came to him, angry and hungry. "Tecumseh," he said, "you talk about tomorrow. But I'm hungry today." Tecumseh stared at him for a long time, then replied, "Then eat your fear. It makes you stronger. Tomorrow we will have meat—or we will die. Either is better than lying full in chains."

The words were harsh, but they worked. The boy remained silent and left, but his gaze remained defiant.

That's how it was in those days: the dream grew, but every step on that dream was harder.

The British helped as much as they wanted—which wasn't much. They gave gunpowder, sometimes some corn, sometimes a barrel of rum. But they weren't fathers; they were traders. And traders only give if they can take double in return.

Tecumseh knew that the British saw the need and used it as a leash. "As long as they are hungry," they said, "they will stay." And they were right. Hunger binds. Hunger compels.

But hunger also eats dreams.

Sometimes, when Tecumseh was alone, he wondered if he was leading his men to ruin. If his dream was too big for empty stomachs. But then he remembered his people, the land, the forests, the children who had yet to have their voices heard. And he swore that he would keep talking, keep fighting—even if his bones were already pushing through his skin.

"A dream," he murmured into the fire one night, "is worthless if it begins with fullness. A dream born in hunger cannot die."

And so the dream grew. And so the stomach remained empty.

Hunger was one thing. But hunger rarely comes alone. It brings with it friends: illness, doubt, betrayal.

The camp stank of smoke and decay. Children coughed, old people died quietly in the nights without a tear to spare. Men lay feverish in the dirt, their faces yellow, their lips dry. The water was dirty, food scarce, and ghosts crawled among the tents like stray dogs.

Tecumseh saw the ranks thinning, not from bullets, but from hunger and disease. Men who had once stood proudly beside him now lay in the mud, too weak to lift a knife.

And some left. They took their families and disappeared. "We can't wait any longer," they said. "Your dream doesn't fill pots."

Every time Tecumseh left, it was like a blow to his heart. Not because Tecumseh hated them, but because he understood them. He knew how hunger burned, how his stomach growled like a wild animal trying to tear him apart

from the inside. But he also knew: whoever left now was doomed. He wouldn't survive alone.

He delivered speeches sharper than blades. "You say my dream won't fill pots. But your escape won't fill them either. You think you'll find peace by making it on your own? You'll only die faster. The settlers are waiting for you. They'll hunt you like dogs hunt deer."

Some stayed. Some didn't.

The British saw all this, and some even grinned. "They're falling apart," they said. "They can't survive without us." And they gave a little corn, a little rum, enough to keep the men in line.

Tecumseh despised this. "You give us drops when we need a river," he said coldly. "You play with our hunger like dice."

But he still took what he could get. Because he knew: an empty stomach doesn't hear speeches.

At night, when the men coughed, when fever filled the tents, he went from fire to fire. He spoke, not like a chief, but like a man who shared the pain. "I'm hungry too," he said. "I also drink the dirty water. I also eat the tough meat. But I won't give up. If I give up, you'll be dead."

His words stopped some from leaving. Others didn't.

Once, an old warrior confronted him, half-starved but with eyes like hot coals. "Tecumseh," he said, "you're talking about a dream. But my children are dying. What good is a dream to me when I see their bones in the mud?"

Tecumseh was silent. For a long time. Then he answered: "Nothing will bring them back. But if you give up, your children's children will die too. They will never have a home again, never have a land again. Then their bones will be the last to lie in this soil. Is that what you want?"

The old man lowered his head. He stayed. But his gaze was broken.

So Tecumseh fought not only against the Americans, but against hunger, disease, doubt, and betrayal. A war with bullets was easier. Bullets kill with bullets. But doubt—doubt eats slowly, silently, from within.

And yet he continued speaking. He held the dream aloft like a torch, even as the wind nearly blew it out.

For Tecumseh knew: Without a dream, everything was just hunger. And hunger alone kills faster than any bullet.

Hunger gnawed at his bones, but Tecumseh realized he could be turned. Hunger isn't just weakness—hunger is also anger. An empty stomach doesn't think clearly, but it burns.

So he began to transform hunger into anger.

"Listen to your belly," he called around the fire, "how it growls. Do you think it growls at me? No. It growls at the white people who took your land. Every morsel of corn you don't have lies in the settlers' pots. Every deer you can't hunt lies in their salt rooms. Do you want to fill your belly? Then take it back!"

The men looked at him, their eyes sunken but glowing. Hunger can dull a knife—or sharpen it.

And Tecumseh sharpened.

He led raids on settlements. No major battles, just quick stabs. Men crept in the night, returning with supplies, corn, meat. It wasn't much, never enough—but it was something. And more importantly: it was a sign that hunger didn't just mean stagnation, but movement, revenge, retribution.

Every sack of corn they took was a blow to the settlers. Every deer they took from the whites was like a cry: *We are still here.*

The British grimaced. "These aren't regular actions," they said. "This is plunder." Tecumseh laughed in their faces. "Plunder? Your entire empire lives off plunder. You take what isn't yours, from India to Canada. But when we take what's ours, you call it theft?"

The officers fell silent.

But the hunger remained.

Tecumseh knew that raids were only temporary fixes. They were a fix for one night, not a year. But they kept the men with him because they sensed he was taking action.

He spoke like fire. "Your stomach is empty? Good! Keep it empty so it drives you. A full stomach makes you lazy. An empty stomach makes you keen. The white people think we'll break them. But we will break them. We'll eat their corn, we'll drink their whiskey, we'll take their meat. Let them feel what hunger is."

His warriors began to wield hunger like a weapon. They mocked their own growling bellies. "Do you hear that?" they said to each other. "My belly is crying out for war."

The children heard it, the women heard it. The growling became not just a lament, but a war song.

And Tecumseh knew he had created something dangerous: a dream that grew on an empty stomach. A dream that didn't satisfy, but burned.

The Americans noticed. They sensed that the raids weren't just hunger, but messages. That Tecumseh's people weren't disintegrating, but rather hardening in hunger.

One settler wrote in his diary: "It is as if they were fighting with their stomachs themselves. We eat, and they starve—and yet we fear them more than ever."

The British continued to grumble. "Undisciplined. Barbaric. Uncontrollable." But even they saw that Tecumseh's men weren't breaking. They were holding fast.

And Tecumseh himself? He ate as little as his men. He drank the dirty water, he chewed the tough meat, he shared every bite. But he kept talking. Talks that drove into hearts like rusty nails.

"Look at your children," he said. "They're thin. Their ribs stick out. That's the truth. But if you fight now, their children will be fed. If you give up now, your blood will seep into the dirt forever."

And some men who were almost broken rose again. Not because they were satisfied, but because they were proud.

So Tecumseh turned hunger into a knife. A knife that he turned against his enemies. And every growl in his stomach became a battle cry.

Hunger is a weapon – but one that is sometimes directed against one's own stomach.

That's how it was in the camp. Tecumseh had turned hunger into anger, but anger never appeases a child. Men can growl and bite, but women want milk, and children want corn. And when both are lacking, betrayal creeps in like a shadow.

It began quietly. Whispers. Men who disappeared at night, supposedly going hunting, but returned with sacks that smelled of salt and white flour—things you wouldn't find in the forest.

Tecumseh immediately sensed the betrayal. "They're trading," he growled, "they're going to the Americans."

And he was right. Some chiefs, not many, but enough, began to negotiate secretly. They sent messengers to the settlers, taking corn, flour, whiskey—in exchange for promises to keep quiet. No more raids, no more warriors for Tecumseh. Just rest until their bellies were full again.

For the men who did this, it wasn't treason. For them, it was survival. "An empty stomach doesn't understand speech," one said when Tecumseh confronted him. "You talk about tomorrow, but my children are dying today."

Tecumseh stood before him, tall, tough, his eyes dark as ash. "And if you eat corn today, what about tomorrow? Tomorrow they'll have you on a leash. Tomorrow you'll be their dog. Is that what you want? Do you want your children fed but in chains?"

The man remained silent. But there was something in his eyes that hurt Tecumseh more than any lie: despair.

Because despair is stronger than pride.

The news spread. Tecumseh was furious. He spoke in council, before all the tribes, his voice like thunder. "You sell the dream for a sack of corn! You sell your land for a bowl of whiskey! You think you're saving your children? You kill them, only more slowly!"

Some nodded, some bowed their heads. But others looked back defiantly. "We can't go hungry just so you can keep your alliance," they murmured.

That was the rift. No cannon shot, no attack—just hunger driving men against each other.

The British noticed. Some even chuckled. "They're falling apart," they said. "The great Tecumseh is losing his power." They deliberately gave too little, just enough to prolong the hunger. Because a hungry ally is an obedient ally—or so they thought.

Tecumseh saw the game, and it made him angrier. "They think we're dogs," he said to his warriors. "They throw us bones to keep us with them. But we're not dogs. We're wolves. And wolves kill."

But words alone could not mend the cracks.

Once, Tecumseh stood before a chief who had openly admitted to trading with the Americans. "I had to," the man said, "my people are starving." Tecumseh stepped so close that they were forehead to forehead. "Then you should have called my people. Then we would have starved together. Together we fight. Separated we die."

But the man remained silent. Hunger deafens one to big words.

That night, Tecumseh sat by the fire and laughed bitterly. "A dream grows," he murmured, "but it grows in a soil of hunger. No wonder it's full of thorns."

He knew: This was the greatest danger. Not the Americans with their cannons, not the British with their mistrust. But the slow crumbling from within. Men who sold their dreams for a sack of corn. Women who would rather see their children fed but enslaved than free but starving.

And he wondered if his dream was too big for empty stomachs.

But then he shook his head, spat into the fire, and said quietly, "No. A dream that survives hunger is a dream no one can kill."

And he swore that he wouldn't tolerate the betrayal. That he would keep talking, keep fighting, keep growling—even if his own bones were sticking out beneath his skin.

Words were good for evenings around fires. But words alone couldn't hold men together when stomachs were rumbling and children were dying. Tecumseh knew: now, actions were needed. Actions as clear as a knife's edge.

Betrayal had spread like mold in bread. Not everywhere, not visibly, but enough that the smell was there. Everyone knew it, everyone smelled it, no one spoke it out loud. Men went out at night, came back with corn that didn't

come from the fields. Whiskey flowed that didn't come from the British. And everyone acted as if it were a coincidence.

Tecumseh decided to break it.

One night he summoned the men. Not a feast, not a council—a meeting. He stood before them, tall, thin from hunger like all the others, his eyes black and burning.

"Some of you," he began, "have sold the dream. For corn, for whiskey, for a piece of bread. You have traded with the Americans while we fight. You have weakened the alliance while we shed blood."

Silence. No one moved. The flames crackled.

Tecumseh pointed his finger at three men. "You. Step forward."

They hesitated, then stepped forward, their shoulders heavy, their faces defiant. One said: "We did what we had to. Our people are starving."

"Your people are starving," Tecumseh repeated. "And you think a sack of corn will buy them lives? No. A sack of corn only buys the rope that binds them."

The men wanted to talk, but Tecumseh raised his hand. "There is no bargain with treason. Not in my alliance."

Then he turned to his warriors. "Lead them away."

The crowd murmured. Some were silent, some nodded. Everyone knew what this meant. The three wouldn't be coming back.

Screams were heard in the night. Short, harsh, then only silence.

The next morning, no one talked about it. But everyone knew: Tecumseh had shown that the dream was non-negotiable.

It was cruel, yes. But cruelty was sometimes the only thing that held men in starvation.

From then on, no one dared to trade openly with the Americans. Whispers remained, yes. But no one wanted to step into the flames like these three.

Tecumseh himself carried it like a burden. He wasn't a man who liked killing his brothers. But he knew that a dream that tolerates betrayal is already dead.

“Better three dead today,” he murmured, “than a thousand dead tomorrow.”

His warriors understood. Some even admired him. “You are tough,” said one, “but you are just.” Tecumseh snorted. “Just? No. I’m just forced.”

But the alliance held again. Not through love. Through fear. And sometimes fear is stronger than any hope.

The British heard about it. Some shook their heads, others grinned. “He’s holding them like a despot,” they whispered. “But he’s holding them.” And that was precisely the point.

The camp was quieter afterward. Fewer whispers, more harshness. Men who had previously doubted stood up straight. Not because they were fed up, but because they knew Tecumseh would not waver.

Thus he nullified the betrayal not only with words, but with blood.

And he knew: every step in this direction made him bigger. But also lonelier.

A dream that grows while the belly remains empty – it grows in thorns, in smoke, in blood.

Hunger made everyone equal. Warriors, women, children—in the end, they were just bones with skin on them, bellies that growled like dogs. But Tecumseh was different. Not because he had more to eat—he was just as hungry. But because he bore his hunger differently.

He devoured him, transformed him into words, into fire. When others writhed, he stood upright. When others groaned, he spoke.

Some said he was no longer just a man. Some saw him at night by the fire and swore that his shadow was larger than his body, that his voice echoed through the trees like thunder.

The children stared at him as if he were a spirit who could protect them. The men listened to him as if he were a shaman. Even the old people, who no longer believed anything else, nodded when he spoke.

Tecumseh sensed it. He sensed he was changing. He slept little, ate little, and talked a lot. His body was thin, his eyes deep, but something burned within them that hunger could not extinguish.

His brother Tenskwatawa had once had visions, seen faces in the fire, and heard voices. Many had laughed at him for this. But now, in the hunger, in the smoke, Tecumseh himself seemed like a prophet—one no one could laugh at because he spoke with blood and steel.

He no longer spoke only of land. He spoke of destiny. Of a future in which all tribes stood together, not as survivors, but as a people. "We are not remnants," he said. "We are not shadows. We are the river, and the river never runs dry."

The men listened, and although their stomachs were empty, their hearts filled.

But Tecumseh knew: prophets often die of hunger. They burn, they shine, and then only ashes and stories remain.

Sometimes, when he was alone, he felt hunger hollowing him out from within. His stomach screamed, his head pounded, his hands trembled. But he didn't let anyone see. He sat by the fire, stared into the embers, and when someone came, he raised his head with eyes so clear that no one noticed his wasting away.

Once a warrior whispered, "He eats nothing, yet he seems stronger than all of us." Another replied, "Perhaps he eats dreams."

Thus the myth grew. Tecumseh, the prophet without visions, the man who transformed hunger into strength.

But he felt the burden. He knew he was no longer like the others. He couldn't complain, couldn't cry, couldn't be weak. He had to always be fire, always flame, always a voice.

And that made him lonely.

The British viewed him with mixed feelings. Some called him "the Indian General." Others whispered that he was dangerous because he had more influence than their own officers. But everyone knew: without him, the alliance would have long since been wiped out.

Tecumseh himself saw it soberly. "I'm no prophet," he once said quietly to a close confidant. "I'm just a man who doesn't want to die without fighting. But if they call me a prophet, so be it. Perhaps they need that more than meat."

And that was exactly the truth.

His dream grew while their stomachs remained empty. It was like a tree growing on stony ground—crooked, hard, full of thorns, but alive.

And Tecumseh was that tree.

The hunger never stopped. It was like a second enemy that never slept. Every sunrise brought not hope, but only a new day with growling stomachs and thinner arms.

Tecumseh saw it. He walked through the camp and heard the coughing of children, the whispers of the elderly dying silently because they no longer had the strength to stand. Men looked at him with eyes that had more shadow than life.

His dream grew, yes – but it grew in a cemetery.

He knew words alone would no longer suffice. And raids only filled the pots for a few days. The alliance held, but it held like a rope that could break at any moment.

So he made a decision.

"We must grow," he told the council. "Not just Shawnee, not just our neighbors. We must reach the South—Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw. If they stand with us, then we'll have more men, more fields, more votes. If not—then we'll die here like dogs, one by one."

The men listened. Some nodded, others shook their heads. One said, "And if you leave, what will we have left? Hunger and doubt. Without you, we will fall apart."

Tecumseh stared at him for a long time, then spoke in a harsh voice: "If you only believe in me, you are already lost. Believe in the dream, not in the man. I am only flesh. The dream is fire."

They were silent.

So Tecumseh decided to travel to the South. It was madness to travel through enemy territory in the midst of hunger, in the midst of war. But he knew that if he stayed, they would slowly starve to death. If he left, there was a chance—small but real.

He prepared himself, packing little: weapons, some dried meat, water. That was all there was. His warriors looked at him, their faces hard. One said, "Your stomach is as empty as ours, and yet you're going?" Tecumseh grinned narrowly. "An empty stomach makes you go faster."

The night before his departure, he went alone to the riverbank. He watched the water flow, black in the moonlight, and whispered: "If I fall, then shall my dream continue like you. Always, always, until it reaches the sea."

Then he returned, and in the morning he called everyone together. "I'm leaving," he said. "But I'll be back. And when I come back, I'll bring brothers with me. Until then, hold on. Starve. Fight. Don't die for nothing."

The men nodded, the women remained silent, the children stared at him with wide eyes. Some believed he was immortal. Others knew he was just flesh.

But everyone sensed: He wasn't leaving because he was weak. He was leaving because his dream was greater than his hunger.

So this part ended. A dream that grew while stomachs remained empty. A dream that didn't satisfy, but kept them alive.

And Tecumseh, thin, tough, with eyes full of fire, stepped out into the darkness to seek the South – and to save the dream.

Farmers, traders, spies – everyone wants a piece

A dream is never just a dream. As soon as it gets big enough, it becomes a commodity. Everyone wants their piece of it.

While Tecumseh traveled south to find new tribes, vultures crawled across the land. British officers, American spies, traders with dirty fingernails—they all smelled the smoke of his dream and thought: *Something can be cut out there.*

The British viewed the alliance as a tool. "Useful as long as they fight," they said in their tents. "But woe betide them if they become too strong." They gave gunpowder, gave whiskey, gave just enough corn—but always with a rope attached. Every sack of flour was a rope, every barrel of gunpowder a treaty without ink.

The Americans were no better. They sent spies, farmers who pretended to be settlers but knew more than a farmer should. They spied on the camps, counted men, and estimated supplies. And when they returned, they told their officers: "The Indians are starving. One more winter and they'll collapse."

Traders came like rats. Some British, some American, some belonging to no side but the gold one. They brought salt, flour, rum—and in return took land, promises, loyalty. You can sell anything to a hungry man, even your own acre.

The warriors saw it, felt it, hated it. But what could one do when one's stomach was empty? Tecumseh was gone, and his words still echoed in the smoke, but words don't fill pots.

So the dream began to be torn apart from all sides as it ran south.

A farmer later recounted how he came to such a camp. "They looked at me like wolves," he wrote. "Their eyes were hollow, but they burned. I offered them flour, and they pounced on it as if it were meat. One whispered: *Tecumseh tells us to stand firm*. Another growled: *Tecumseh is not here*. I knew there was a crack."

The spies heard precisely these cracks. They reported: "Without Tecumseh, order is crumbling. Some follow him, others just follow their gut. This is our chance."

The British heard this too, and they grinned. "Then we'll keep them alive—but not fed. A hungry ally fights harder."

Thus, the alliance became not just a war, but a market. Farmers offered information, traders offered whiskey, spies offered reports. Everyone took a slice of the pie while Tecumseh was still on the move.

And in the middle of this market stood the warriors, trying to hold on to the dream. Some clung to its words like a sacred song. Others murmured that perhaps corn was worth more than a dream.

It was like a carrion field. The dream was of a large animal, still alive but bleeding. And the vultures circled, pecking, waiting for it to fall.

Tecumseh's words still hung in the smoke, but words are like sparks—they only glow as long as you blow on them. Without him in the camp, the sparks grew weaker.

Then the traders came. With carts, with sacks, with bottles. They smelled hunger like dogs smell blood. "A little flour," they said. "A little salt." And they smiled with teeth that looked like old nails.

The men on guard sometimes let them through. Not out of greed, but out of tiredness. Because when your child is crying and your wife is weeping in the tent, a sack of flour sounds like salvation.

One trader was particularly bold. A fat, red-faced bastard, a whiskey dealer. He came into the camp, set down a barrel, and said: "For the men who can still fight." No price, no exchange. But everyone knew: Nothing is free.

The first to drink laughed. They forgot their hunger, forgot the smoke. But in the morning, the barrel was empty, and their stomachs were even emptier. And the bastard had collected names—men he knew, men weak enough to come back.

This is how the traders worked. They didn't just sell corn. They bought souls.

The spies were even smarter. They came not with goods, but with stories. "The Americans are strong," they whispered. "Tecumseh is gone. Why starve when you can have peace? Take a piece of land, take flour, take rest. Your children want to live, not fight."

Some listened, some spat. But everyone listened. Because when your stomach is empty, every word becomes heavier.

Farmers who pretended to be harmless were often the worst. One arrived with a wagon full of pumpkins, offering them for a few furs. But while he was selling, he was counting men, counting weapons, counting how many were too weak to hold a rifle. He disappeared again—and his information went straight into the hands of the Americans.

In the camp itself, things began to simmer. Men whispered in groups. Some said, "Let's wait for Tecumseh." Others said, "Maybe he won't come back at all."

And in that whisper lay the greatest danger. Not cannons, not bullets—doubt.

Tenskwatawa, the prophet, tried to fill the gap. He spoke of visions, of spirits who said Tecumseh would return. But many still remembered Tippecanoe, the defeat, the shame, and they no longer listened with such faith.

"Your visions don't fill stomachs," murmured one.

So the dream hung like a thin rope over a precipice. Every merchant pulled on it, every spy sawed at it, every farmer gnawed at it. And the men in the camp tried to hold on, even though their hands were covered in blisters.

It wasn't the same without Tecumseh. His absence was a hole, an open mouth into which everyone threw something: whiskey, lies, doubt. And every piece gnawed at the dream.

But still—despite everything—there were men who held on. Men who said, "We are hungry, yes. But we are hungry for something. We are waiting, yes. But we are not waiting for corn. We are waiting for the man who showed us that we are more than beggars."

These men kept the dream alive. Not full, not strong—but alive.

A dream without the man who carries it is like a horse without a rider. It still runs, but not straight for long.

This was evident every day in the camp.

There were the Tecumseh loyalists—men who remembered how he had stood in Detroit, how he had turned battles, how he had set fire with words. For them, he was more than a chief. He was proof that dignity still lived. These men clung stubbornly to his words as if they were bones in a dry soup.

And there were the others—men who were tired, who said, "He's gone. Maybe he'll come back, maybe not. But we're starving now. We're dying now." These men began to seek their own paths. Sometimes quietly, sometimes openly.

There was a palpable tension between these groups. Around the fire, they were seen sitting in two circles: those who spoke of Tecumseh's return, those who talked about traders and pumpkins.

At one point, the fight broke out openly. A young warrior rose, his eyes red with hunger and rage. "We're waiting for a man who may already be dead," he cried. "How long shall we starve? Until our children are bones? I say: Every man for himself. Take what you can!"

Another jumped up, an older one, tough as leather. "Shut your mouth," he growled. "Without Tecumseh, we are nothing. With him, we are everything. Anyone who leaves now is already dead. Dead in spirit before they die."

They attacked each other with knives. Men jumped in between, separating them. But the fire had been ignited. From then on, it was clear: the camp was divided.

The spies took advantage of this. They whispered to some: "You don't have to commit. The Americans will give you corn." To others they whispered: "Do you see how your brothers are weakening? Tecumseh alone can save you."

The British saw this and grinned behind their uniforms. A divided alliance was easier for them to control. "Let them tear each other apart," said one. "As long as they serve us, it doesn't matter who they follow."

But for the Shawnee, it was fatal. Every dispute, every split, every migration gnawed at the dream.

Tenskwatawa tried to fill the gap, but his words had lost their bite. "The spirits say..." he often began, but men laughed. "Your spirits brought us Tippecanoe," one mocked. "We don't need spirits. We need bread."

So a hole remained. A hole that only Tecumseh could fill.

The faithful held the rope tightly, with bloody hands, vowing that he would return. The others secretly cut pieces of it and tied them around their own stomachs, hoping to satisfy their hunger.

The camp was no longer a camp; it was a battlefield without cannons. A front of words, hunger, and doubt.

And every day Tecumseh stayed away made the rope thinner.

It was only a matter of time before someone left. Words don't keep stomachs alive forever.

One morning they stood there: twenty men, women, and children. Packed with what little they had: an old wagon, a few sacks, two emaciated dogs. They said nothing, didn't look left or right. They just wanted to get out of the camp, out of the hunger, out of the dream.

Tecumseh loyalists stood in their way. "You can't leave," one said. "That's treason."

The leader of the group, a man with sunken cheeks, calmly replied: "It is not treason if you just want to survive."

"Survive?" growled the other. "Alone, you'll die. The Americans will eat you."
"Then we'll die," replied the man. "But not here anymore. Not for a promise that won't feed our children."

Silence. Only the growling of dogs and the cracking of bones under bare feet.

Tecumseh's loyalists grabbed their weapons. One said, "Tecumseh wouldn't allow this." The man laughed bitterly. "Tecumseh isn't here. And hunger doesn't ask for permission."

It could have ended at that moment—a silent departure, a silent stay. But nothing remained silent during those days. Everything was noise, everything was fire.

A young warrior shouted: "Don't let them! They're selling us out! Today they're leaving, tomorrow they're fighting for the Americans!"

That was enough. Knives flashed. Arrows were drawn. Women screamed, children cried, dogs growled.

The group pressed forward. The faithful stood against them. And then the first stone flew. Then the first arrow.

The small skirmish was short, ugly, and brutal. No battle, no glory. Just chaos. Men wrestled in the dust, women screamed, children were pushed away. A dog yelped as a knife struck it.

In the end, two men lay dead, one from each side. Blood in the dust, as red as every banner.

The group stood still, their faces gray. One of the women held her child tightly, as if to shield it from the sight. The faithful stood there, breathing heavily, with blood on their hands.

Finally, an old man stepped forward, a faithful one. "Go," he said. "But if you go, you are no longer our brothers. You are nothing. You are dust."

The group nodded, wordlessly, and moved on. Slowly, through the forest, out into the void.

Those who remained behind watched them until they disappeared. Then they returned to the fire, silent, as if they had buried something.

And they had buried something. Not just two men. But also a piece of the dream.

Because everyone who left took a piece of it with them. And everyone who stayed knew: next time there could be more.

No one spoke in the night. Only the fire crackled. Someone murmured, "If Tecumseh were here..." But the sentence hung in the air, like smoke that didn't rise.

It was clear: the alliance held—but no longer out of conviction. It held out of fear, out of defiance, out of habit. And fear alone is a poor mortar.

The dream was still alive. But it was bleeding.

The British were no fools. They saw the break, they smelled the weakness. When a dream starts to bleed, those who sell band-aids come along.

They came into the camp with crates. Crates full of flour, salt, gunpowder, and rum. They opened them demonstratively, letting the smell of bread and alcohol waft through the tents. Hungry children crept closer, men licked their lips.

The British officer, a man with a stiff back and eyes like ice, spoke loudly so everyone could hear: "You fought loyally. We appreciate that. And we will continue to support you."

His voice was as smooth as oil. But everyone knew that oil also consumes fire.

"Yes," he continued, "you must work more closely with us. No solo actions. No raids without our consent. Anyone who fights against the Americans will do so in our ranks—or not at all."

The words were like chains, invisible but heavy.

The Tecumseh loyalists grumbled. One shouted, "We are fighting for our country, not for your king!" The officer smiled thinly. "Your country only lives as long as we give you weapons. Or do you think you can drive out the Americans with empty stomachs and empty hands?"

A murmur went through the camp. Men looked at each other, at their wives, their children. The officer was right. Without the supplies, they would die. With them, at least they could continue.

So he laid out the chain—and the men put their necks into it. Not because they wanted to, but because they had to.

The crates were distributed. Bread, rum, and gunpowder. The children ate, the men drank, the women breathed a sigh of relief. But no one laughed. They knew: every bite was paid for. Not with furs, not with silver, but with freedom.

Tenskwatawa, the prophet, tried to show off. "The spirits sent these supplies!" he cried. But an old warrior growled, "The spirits wear red uniforms?" and the laughter was bitter.

The British knew they had won. Not in a battle, but in a deal. A deal that was harder than any bullet.

They set their rules. "No negotiations with the Americans," they said. "No deviation from our plans. You fight when we say you will fight."

And the men nodded, not because they were convinced, but because their mouths were full of bread.

Tecumseh's dream was thus resold—piece by piece, crate by crate. While he was running south, the British turned his alliance into a tool. No longer a free stream, but a canal that only flowed when London opened the tap.

Some saw it, felt it, hated it. One of the faithful whispered, "We're selling the dream for whiskey." Another replied, "Maybe. But whiskey keeps us alive. A dream doesn't."

So the alliance stood: stronger in supplies, weaker in spirit.

And somewhere far away in the South, Tecumseh walked through strange forests, unaware that his dream was already shackled in the North—not by Americans, but by the allies he needed.

A full stomach makes you sluggish – but it also makes you bitter when you know you didn't catch the bite yourself.

After the British crates, the camp was full. At least for a few days. Children finally slept without crying, women had color back in their faces, men chewed bread as if they'd never seen it before.

But there was something else in his eyes: shame.

It wasn't the fact that they were full that weighed them down. It was the way they had become full. Not through hunting, not through raiding, not through their own strength—but through the hands of strangers who gave them their food like a dog that obediently stays at their heels.

Men sat by the fire, chewing silently. No laughter, no singing. Just the chewing, the cracking of teeth, the swallowing. One said, "The stomach is full, but pride is empty." Another replied, "Pride doesn't make bones strong." "And without pride, we're already dead," a third chimed in.

So it went back and forth. Full in the stomach, but hungry in the soul.

The British didn't see this—or they saw it and enjoyed it. For them, a dependent warrior was a useful warrior. They wanted fighters, not brothers.

But Tecumseh's loyalists sensed that they had betrayed without realizing it. Every bite of bread tasted of guilt. Every sip of rum of betrayal.

Tenskwatawa tried to interpret it. "The spirits give us strength through the redcoats," he preached. But the men just laughed dryly. "Your spirits drink whiskey with red coats," one growled.

Thus, the camp rotted from within. Not from hunger—from humiliation.

A young warrior, who usually laughed, sat silently by the fire one evening. When someone asked him why, he replied: "Because I'm full without having fought for it. I feel like I have a bone in my mouth that a stranger threw me."

Another nodded. "Yes. We became dogs. And Tecumseh wanted us to be wolves."

That hit. Like an arrow right through the heart.

Because that was exactly the truth: they were no longer wolves, they were dogs on a leash.

The Americans knew this too. Their spies reported: "The Indians are full, but weak. They eat British bread, they drink British rum. They only fight when the Redcoats allow it. Their pride is broken."

And in this truth lay the greatest danger.

For a hungry man struggles. But a fed and humbled man breaks.

The British kept them alive with supplies, but they took away the very thing Tecumseh had given them: dignity.

And so they sat by the fire, with full stomachs and empty hearts, waiting. For Tecumseh, for a sign, for anything that would turn them back into wolves.

Tecumseh returned like a man who had walked through hell and dust. Weeks in the South, through forests, across rivers, from village to village, from chief to chief. Some had listened to him, some had laughed, some had turned their backs on him. But he had talked, tirelessly, like an itinerant preacher with a heart of steel.

And now he returned to the camp.

He expected hardship, hunger, despair. He expected men who were thin, children who wept, women who suffered in silence. That was the image he had in his mind as he emerged from the forest.

What he found was worse.

The camp wasn't dead. It was alive. Children played, men chewed bread, women stirred pots. Smoke rose, the smell of meat hung in the air.

But it was a false life.

Tecumseh saw the crates. British crates, with red markings, neatly stacked. He saw rum bottles that came from London, not from the forest. He saw rifles that were brighter than the men's faces.

And he saw the eyes.

They were full, yes. But empty. They had eaten, but they had lost something in the process: their dignity, their pride, their fire.

Tecumseh stood there, motionless, while men ran toward him. "He's back!" they shouted. "Tecumseh is back!" Some hugged him, others patted him on the shoulder. But their cheers were weak, forced.

He sensed it immediately: they had survived, but they were no longer the same.

By the fire, they told him what had happened. The traders, the spies, the emigrants. The British with their crates. The conditions, the rules. And as they talked, something boiled inside him.

He was silent for a long time. Then he looked at the men surrounding him. "You ate," he said quietly. "But what did you sell?"

Nobody answered.

"Your stomach is full," he continued, "but your pride is empty. You've allowed yourselves to be fed like dogs. And dogs only fight as long as you throw them bones."

A murmuring roar went through the crowd. Some bowed their heads, others grew angry. "What should we do?" one shouted. "Die? Wait until our children starve? Your dream didn't bring us any corn."

Tecumseh's eyes burned. "My dream brought you dignity. And you sold it for rum."

Silence. Heavy, thick, like smoke in the throat.

Tenskwatawa stepped forward, trying to calm things down. "The spirits..." he began. "Shut up," Tecumseh interrupted. "Your spirits haven't done anything but drink. I'm talking about flesh and blood."

He walked slowly through the crowd, and everyone backed away. He was no longer a man like them. He was bigger, tougher, full of anger.

"I've been to the south," he cried. "I've spoken to chiefs who still want to fight. I've seen men who don't fear hunger because they know that freedom is worth more than corn. And I come back, and what do I see? A camp full of stomachs and empty hearts!"

The words were like blows. Some men clenched their fists, others nodded.

"You want to live? Fine. But not as dogs. If we fight, then as wolves. If we die, then standing, not crawling. I swear to you: whoever takes whiskey from British hands again has no place at my fire."

The crowd was silent.

Tecumseh looked into the faces. He knew he couldn't bring them all back. Some were lost, fed up, and weak. But others—those whose eyes still glowed—would follow him, no matter where.

He had understood: His dream was no longer a camp, no more bread, no more provisions. His dream was a knife. A knife against those who wanted to feed him and against those who wanted to eat him.

Thus ended his return. Not with jubilation, not with triumph—but with the bitter realization that the dream, while still alive, had already been sold, piece by piece, while he was gone.

And he swore that he would buy him back. Not with silver. With blood.

Nights by the river, conversations with ghosts

At night, the river was black as burnt iron. It flowed as if it knew nothing of hunger, nothing of the British, nothing of dreams. Just water that doesn't care.

Tecumseh sat on the bank. The camp slept, full and dull from British bread. But he couldn't sleep. Sleep was a luxury for people who still believed that tomorrow could be better. For him, tomorrow was just another fight, another knot in the rope.

The water murmured, and in the murmur he heard voices. Not clear, not loud, but enough that he wondered if they were ghosts or just his own head going crazy.

His brother Tenskwatawa always spoke of ghosts. "They come when you're still," he said. But Tecumseh had never sat still. He was a man of action, not of vision. And yet, that night, he sensed them.

He heard his father. "Blood in the forest," a voice whispered. "They took me, and you are left. What do you do now, son?"

He heard warriors who had fallen. "We died for your alliance. Where is it now? In crates with British symbols. In bellies that no longer want to fight."

He even heard the children. "Why do we starve for a dream we can't see?"

He pressed his hands against his temples as if he could push the voices out. But they remained, whispering, sneering, demanding.

Finally, he spoke aloud, into the darkness, into the water. "I'm not a prophet! I'm not a damn shaman! I'm a man with a knife, a heart, and a dream too big for a stomach. If you're ghosts—then shut up or fight me!"

The wind didn't answer. Only the sound of the river.

Tecumseh laughed dryly. "Of course. You like to talk when I'm alone. But in battle, you're silent."

He grabbed a stone and threw it into the water. Splash. Waves that dissipated. Like men who had left their dreams.

Nevertheless, he remained seated until the cold crept through his bones. Because deep down he knew: Maybe they were ghosts, maybe just his own madness. But both were telling the truth—the dream was dying.

He thought of the south. Of the tribes who had listened to him half-heartedly, of the chiefs who nodded but refused to leave their fields. Some had hope, yes. But many were tired, just like here.

And he thought of the camp, of the crates, of the men who were full but broken.

His heart pounded, heavy as a drum. "Maybe it's over," he murmured. "Maybe the dream was too big. Maybe we can't all become one. Maybe..."

But then he stood up and looked into the river, which continued to flow incessantly.

"No," he growled. "The river won't stop. And neither will I. If the Alliance bleeds, I'll sew it with my blood. If it dies, I'll die with it. But not before."

And so he sat there, alone on the shore, conversing with ghosts, with doubts, with the water. And he knew: the next battle would not be against the Americans, not against the British—but against his own decline.

The next evening, Tecumseh didn't go to the river alone. He went to the campfire, where the men were sitting, full and silent, as if they had swallowed the last of their courage with their bread.

He simply sat there. No throne, no place for chiefs. Just dust and fire. He waited.

The men looked at him, some nodding hesitantly, others pretending they hadn't noticed. Finally, one said, "You're back. We thought you were staying south." Tecumseh looked at him for a long time, unblinking. "I always return. A wolf never leaves its pack. But I've seen what you've become here."

Silence. A cracking sound in the wood. A child coughed somewhere behind the tents.

"You are full," Tecumseh continued. "Your stomachs are full, but your hearts are empty. You have bread, yes. Rum too. But do you know what you lack?"

No one answered. Tecumseh leaned forward, his eyes like coals in the firelight. "Pride. You've sold your pride. For flour, for whiskey, for a few weapons that aren't yours. You think you're alive. But you're already dead if you keep going like this."

A murmur went through the group. One growled, "Without the bread, we would have starved." "Then you would have starved like warriors," Tecumseh shot back. "But now you live like dogs."

It wasn't a shout, it wasn't a sermon. It was a verbal blow, raw and hard.

An old warrior raised his head. "What are we to do? We're full, but we feel smaller than ever." Tecumseh nodded. "Then start being men again. No more whiskey from red hands. No more bread with a chain on it. If we eat, it's because we've taken it ourselves. If we drink, it's because our blood deserves it."

The men looked at him. Some with defiance, others with a sparkle that had long since disappeared.

He stayed the entire night, speaking not just to one, but to all of them. No grand ritual, no counsel, just small conversations around the fire. A warrior asked, "Why still fight?" Tecumseh replied, "Because land is more than earth. It is your mother, your blood. If you sell it, you sell yourself."

Another asked, "And if we lose?" Tecumseh grinned narrowly. "Then we lose standing. And a standing man is worth more than a dog on its knees."

So he placed his words like nails, one after the other. Not shiny, not beautiful. Rusty, dirty, but hard.

And slowly, very slowly, something stirred. A spark in the eyes, a nod, a return of anger.

At the end of the night, Tecumseh stood up. "I'm going back to the river," he said. "But remember: a full belly is worth nothing without pride. Tomorrow you can sing again, or you can remain dogs. You decide."

He left. Silence remained behind him. But a silence that was no longer stale, but full of fire.

On those nights, Tecumseh wasn't looking for the crowd. He was looking for the few. Those who still had teeth in their mouths, even if they were long since bloody.

They sat away from the large fire. No bread in their hands, no rum in their stomachs. Only knives, smoking pipes, and faces that looked like leather with too many creases cut into it.

These were his men. The ones who had seen him in Detroit. The ones who had crossed the Wabash, through smoke and blood. The ones who didn't give in at the first sign of hunger, but growled.

Tecumseh sat down. He needed no words of greeting. Just a look, a nod. They knew why he came.

"You've seen," he began quietly, "what the camp has become. Sated dogs wallowing in British shadows."

A growl went through the group. One spat into the fire. "They traded dignity for whiskey."

"Yes," said Tecumseh. "But not us."

He leaned forward. "We take what they give us—bread, gunpowder, weapons. But we don't take it like dogs. We take it like thieves. They think we're fighting for them. But we're only fighting for ourselves."

A warrior grinned crookedly, gap-toothed. "You want us to use the Redcoats?" Tecumseh nodded. "Exactly. We are not their brothers, we are their shadows. We need their rifles, their cannons. But when the day comes, they are not our

masters. They are merely tools. Tools we will abandon once they become blunt."

Another, older, with scars across his chest, asked, "And what if they realize we're just using them?" Tecumseh laughed dryly. "Then they'll realize it too late."

The fire crackled. The smoke rose, bitter and sharp. It wasn't a grand ritual, no dance. Just men deciding they would no longer be slaves, even if they wore chains around their necks.

"The Americans think we're starving," said Tecumseh. "The British think we're obedient. Both are mistaken. We're wolves. We'll tear when the moment comes."

The men nodded. No cheers, no oaths. Just a hard, silent agreement.

A warrior drew a knife from his belt, lightly cut his hand, and dropped a few drops of blood into the fire. "For the dream," he murmured. The others followed. Tecumseh too.

The fire hissed as if it were drinking the blood.

"Not a word about it in the camp," said Tecumseh. "The others should stay fed, should dream, should sleep. But we watch. We wait. We tear."

Thus, that night, a second alliance was formed. Not a large one, not with words. Just a handful of men, a few drops of blood, a fire. But stronger than any crate of British supplies.

Tecumseh knew: The dream didn't need hundreds of men, nor empty promises. It needed wolves. Few, but hungry.

And he had them.

The night was thick as tar, the moon a torn piece of bone in the sky. Tecumseh sat by the river, his eyes heavy, his body burned. Hunger gnawed, fatigue consumed, but sleep did not come.

The water rushed, steady and cold. And at some point, the rushing turned into voices. Not the whispers of doubt, like the last few nights. This time, they were faces.

They surfaced in the water. First blurry, then clearer. Warriors who had fallen. Friends, brothers, men he had seen beside him in battle—and who now stood in the stream, their eyes as empty as the sky.

One spoke, his voice deep and hoarse, as if it came from beneath the stones: "You carry us all, Tecumseh."

Another grinned, bloody, with a hole in his chest. "And you think you can save the dream alone?"

Tecumseh gritted his teeth. "I'm carrying because you can't anymore."

The ghosts laughed. Not a warm laugh, but a sharp one, like knives against each other.

"You're fighting against the British, against the Americans, against hunger. But you're forgetting the most important thing," whispered one, his head half torn off. "You can't trust anyone. Not even your own brothers. Not even your shadow."

"I trust no one," growled Tecumseh.

"Yes," the voice hissed. "You trust your dream. And that's dangerous. A dream will consume you if you don't put it in chains."

He snorted and spat into the water. "My dream is the only thing that remains. Without it, we are nothing."

The ghosts nodded, almost in agreement, but their faces remained mocking.

"Then listen to what we tell you," said the one with the bloody chest. "Use everyone. The British, the traders, your own men. But trust no one. Not the redcoats, not the Americans, not the fat bellies in your camp. Use them like stones to cross the river—and if the stone slips, kick it deeper into the water."

Tecumseh stared into the stream, his eyes burning. He wanted to object, but he couldn't. Because he knew they were right.

He had seen men sell their honor for whiskey. He had seen the British give supplies just to put on chains. He had seen how even his brother Tenskwatawa clung more to ghost talk than to reality.

"Use everyone, trust no one."

The words burned in like burn scars.

Then came a final face, barely more than a shadow. His father. Quiet, old, serious. He said nothing. He just looked at Tecumseh, and in that look lay everything: pride, sadness, warning.

Tecumseh nodded slowly, as if making an invisible pact. "I accept your words. I accept your burden. I move on."

The faces faded. The water became just water again. But the voices remained within him, as if carved into his bones.

He stood up, his body tired, his head clear.

"Use everyone. Trust no one."

This was no longer a dream. It was a law.

The next morning, Tecumseh was a different man. Not in his face—that was still hard, gaunt, as if carved from stone. But in his eyes. There was something new. No fire, no madness—a calculation.

He walked through the camp, and the men sensed it. They no longer saw him merely as a leader or prophet. They saw a man who assessed them like arrows in a quiver. Useful or useless. Nothing more.

Tecumseh had understood: loyalty was a beautiful word, but a dangerous one. Those who trusted too much died quickly. So from now on, he would use everyone. Like stones in a river.

The British were the first. An officer arrived with supplies, those crates again, the oil in his voice again. "We are pleased with your steadfastness," he crooned. "We bring gunpowder, we bring bread."

Once, Tecumseh would have hesitated, feeling humiliated. Now he took it coolly. "Fine," he simply said. "Give it here."

The officer was irritated. "But of course we expect..." "Expect what you will," Tecumseh interrupted. "As long as I need your weapons, I'll take them. As long as you need my warriors, you have them. But don't mistake that for loyalty."

The words were like a slap in the face. The officer pressed his lips together, nodded stiffly, and had the crates unloaded. There was nothing he could do. The British needed Tecumseh just as much as he needed them.

In the camp, some warriors grinned. For the first time in weeks, they saw him spitting in the eyes of the British—not literally, but sharply enough.

Then their own men arrived. One of the younger ones, full of doubt, asked, "Tecumseh, can we trust the Redcoats?" He laughed dryly. "We can trust them like a knife in the night. You hold it while it's sharp. But you don't sleep next to him."

The men nodded, understanding. It was no longer brotherhood. It was a deal, cold, clear, deadly.

Even Tenskwatawa, his brother, became a tool. The prophet came to him, full of talk of visions, of spirits that supposedly promised victory. In the past, Tecumseh would have argued. Now he just nodded. "Good. Tell the men. They need your spirits." Tenskwatawa beamed, feeling important again. But Tecumseh knew: He was just smoke. Smoke he needed to keep the men in line.

So he began to play everyone. The British with cold obedience. The men with pride and toughness. His brother with feigned respect.

But it was clear in his mind: he didn't trust anyone.

"Use everyone," he murmured at night as he sat by the fire. "Use them all. The redcoats, the traders, even my brothers. But trust no one."

The men noticed the change. One whispered, "He's no longer just our chief. He's become a wolf." Another nodded. "A wolf who walks alone."

And that's exactly how it was.

Tecumseh rebuilt his alliance, but no longer based on trust, no longer on brotherhood. He built it like a man setting a trap. Everyone was a tooth, every piece of meat a bait.

And deep down, he knew: This was the only way the dream could survive. Not with brothers. But with tools. Not with trust. But with control.

Tecumseh barely slept anymore. He lived on smoke, bitterness, and the oath to trust no one. His nights were ghosts, his days were plans.

He began organizing raids—but not like before, with wild sorties that were half hunger, half anger. Now it was calculated. Cold. A village here, a wagon train there, precise, as if he were stabbing a knife into flesh, always where it hurt the most.

The British saw the successes and patted themselves on the back. "Our Indians are fighting again!" they said, as if they had given the order. Tecumseh grinned inwardly. "Our Indians"—they didn't understand anything.

He played the game with ice-cold precision. He made the British believe they were in control, while he had long since grasped the reins. They gave him gunpowder, bullets, bread – and he took it. Not as thanks, not as loyalty, but as booty.

When they made demands, he smiled. "Yes, we are fighting for the king." And as he said this, he thought: *I fight for no one but the dream.*

He treated the men in the camp the same way. He no longer spoke of great visions, of alliances that united all the tribes. That was too far-reaching, too weak for hungry warriors. He spoke of blood, of pride, of raids that brought plunder.

"You want bread? Get it," he said. "You want whiskey? Rip it out of their hands. No dog waits for a bone thrown to him. A wolf takes the meat."

The men roared, their eyes bright again, no longer dull. They had something back—not dignity, perhaps, but anger. And anger was a better fire than rum.

But as he rekindled the camp, he himself grew colder. He no longer saw the men as brothers. Each was an arrow to be shot when needed. Each was a tool to be used until it was blunt.

Once, a young warrior came to him, full of enthusiasm, his eyes shining. "Tecumseh, I would die for you." He placed his hand on his shoulder and said, "Then die when it's your time." The boy grinned, proud, as if he'd received a gift. But Tecumseh felt nothing. No pride, no gratitude. Only the calculation: One more arrow, ready to be shot.

The British began to get nervous. They realized Tecumseh had too much influence. One officer said, "You are too independent." Tecumseh looked at him coldly. "I am as independent as you need me to be. Nothing more."

And the officer remained silent because he knew: without Tecumseh, their war in the West was just smoke.

This is how Tecumseh turned the game around. Raids against Americans, pressure on the British, control over warriors. Everyone moved to his whim without realizing it.

But at night, by the river, when the camp was asleep, he sat alone. No fire, no cheering, no brothers. Just him and the water, which kept flowing, no matter how much blood flowed into it.

He was lonelier than ever. A man who controlled everything but trusted no one. A wolf, yes. But a wolf who howled alone.

The river was his mirror. Not a clear one, not one that showed the truth—more like a mirror made of broken glass, in which one saw faces one didn't want to see.

Tecumseh sat there again, as he did every night. Behind him was the camp: men who finally seemed proud again, women who laughed, children who played. Everything as it should be. But he knew it wasn't real. It was all just anger, just hunger, just his iron grip holding them together.

He stared into the water. He saw his face, which was no longer his. Too many sleepless nights, too many days of hardship. His skin taut, his eyes burning, his mouth as if carved in stone. No brother, no father, no other person. Only the man with the dream.

He remembered the past, his youth on the Ohio, nights filled with laughter, hunts, and feasts. Back then, pride had been simple. Back then, it wasn't as heavy as a chain around one's neck.

Now he was just weight.

He muttered into the darkness: "I have everything under control. The British give me what I want. The men obey. The Americans fear us. Everything is working."

But the water didn't respond. Only the rushing, cold, indifferent.

Then came the truth. It crawled out of his own chest, bitter, cutting: *You are trapped yourself.*

Trapped in your dream, in your vow, in your role.

He had said he would use everyone and trust no one. And he did. But he realized that he himself was the one being used the most. Used by his own idea, by his own dream.

A wolf, yes. But a wolf chained to his own vision.

He clenched his fists and pounded the ground beside him, kicking up dust. "Damn it!" he screamed into the darkness. "Damn every spirit that gave me this path!"

But it was too late. The path was there. The dream was there. And he couldn't go back.

He thought of the men who had left, the traitors, the traders, the British. Everyone had taken, everyone had sold, everyone had lost something. And him? He had lost everything, except the dream.

And the dream wasn't a gift. It was a rope.

Tecumseh stared into the water until his eyes burned. He saw no more ghosts, no more voices. Only the flow. On and on, on and on.

"So that's it," he murmured. "I chained them all—and in the process, built my own."

He knew he couldn't get rid of the dream. He would carry it with him until it killed him.

That night, by the Black River, he understood: He was no longer free. He was no longer just a man. He was a prisoner of his own fire.

And so that night ended, not with hope, not with visions – but with the bitter realization that he had everything under control, except himself.

Alliance like rotten wood

The alliance stood. On paper, in people's minds, in the speeches around the fire. Men swore, women nodded, children heard stories of a great morning. From the outside, it seemed strong, like a tribe that could withstand wind and rain.

But anyone who looked more closely could tell: the trunk was hollow.

Tecumseh had held it together—with words, with blood, with fear. But inside, it was already full of cracks. The British, who only ever gave when it benefited them. The Americans, who spied and sowed enticements. The tribes themselves, who were more concerned with their own lands than with any dream of a grand alliance.

It was like rotten wood: firm to the touch, but when you stabbed it with a knife, it crumbled into dust.

Tecumseh saw it. Every night, as he walked through the camp, he knew: Here is a man just waiting for the next sack of bread to arrive. There is someone who dreams of peace, no matter the cost. And there is someone who is still fighting—but only because he knows nothing else.

The speeches still helped. They gave pride, they gave sparks. But sparks alone won't ignite a fire if the wood is damp and rotten.

The British noticed it too. They sent more supplies, more rum, more promises. But they always held the rope. Every bite was a reminder: "You live because we feed you."

The Americans played their own game. They spread rumors: "Tecumseh is too big. He wants your land just like we do." Or: "The British will let you fight while they laugh and drink." And some listened.

That was the alliance—a house that was supposed to stand on rock, but was built on clay. From the outside, it looked grand. From the inside, it creaked.

Tecumseh knew it. But he did what he always did: He kept going. He made speeches, sent warriors on raids, and made the British believe they were the masters. He played the game, even though he knew the boards beneath his feet were rotten.

For what choice did he have? He couldn't say, "It's over." He couldn't extinguish the fire he himself had ignited. So he continued to stir the embers, even if they only gave off smoke.

One night, as he sat alone by the fire, he heard two men whispering. "The alliance is strong," one said. "Tecumseh holds us together." "Strong?" the other laughed softly. "Strong as rotten wood. One blow, and we break."

Tecumseh heard it, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. And he knew: the man was right.

The first to leave did so quietly. No fuss, no speeches. They simply packed their things, waited one night until the moon was small, and disappeared into the forest.

When morning came, the fire pits were cold, the tents empty. A few footprints in the dust, nothing more.

Tecumseh found them, knelt down, and ran his hand over the prints. "Mice," he murmured. "No thunder, just mice."

But mice could devour a camp just as easily as fire.

He called the remaining warriors together. "They've left," he said, his voice harsh. "They think they can buy peace by going alone. But peace will find them just as it found us. Only faster."

Some nodded, but there was fear in their eyes. Everyone thought: *Maybe they're right.*

The British noticed it too. An officer arrived, his brow furrowed with worry, his voice sweet as sugar but hard as iron underneath. "You must hold it," he said. "An alliance that falls apart is useless. Our plans need you strong."

Tecumseh glared at him. "Your plans?" He laughed dryly. "Your plans are cannons and rum. Our plans are blood and earth. Don't confuse the two."

The officer flinched, remained silent, and stepped back.

But the truth remained: the alliance was crumbling.

A small tribe of Kickapoo openly declared that they had had enough. "We have our fields, we have our children. We are no longer fighting for your dreams."

Tecumseh roared them down, his voice like thunder. "Your fields will be burned, your children enslaved, if you don't fight. Do you think the Americans will leave you alone just because you keep quiet? Even the dead are silent."

It worked for a moment. But he knew: fear gnawed at him more strongly than his words.

The British also hesitated. They had sent supplies, yes. But fewer and fewer. Later and later. Their promises sounded more tired, their faces more tense. They could be heard talking behind the tents: "Perhaps Tecumseh's alliance is already lost. Perhaps we should rely on our own soldiers."

Tecumseh heard this, and it burned within him. He confronted them with their own doubts. "Without us, you are lame. Your red jackets scare no one. But our warriors strike fear into the hearts of your enemies. Remember that before you write us off."

But he knew that he was fighting more against the inside than against the enemy outside.

Because an alliance can survive many enemies – but not itself.

By the river, he thought of it like rotten wood. Smooth on the outside, full of worms on the inside. Every fallen log was another worm. Every British lie, every American trick was another crack.

And he, Tecumseh, stood in the middle of it, his hands full of splinters, his skin bloody, trying to hold the wood together.

The Kickapoo were the first to openly object. Tecumseh confronted them, right in the middle of the camp, in front of all the men.

"You want to leave?" he yelled. "You want to plow your fields while the Americans trample your land with their boots? You want to pretend you can hide until the storm passes?"

The Kickapoo spokesman, a man with gray hair and a scar across his face, raised his chin. "We've seen enough blood. Enough burned, enough lost. Our children need corn, not dead people."

A murmur went through the crowd. Tecumseh stepped forward, grabbed the man by the arm, and pulled him toward the center. His eyes were fiery, his voice a powerful blow.

"Your children won't have cornfields when the Americans are here. They'll wear chains. They'll live in shacks that aren't theirs. You talk about peace—but the only peace you'll get is the peace of a grave."

The men held their breath. But the Kickapoo didn't back down. "And if that's the case, at least we die on our land. Not in your wars."

That hit. Harder, deeper than Tecumseh had expected.

He pushed the man away as if he held poison. "Coward," he spat. "You're already dead, only your body doesn't know it yet."

The Kickapoo left. Not all of them, but many. With them vanished tents, children, and women. Dust rose as they entered the forest. And Tecumseh watched, his fists clenched, knowing he couldn't hold them.

That evening, he called the remaining warriors together. His voice was a storm, his gaze like steel.

"Anyone who leaves dies faster. Anyone who stays still has a chance. You decide."

It worked for a moment. They nodded, they murmured their agreement. But Tecumseh looked into their eyes and knew: Many were thinking the same thing as the Kickapoo, they just weren't saying it.

He tried something different. Not just threats, not just anger. He spoke of the dream, of a land that couldn't be sold, of freedom that was greater than corn.

Some listened, their eyes glowing. Others stared into the fire as if they hadn't heard anything at all.

It was like water in a leaky jug. He poured more and more, but it leaked out the bottom.

The British saw this and became uneasy. "You must keep them together," urged an officer. "Without unity, you are useless."

Tecumseh gasped and laughed coldly. "Useless to you? We are not soldiers in your ranks. We do not fight for your king. We fight for our land. Never forget that."

But deep down, he knew they were right. Without unity, the dream was just smoke.

And he felt that every attempt to bring the men back only drove them further. Like rotten wood: the harder he pressed, the more it broke.

The Americans had a keen nose for weakness. They didn't need to win battles if they could wait until an alliance rotted from within.

Their spies stalked through the forests, with false faces and sweet tongues. They carried letters, promises, sometimes just rumors, which they spread like poison.

"Tecumseh wants your land just as much as the whites do," they whispered. "He's only gathering you to use you. He talks about brothers—but in the end, you're just his soldiers."

Others said: "The British laugh at you. They give you whiskey because they know you'll collapse without it. You die for a king who doesn't know your name."

And still others offered: "Come to us. Lay down your weapons. You keep your fields, your corn remains your corn. No more fighting, no more winters of hunger."

It was all a lie. Tecumseh knew it, the men knew it—and yet it gnawed at them. For in every lie there was a grain of truth.

A Delaware tribe began to ask questions. "Why are we fighting for a dream that only brings us blood? The Americans offer peace. Perhaps we'll take it." Tecumseh raged. "You take peace? You take chains! Peace offered by the enemy is poison. You drink and die more slowly."

But he felt that they no longer listened to him as they used to.

Doubts also arose among the Wyandot. A messenger came to the camp, holding a note written by some American general. It read: "Lay down your weapons. We guarantee your land." Some Wyandot held the letter sacred, whispering about it as if it were a promise stronger than blood.

Tecumseh tore the note into pieces and threw them into the fire. "Guarantee?" he yelled. "You guarantee nothing! Your words are like autumn leaves—beautiful when they fall, dead when you touch them."

The men looked at him, some with approval, others with quiet hope that perhaps there was something to the promises.

That's how the Americans worked. No cannons, no guns. Just words. Words that crawled into wood like worms.

The British sensed it too. An officer approached, nervous, his face pale. "Your men are listening to foreign voices. You must stop that." Tecumseh growled. "And how? With your rum bottles? Your supplies keep them fed, but feeding makes them weak. Your cannons are far away. Here we fight words against words—and your voices are just as hollow as theirs."

It was a battle he couldn't win. Because words don't need victory. They only need doubt.

And doubt was everywhere. In the tents, around the fire, even in the eyes of some warriors who had remained loyal to him.

The Covenant was a tree still standing, but every gust of wind cracked its branches. Tecumseh walked around every night, like a man holding onto the bark while the trunk inside had long since crumbled to dust.

And the Americans laughed because they knew they just had to wait.

Tecumseh knew that words were poison—so he used words like knives. But he was no healer. His words weren't balm. They were blows, rusty nails that he drove into the men's chests.

He stood before the camps, before the nights of fire, and his voice was like thunder. "You listen to the Americans?" he roared. "You believe their letters, their promises? Then listen to me too: Anyone who believes an enemy is already his dog. And a dog dies as soon as his master is no longer hungry."

The men listened, some with sparks in their eyes, others with downcast eyes.

"They offer you land?" he continued. "What land? Land that already lies beneath their plows. They offer you peace? What peace? The peace they give to the bones when they're full."

It was powerful, it was real—but it was also desperate. Because he realized: those who truly listened to him were already convinced. The others heard only the anger, not the truth.

So he followed up with action. He sent soldiers to attack American settlements. "Look," he said, "this is what your peace looks like. Smoke, blood, screams. This is the enemy you trust."

The raids were cruel and targeted. Houses burned, fields were destroyed, men fell, women screamed. Tecumseh wanted to kill doubt with fear.

But fear is a double-edged knife. Some warriors became harder, their blood burning. Others became stiffer, colder—they wondered if this was truly the way.

A young Delaware man approached him, his face ashen. "I did what you said," he stammered. "We burned down a village. But the children..." He broke off, shaking his head.

Tecumseh grabbed him by the shoulders, hard and firmly. "Children grow up to be enemies. Either you kill them now, or they kill your children later. There is no peace."

The boy nodded weakly, but his eyes were dead. One more tool growing blunt.

The British were horrified by the brutality. One officer dared to protest: "Such cruelties don't help! They only drive more Americans into the fight." Tecumseh snapped at him. "Americans don't need a reason to kill. They are the reason. You don't understand anything."

But deep down, he felt that his harshness was like axe blows on rotten wood. The more he chopped, the faster it broke apart.

The men muttered in silence. Some said, "Tecumseh is blind with rage. He thinks only of fighting. Perhaps the Americans are right. Perhaps peace is better than this fire."

Others remained loyal to him, but even they felt that the alliance was no longer a tree, but a pile of splinters that Tecumseh wanted to press together with his bare hands.

And every speech, every deed, every attack was another blow – loud, violent, but always more dangerous for what he wanted to save.

He was a man who supported a rotten roof with his fists while it crumbled into dust around him.

The British liked order. Straight lines, commands, drums, marching steps. They liked wars that could be counted: soldiers on the left, soldiers on the right, a battlefield in between.

Tecumseh was the opposite. He was fire, smoke, night raids, knives in the back. A war that wasn't counted, but merely endured.

At first, the British loved it. "Our fierce allies," they said, and patted each other on the back while Tecumseh's men burned American villages. But the longer it went on, the more they realized: The wolf couldn't be led on a leash.

An officer came into the camp, his uniform clean, his face like a piece of stone. He spoke to Tecumseh as if he were a naughty student. "You must stop attacking indiscriminately. You are making our job difficult. The enemy is getting angrier, his ranks denser. We need strategy, not wild raids."

Tecumseh looked at him, silent, as if he wanted to pierce him with his eyes. Finally, he said coldly: "You need order, we need life. Your strategy is a piece of paper. Our war is flesh and blood."

The officer grimaced as if he'd swallowed something bitter. "If you continue to act like this, we'll lose control." "You've never had control," Tecumseh cut him off. "Without us, you're weak. With us, you're stronger. But you don't command us."

The men standing by grinned crookedly. They loved it when Tecumseh kicked the Redcoats in the face. But the British weren't laughing.

Over the next few days, their deliveries dwindled. Less powder, less bread, less rum. Not enough to starve, but enough for everyone to notice.

A warrior growled, "The Redcoats are punishing us." Tecumseh nodded coldly. "They want us to feel dependent. But we're not dogs. If they let us starve, we'll take what we need."

So he allowed raids not only against Americans, but also against traders traveling between the lines—sometimes British, sometimes neutral. A wagon loaded with flour disappeared; a convoy of bullets never arrived at its destination. The British knew who was behind it, but they couldn't prove it.

Distrust grew. British officers whispered among themselves: "Tecumseh is unpredictable. He will ultimately do us more harm than good."

Tecumseh heard about it, and he liked it. Because unpredictable meant free.

But the truth gnawed at him. He knew he needed the British. Without their powder, without their cannons, his alliance was just a bunch of men with bows and old rifles. But he couldn't let them see it. He had to always remain the wolf they feared more than the Americans.

It was a dance on rotten wood. Every step cracked, every glance sent splinters flying. The British wanted order, and it brought chaos. The British wanted predictability, and it was a storm.

And the wood creaked louder.

It was night when Tecumseh walked through the camp. There was no moon, only dimly glowing fires. Children slept, women whispered, men lay with their eyes open, as if they themselves knew that dreams at this time were only lies.

He saw the faces. Tired. Doubtful. Divided. Some full of hatred, others full of hunger, others simply empty. An alliance, yes – but no longer a people.

He thought about everything he had done: shouted speeches, led raids, used the British, and put men in chains of discipline. He had shed blood, seen tears, heard ghosts. And for what?

For an alliance that was as rotten as wet wood in winter.

He remembered his earlier words: *We are wolves, not dogs.* And now he knew: Many of them had long since become dogs again. Full, but quiet, waiting for the next bone.

The British played their game. The Americans spread their poison. And his own brothers wavered between pride and complacency.

He sat down by the river, which rushed as always, mercilessly, indifferently.

"It's rotten," he muttered. "I've built it, I've cursed it, I've bled—and it's still rotting."

He thought of wood. How a trunk can look strong, hard under the fingers. But when you apply a knife, it crumbles to dust. That was exactly how his alliance was. Terrifying on the outside, already doomed on the inside.

He laughed bitterly, a short, dry bark. "An alliance like rotten wood. And I'm the idiot who thinks I can bear it."

But he knew he couldn't stop. Even when he saw it crumbling, he couldn't let go. A man who holds a dream for too long becomes its prisoner. And prisoners don't let go.

The men in the camp still believed in him—or at least they pretended to. Some followed out of pride, some out of fear, some simply because it was easier than making their own decisions. But no one was the way he had once wanted them to be: burning, free, unbreakable.

"Perhaps," he thought, "wood has to be rotten before it burns."

That was the bitter realization of that night: He couldn't save it. But he could use it. A rotten trunk no longer bears a burden. But it burns brightly if you hold a fire to it.

And so he swore to himself: If the alliance had to collapse, then it wouldn't rot quietly. It would burn. It would crash. It would die so loudly that the world would hear the echo for centuries to come.

He stood up, his eyes hard, his mouth cut. "If the wood is rotten, I'll make fire out of it."

And with this thought, the night ended. Not with hope. Not with victory. But with a decision: The alliance was dead—but it could still die ablaze.

Thames River – mud under your boots

The journey to the Thames River wasn't a march, it was a punishment. It had been raining for days, clouds like wet stone, and the ground turned into a hell of mud. Every step sucked the boots deeper into the mud, as if the earth itself wanted to devour the men.

The British marched in front. Red uniforms that had long since turned brown and gray, rifles heavy as lead. Their drums had fallen silent, their faces blank. They were no longer proud soldiers, they were soggy dolls in the rain.

Tecumseh and his warriors followed. No marching steps, no drumming—just the squelching of bare feet and moccasins in the mud. The mud dragged at their legs, the rain beat in their faces, and the nights were cold as graves.

The river itself was like a mockery. Wide, black, sluggish—it flowed calmly while men sank on the banks. "Thames," murmured one. "A name like a cough."

The British grumbled. They'd had enough. One of the officers, dripping wet, muttered to another: "This is no longer a war. This is a death march." And he was right.

Tecumseh saw them trudging, their ranks thinning. He heard their cursing, their complaints. He felt their will breaking. They were no longer fighting, they were just dragging themselves along.

He turned to his warriors, who continued on in silence. They were accustomed to enduring mud and hunger. For them, this wasn't doom, just another day in the dirt. But there was weariness in their eyes, too. No more embers, only ash, barely able to spark.

The sky was gray, the water black, the ground brown – the world had lost its colors.

"Mud beneath my boots," thought Tecumseh. "That's how a dream ends. Not in fire, not in thunder. But in dirt."

But he knew this was only the beginning of the end. Because mud wasn't the enemy. The enemy was already waiting. And he smelled blood.

The British whispered of retreat, of surrender. Tecumseh heard it and gritted his teeth. "Cowards," he muttered. "The ground will suck you in, and you will surrender."

But he knew they were right. The ground, the rain, the emptiness—they weren't just eating away at his boots, they were eating away at his morale.

That evening, as the men sat around wet fires, Tecumseh spoke softly but harshly. "You think the mud will eat you? Then let it. Better to die in the mud than live in chains. Tomorrow won't be better. Tomorrow will only be harder. But tomorrow is ours—while we're still standing."

A few men nodded, others just stared at the rain.

So the march to the Thames River began: not with drums, not with cheers – but with mud under our boots and the feeling that every step led deeper into the grave.

The British were tired from the march. Not just physically tired—tired in their bones, in their hearts, in their souls. Mud ate their boots, the rain ate their flesh, and the thought of defeat gnawed at their brains like a worm.

You could see it in their eyes: no longer proud, no longer cold, but empty. They wanted out. Out of the swamp, out of the war. One by one, they began to murmur the word "retreat" like a prayer.

Tecumseh heard it. First in whispers, then in open conversation among the officers. "We must retreat," said one, his voice brittle like rotten wood. "We are too weak, too wet, too tired. The men cannot endure another fight."

Tecumseh stepped forward, dripping, his face chiseled with rage. "Retreat?" he asked quietly, dangerously quietly. "Retreat to where? To your homes in England? To your officers' tents with rum and warm bread? This is our land! For us, there is no retreat. We stand or we die."

The officer raised his chin, trying to show composure. "We must save our men." "Save?" Tecumseh laughed coldly. "You haven't saved anything. You've only taken. You talk about saving, but you mean escape."

The British flinched. Some officers lowered their gazes. They weren't used to a "savage" spitting in their faces—but no one could object.

Tecumseh walked through their ranks, speaking like a storm. "You marched through our forests, you carried our blood on your hands, you used our warriors like chess pieces. And now that the enemy is truly before you, you will turn back? No. You stay. You fight. You die if necessary—but you will not run."

His voice was thunder, and some of his own warriors roared in agreement. But there was only frost on the faces of the Britons.

They weren't cut from his cloth. For them, war was a game with rules, a line on a map, a trophy for the king. For Tecumseh, it was everything—blood, earth, breath. No play, no retreat, only survival or death.

That evening, as the camp lay damp and smoky, the British officers met in a tent. Voices grew loud, stifled, and loud again. Tecumseh heard enough to know: They wanted to leave. They would leave.

He entered the tent without knocking, without asking. Mud dripped from him, his eyes burned. "You talk of retreat," he said, not questioning, but accusing. "Then listen carefully: If you leave, you leave alone. My warriors will not flee. They will fight. They will die. But they will not run."

Silence. You could hear the rain dripping onto the tent canvas.

An older officer, gray and tired, looked at him. "You are brave, Tecumseh. But courage doesn't stop cannons. Our ranks are weak. We have no choice."

Tecumseh stepped closer, so close the man could smell his breath. "You always have a choice. The choice to fight or crawl. And I tell you: He who crawls dies faster."

Then he turned and left the tent. His footsteps were heavy, absorbed by the mud.

His warriors were waiting outside. "What are they saying?" one asked. Tecumseh spat. "They're talking about retreat. But we're talking about fighting."

The men nodded. Some with anger, some with fear. But they nodded.

The mud beneath their boots grew heavier. Not just from the rain, but from the weight of betrayal that everyone felt.

The morning began with fog. Thick, gray fog that enveloped the river like a shroud over a corpse. One could hear the sloshing of mud, the clanking of chains, the shouting of voices.

The British packed. No speeches, no drumbeat—just the dull sound of crates being heaved onto wagons, horses snorting restlessly.

Tecumseh watched. The officers stood with maps and compasses, their faces rigid, as if they didn't want to utter the word "escape." But it was in every move. They departed.

He approached them, splashing mud, his eyes like coals. "So then," he said. "You retreat."

An officer, pale and with sunken cheeks, barely looked at him. "We have no choice. Our men are too weak. We must cross the river and regroup."

"Regroup?" Tecumseh laughed dryly. "You're fleeing. Call it what you will, it still stinks."

Another officer, younger, angrier, tried to maintain his composure. "We'll keep fighting—just not here." "Just not here," Tecumseh repeated. "Not here, not now, not with us. You're always fighting somewhere else."

The men behind him, his warriors, stood silent. Some with hatred in their faces, others with resignation. They had known this would happen.

Tecumseh stepped closer to the officers, his voice sharp as a knife. "You want to go? Go. But don't forget: If you go, you'll leave us in the mud. You'll leave us alone against the enemy. And if we die, your war dies with us."

The gray officer raised his eyes. "Tecumseh, you are brave. But bravery doesn't hold lines. We can't do otherwise."

Tecumseh snorted and spat into the mud. "Then go. But if we fall, know this: it was your retreat that killed us."

The officers fell back and went to their men. Orders were shouted, wagons rolled, horses pulled. Step by step, the British moved away from the camp.

Tecumseh stopped and stared after them until the fog swallowed them.

Behind him, his warriors murmured. One said, "They're leaving us alone." "We were always alone," Tecumseh replied.

He turned to them, his voice loud, harsh, full of anger, but also full of fire. "The Redcoats are fleeing. They have no hearts, only uniforms. But we—we still have land. We have blood. We have the ground beneath our feet. If they run, we stay. If they tremble, we roar. If they flee, we fight!"

The men roared back, voices like thunder in the fog. It wasn't jubilation, it was rage, despair, a rebellion against what they already felt.

Tecumseh raised his hand, silencing them. "Listen to me. We don't stand here for the Redcoats. We don't stand for a king. We don't even stand for an alliance that's already rotten. We stand for ourselves. For our land. For our children. For our dead."

His voice cut through the fog.

"And when we die, we die standing. Not kneeling. Not fleeing. Standing."

The warriors nodded, one after the other. They knew what this meant. They knew it was probably their end. But it was better than the silence of the British.

The water rushed along the river, indifferent as always. The fog swallowed the redcoats, and only Tecumseh and his men remained. Mud beneath their boots, anger in their hearts. Alone.

The night was wet, the fire little more than embers in the mud. But the men sat around it, silent, with knives, axes, and rifles. Everyone was sharpening, everyone was checking. It was no ordinary camp—it was a house of the dead, where the living were preparing themselves for the pit.

Tecumseh went from man to man, looking them in the eyes. No more hope, no more questions. Only hardship. They knew what was coming. Maybe not when, maybe not how—but it hung over them like a stone that was already falling.

"Have you eaten enough?" he asked dryly. A few men grinned crookedly. They had barely anything in their stomachs except a bit of corn and old meat. But it didn't matter. Tomorrow, no one would be hungry.

A young warrior, barely twenty, raised his rifle. "My powder is dry." Tecumseh nodded. "Good. Dry powder is better than a dry mouth in the grave."

They laughed hard, without joy.

Then Tecumseh spoke. No great speech, no thunder. Just words, sharp as blades, thrown into the silence.

"We are alone. The Redcoats have betrayed us. The Americans want to swallow us. There is no turning back, no tomorrow, no peace. Only this fight. This ground. This breath."

He took a few steps, entering the circle of fire. His silhouette was black, his face torn by flames.

"Listen to me carefully. You're no longer fighting for any alliance, not for a dream. You're fighting for yourselves. For your children, for your wives, for the dead who are already lying in the ground, watching. Tomorrow they'll see if you're worthy."

Silence. Only the crackling of the embers, the dripping of the rain.

"Die?" he continued. "Yes, many of us will die. Perhaps all of us. But I tell you one thing: If we fall, we will fall so that the earth itself will feel it. If we scream, we will scream so loudly that they will hear it in Washington. If we die, we will not die quietly, not like dogs. We will die like men."

The warriors nodded. Some pounded their chests with their fists, others held their weapons high. No tears, no pleading—only that last spark that Tecumseh had plucked from their ashes.

Then the preparation began.

Some carved symbols into their skin—spirals, lightning bolts, lines meant to summon spirits. Others painted their faces black and red, the colors of war, the colors of the end.

They tied feathers in their hair, strapped knives to their legs, and tested their bows. Every step a ritual, every movement a farewell.

Tecumseh saw it and nodded. "Good. Make yourselves beautiful for death. He loves men who smile at him."

They laughed, louder this time. A defiant laugh that drowned out the rain.

Later, as the night deepened, they sat in silence. Some murmured to spirits, others to ancestors, still others said nothing at all.

Tecumseh stood by the rushing river, indifferent as ever. He looked into the water, his mirror. No more ghosts, no more voices. Only his face. Hard. Old. Finished.

He murmured, "This is the last dance."

And the river took the words, carried them away, as if it wanted to take them somewhere where someone else could listen.

The morning came not as a light, but as a gray knife. No sunshine, no gold in the sky—only fog, rain, and mist that enveloped the river and the forests in a dripping shroud.

Tecumseh rose early, even before the first voices emerged from the camp. He looked into the fog and knew: Today. It was in the air, in the smell, in the breath. Today the enemy was coming.

His warriors gradually awoke, shook the rain from their hair, and grabbed weapons they would never let go of. No one complained, no one questioned. They knew this morning was their last, and they accepted it like men who knew no other way.

Then they heard it. First quietly, then louder: the stomping of boots, the creaking of wagons, the metallic clang of rifles. Americans. Lots of them.

A warrior whispered, "There are hundreds." Tecumseh nodded curtly. "There are always hundreds. It's enough if one of us has more courage than ten of them."

But he knew the numbers were against them. Always had been. Always.

The Americans advanced, orderly, disciplined, lines of gray and blue, drums, commandos. An army marching like a wall of flesh and steel.

Tecumseh led his men out. No drums, no flags. Just painted faces, eyes like fire, weapons in hand. Mud beneath their feet, sucking them in like a grave that had already been opened.

He raised his voice, not a shout, just loud enough for everyone to hear. "Look at them. Lots of them, neat, packed with guns and courage that only comes from numbers. But we—we are not many. We are not neat. We are not satisfied. We are what they fear: men who have nothing left to lose."

The warriors roared, voices that ripped through the fog. No words, just sound, raw, wild.

The Americans heard it, and for a moment their rhythm wavered. Their ranks were strong, but they knew fear.

Tecumseh stepped forward into the mud, looking over the heads of his men at the army forming in the fog. His heart didn't beat faster, his breathing remained steady. He was ready.

"This is the ground," he said quietly to himself. "Here the dream ends."

The Americans stopped, their officers shouted orders. Rifles were raised, bayonets glittered.

Tecumseh turned to his men once more. "If you die, die loudly. If you fall, fall hard. Let them know we were not dogs. Today we write the last word in blood."

Then he raised his hand and let it fall.

A scream burst from the throats of his warriors, raw, bestial, a scream that ripped open the morning like lightning.

And they ran. Into the mud, into the fog, into the ranks of the Americans.

The first shot was like a clap of thunder, shattering the fog. Smoke rose, the crack of muskets filled the air, and the first bodies fell into the mud.

Tecumseh ran ahead, a shadow in the gray, musket in one hand, axe in the other. He roared, a scream that was more than a voice—a piece of madness, a piece of life, a piece of death.

His warriors followed, wild, painted, screaming, like a tide of flesh and fury. They crashed into the American ranks, and suddenly everything was chaos.

Shots rang out, bayonets stabbed, axes whizzed. Men screamed, blood spurted, and the mud soaked it up like a thirsty dog.

An American leaped at Tecumseh, bayonet first. Tecumseh yanked him around by the rifle barrel, the metal sliding into the mud, and with one blow of his axe, he split open his head. Warm blood splashed into his face; he shook it off like rain.

"More!" he yelled. "More of you! Come on!"

The American ranks wavered, then reformed. They had the numbers, they had the order. Every cry of the warriors was answered by ten shots.

A young warrior next to Tecumseh was hit by a bullet, his chest bursting open, and he fell into the watering hole next to him. Tecumseh stepped over him, continuing to roar. No time for mourning.

The Americans pushed forward, a wall of rifle barrels, bayonets, and boots. Tecumseh punched, hacked, and stabbed. Every blow was a sign of anger, every movement a sign of defiance. But the wall didn't stop.

The mud became a quagmire of blood and water. Men slipped, fell, fought on their knees, and died. Screams mingled with gunfire, with the roar of cannons roaring further back, shaking the ground.

A warrior grabbed Tecumseh by the arm, bleeding, his side open. "There are too many of them!" he cried. Tecumseh tore himself away. "Then kill as many as they need until they realize there are too few!"

He charged forward again, leaping over corpses, hacking at faces and necks. Every breath was a fight, every blow a survival.

But he saw the ranks of his men thinning. Slowly at first, then faster. One by one they fell, and behind them there was nothing but mud.

A drumbeat from the Americans, a command, and the line closed like a mouth closing over its warriors.

Tecumseh roared louder, hit harder. He felt bullets whizz past him, one grazing him, hot against his skin. He ignored it, kept hitting.

But he knew, deep down, this was no longer a fight, this was slaughter.

His men fought like wolves, but they were surrounded, encircled, overrun. The mud was littered with bodies that were no longer moving.

A warrior fell right in front of him, his face in the water, blood gushing from his back. Tecumseh grabbed the dead man's musket and fired it into the crowd without aiming. A man fell. A drop in the ocean.

But he still screamed as if he had destroyed an army.

"We are falling, but we are falling standing!" he roared.

And around him the final dance raged.

The battle raged on, without order, without direction. Only chaos. Smoke hung low, shots rang out, screams mingled with the thunder of cannons. The ground shook, the river roared, and the mud absorbed everything—blood, water, men, dreams.

Tecumseh was still in front. He roared, struck, and thrust. His axe was red, his musket empty, but he swung it like a club. Every blow a curse, every movement a cry against death.

Around him, his warriors fell. One by one. Faces he knew, faces he'd seen yesterday by the fire, now staring fixedly at the sky. Some were still screaming, some were gurgling, some were simply lying still.

He felt the end coming. Not as a thought, not as a vision—but as a weight. Heavy in the air, heavy on his shoulders, heavy in his stomach.

But he laughed. Loudly, harshly, dirty. "Come on!" he yelled at the Americans. "You want me? Then get me! Get me out of this mud if you can!"

His voice cut through the noise, and for a moment even the enemy looked up. A man, alone, in the midst of the chaos, still standing, still screaming, still alive.

A bullet whizzed past his head. A second ripped open his shoulder. Warm blood flowed, but he barely felt it. He kept punching, kept kicking, kept screaming.

His dream had already fallen. He knew it. The alliance was rotten, broken, burned. The British had fled, his men almost dead. But he himself was still here. And as long as he stood, the dream lived in this one breath.

He raised the axe, bloody and heavy, and ran forward again, into the middle of the American ranks. A man shot, he threw up his arm, the bullet grazed him, he slashed, the man fell. Another came, bayonet first, Tecumseh grabbed him, spun him around, and plunged the knife into his stomach.

"More!" he screamed, his face covered in blood and rain. "More of you! I'm not satisfied yet!"

But his ranks were empty. Behind him, only mud, smoke, and bodies. No more chorus, only isolated screams that quickly died away.

Tecumseh stood at the center of a dying circle. One man against hundreds. And he knew: Somewhere out there, the bullet that would take him was already on

its way. Perhaps it was already flying through the smoke, perhaps it was being stuffed into a rifle. But it was coming.

He tensed his muscles, took a deep breath, and screamed again, louder than everything around him.

"I am Tecumseh! I am the dream you will never kill!"

And the sky thundered as if to confirm it.

The smoke was thick, the lines drew closer, and somewhere between mud and fire, between screams and thunder, the end waited.

Tecumseh shouts over the thunder of the cannons

The sky was a mass of smoke. Cannons thundered, muskets cracked, screams ripped through the air. It was no longer a battlefield; it was a mill grinding meat.

And in the middle of it all stood Tecumseh. Blood smeared across his face, his axe red, his musket held like a stick. He screamed, louder than anything else, louder than the cannons.

"Here I am!" he roared. "I'm Tecumseh! Come and get me!"

The Americans advanced, orderly, in numbers, like a wall of boots and rifles. But they hesitated when they saw him—a man, alone, wild, unbroken.

Bullets hissed. One grazed his hip, one ripped the skin on his arm. Blood spurted, but he laughed. A harsh, evil laugh that cut through the smoke.

"Your lead won't hit me!" he cried. "Your lead is weak! Your hearts are weak!"

He charged forward, hacked, and struck men down. Every blow a curse, every thrust a defiance. He stepped over corpses, jumped into the mud, pulled an American to the ground by the neck, and smashed the axe into his skull.

Cannons thundered again, the ground shook. Earth sprayed, bodies were torn apart, screams were drowned out by the smoke. But Tecumseh continued to scream, as if trying to drown out the cannons with his own voice.

An officer pointed at him and shouted an order. Several muskets were aimed at him. Tecumseh saw it, spread his arms, and laughed like a madman. "Shoot! Shoot! I'm still standing!"

The shots rang out, the smoke spewed fire. A bullet ripped through his side, blood spurted, he staggered—but he stood. He spat blood, laughed, screamed even louder.

"You can't break me!" he roared. "Not me, not the dream!"

His warriors, the few who were still alive, heard him. They cried back, a chorus of despair, of pride, of madness. It was no longer a war; it was a final cry against the end.

The Americans pushed on, bayonets first, bullets, cannons. All against this one man standing in the mud, screaming like an animal.

And Tecumseh roared above the thunder, as if to let the world know: He was not going quietly.

He was not a shadow, not a victim, not a dog. He was the scream itself.

And as long as he roared, the dream was still there—for a breath, for a blow, for a final thunderbolt.

The Americans advanced like a machine. Lines, drums, orders. Every step was the same, every shot in time. But up ahead, in the fog, there was something that didn't fit their rhythm.

A man covered in blood, axe in hand, musket like a club, his face a mask of blood and sweat. He screamed, louder than the cannons, louder than their commands.

"I'm still here!" he yelled. "You can't kill me!"

Muskets fired, bullets tore through the smoke. One hit his leg, he staggered, gritted his teeth, and screamed even louder. Another pierced his shoulder, blood spurted, and he continued to punch.

An American soldier stared at him, his rifle trembling in his hands. "He's not going to fall," he whispered. "He just isn't going to fall." The man next to him growled, "He's a human being like us. Shoot again!" But his voice broke, as if he himself no longer believed it.

Tecumseh pulled a man from the ranks, smashed him into the mud, and crushed his skull. Blood spurted, he raised his head, and roared again. His voice drowned out the crack of muskets and the roar of cannons.

The officers shouted orders. "Aim at him! Aim at him, everyone!" Ten rifles were aimed. The fire cracked, smoke, noise. Tecumseh staggered back, hit, his chest and side covered in blood. He coughed red, spat it into the mud—and laughed.

"That's all you need!" he shouted, his voice rough, ragged, but unbroken. "One hundred bullets, one thousand—I'm still standing!"

The Americans looked at him, and some whispered, "He's a ghost. Not a man. A demon." Others pressed their lips together, continued shooting, wanting to convince themselves that he could die.

But he was still standing. Blood ran down his body, his breath was labored, his gaze burned. He was no longer a man; he was an embodiment. Rage, defiance, a scream that refused to be silenced.

His warriors, the few who were still alive, cried out his name. "Tecumseh! Tecumseh!" Their voices echoed, short, flickering, but powerful. The Americans heard it, and even they sensed: This was no ordinary death.

Tecumseh marched on, striking, hacking, and screaming. Every blow drew blood, every scream etched itself into the minds of his enemies.

And the men in the ranks who saw him began to doubt. "How do you kill something that doesn't fall?" "Maybe he won't fall at all." "Maybe he'll still be fighting when we're all dead."

Thus, his cry spread—not only among his men, but also among the enemy. He was a ghost in the mud, a thunder that never fell silent.

And the fight raged on, while the bullet that would truly break him still lurked somewhere out there.

The circle tightened. Smoke, mud, blood. The American ranks advanced like a wall, bayonets gleamed, drums set the beat.

And amidst all this was Tecumseh. His warriors were still shouting, but their voices were few. One to his right fell with a shot through his chest, spitting

blood, dying. One to his left was still calling his name before a bayonet impaled him.

"Tecumseh!" – the scream echoed for a moment, then it was gone.

Now there were perhaps a handful of men left, scattered, roaring, fighting. And he himself was in the middle, covered in blood, screaming like a madman who had hell itself as his enemy.

He raised the axe and smashed it into an American who charged him head-on. The man screamed, fell, blood spurted, and Tecumseh stepped over him.

"There are many of you!" he roared, his voice hoarse and broken, but still loud. "But I am more than all of you!"

A bullet hit him in the ribs, he stumbled, and fell to one knee. Blood spurted from his side. He laughed, spat it out, and stood up again. "Look! I'm still standing!"

The Americans advanced. They saw him, but they no longer saw just a man. They saw a monster, a ghost, a scream in the mud. Some hesitated. Some took aim, lowered their rifles again.

An officer shouted, "Fire! Bring him down!" Muskets cracked. Smoke, thunder, fire. Two bullets ripped into his arm, one pierced his thigh. He staggered, almost fell—then he pulled himself up, roared again.

"Not today!" he screamed. "Not now!"

His legs trembled, his breathing rattled, blood dripped onto the floor, but he was still standing.

The last warriors around him fell one by one. One was struck down by a bullet, another pierced by bayonets. Soon, no one was left. Only him.

Alone.

He stood there, with the axe, blood in his eyes, and screamed. Not words, nothing more. Just a sound. Raw, piercing, a scream that fought against the thunder of the cannons and never fell silent.

A soldier whispered, "He's alone." The man next to him shook his head. "No. He's not alone. Listen to him. There are a thousand screaming through him."

And that's exactly how it seemed. A man who was almost dead, yet sounded as if he were speaking with the voices of generations.

The ranks closed in. Bayonets flashed, rifles loaded, drums pounded.

But Tecumseh still stood, roaring, swaying, a shadow of blood and smoke.

The fog hung thick, heavy as a shroud. American drums pounded, commandos cut through the crack of rifles. The circle was complete.

Tecumseh stood alone. Blood streamed from him, his clothes torn, his skin covered with wounds. But he still held his axe. His chest rose and fell, each breath a rattle, as if death were already in his lungs.

Before him was a wall of bayonets, rifles, and faces. Fear and rage, sweat and smoke. They were many, he was one. But no one stepped forward.

Because he was still screaming.

"Come!" he roared, his voice broken but strong enough to tear through the drums. "You want me? Then come and get me!"

An officer raised his hand. "Shoot!"

Muskets fired, smoke, thunder. Bullets hissed. One hit him in the chest, he stumbled, blood flowing like a river. He fell to one knee, the ground sucking him in. But he pulled himself up and roared again.

"You need more! More!"

The men in the ranks stared at him, some whispering, "He won't fall. He's not human."

A young soldier, bayonet at the ready, trembled. "I... I don't want to." His sergeant pushed him forward. "Do it! Stab him!"

But when he got close enough, he saw Tecumseh's eyes. Burning, blood red, full of madness and life. He stopped, his rifle trembling.

Tecumseh laughed. "You can't. You see it. I'm bigger than you."

Another soldier ran forward and stabbed. The bayonet ripped into Tecumseh's side. He roared, grabbed the rifle, ripped it from the man's hand, and struck him down with his own barrel. Blood spurted, and the soldier fell.

"More!" he shouted. "More of you!"

The circle swayed. Men advanced, then retreated. No one wanted to be the one to hit him head-on.

An officer raged. "He's only one man! Only one! Tear him down!"

But no one believed that anymore. They didn't see a man. They saw a ghost in the mud, a scream that wouldn't die.

Bullets rang out again. Smoke, fire, blood. One bullet pierced his shoulder, another ripped off his leg. He staggered, almost fell—and still screamed.

A sound, raw, bestial, larger than himself. It was no longer speech, no longer a voice. It was thunder roaring against the cannons.

The Americans stood there, bayonets pointed, rifles loaded – and yet no one dared to take the final step. Because everyone knew: whoever fells him will carry that scream in their bones forever.

Tecumseh still stood, staggering, bleeding, alone. But his cry filled the field, louder than the drums, louder than the cannons.

A scream that said: *I won't go quietly.*

The circle was now very tight. American faces, pale, distorted, rifles extended, bayonets like the teeth of a predator. Behind them, the drums, the thunder of cannons, the crack of muskets.

Tecumseh stood in the middle. His body was a map of wounds, every breath a cough of blood. But he stood. He still held his axe, which dripped as if it were thirsting for more.

"Come!" he yelled, his voice hoarse, broken, but loud. "Come, everyone! I'll take you with me!"

The Americans hesitated. There were many of them, he was one, and yet everyone felt: whoever struck him down would carry his eyes, his scream, his curse forever in their skulls.

A sergeant shouted, spat, and urged his men forward. "He's finished! Strike!"

Three soldiers ran at once, bayonets first. Tecumseh raised the axe, blocked the first thrust, and smashed it across the man's skull. The second stabbed him

deeply in the side, drawing blood, but Tecumseh grabbed the rifle, swung it around, and rammed the third soldier in the stomach.

All three fell. Screams, blood, mud.

Tecumseh staggered, breathing heavily. His vision was blurry, but he laughed. "You need more. More men. More bullets. More courage."

An officer raised his sword and pointed at him. "Fire!"

A volley crashed, smoke, fire, thunder. Bullets ripped into his body. His chest, his arm, his leg. He staggered, almost fell. Blood spurted, flowing from him like water.

But he still stood. Swaying, wavering, but he stood.

And he screamed. A sound, raw, greater than himself, greater than the sky. A scream that drowned out the thunder, that tore the drums, that cut through even the smoke.

"I am Tecumseh!" he roared. "I will not fall! Not by your hands!"

The Americans saw him, and a whisper went through their ranks. "He's not human... not human..."

A cannon shot rang out, earth flew, men were thrown. Tecumseh stopped. The mud boiled around him, but he stood his ground.

He raised the axe, covered in blood, his face like a demon in smoke. "I'll take you all!"

His scream was the last thing many of his warriors heard. His scream was the first thing many Americans never forgot.

He stood until the circle was completely closed. Until bayonets and bullets descended upon him like teeth and claws. Until death itself seized him—and seized him head-on, open-mouthed, with clenched fists, with a scream that echoed beyond the roar of the cannons.

The mud was covered in bodies, blood, and broken bones. Smoke hung heavy, and the stench of gunpowder and flesh pressed down on the breath like a pillow.

Tecumseh was still standing. A red specter, half man, half blood, axe in hand, his mouth a scream. His body swayed, but he held on, held on against everything, against cannons, against bullets, against God himself.

"Still here!" he yelled, spitting blood, laughing hoarsely. "Still here, damn it!"

The Americans, gathered around him in a tight ring, saw him as an animal that should have been felled a thousand times. But he stood.

An officer raised his sword. "Stop it!"

Guns were raised. Ten, twenty, thirty barrels pointed at him. Some hands trembled, some eyes wide. Everyone wanted to end it, no one wanted to be the one.

Tecumseh spread his arms, blood running down his chest, his gaze like fire. "Come on! Pull the trigger! You all need me!"

The first volley crashed. Smoke, thunder, bullets. He staggered back, blood spurted, his body trembled. But he didn't fall. Not yet.

He laughed. Loudly, crazy, dirty. "More! You cowards! More!"

A bullet had hit his lungs, and every breath was a gurgle. But he continued to scream, wheezing and rattling, and his voice still carried over the drums.

One soldier whispered, "Damn it, he's not falling." Another hissed, "He's dead and doesn't know it."

But Tecumseh knew. He felt his body already breaking, the blood flowing like a river, the weight crushing him. But he forced himself to stand. One more moment. One more scream.

He raised the axe, heavy, shaky, but high. "I am Tecumseh!" he roared. "I will not fall by your hand!"

The men stared at him, hesitated. The smoke wafted, the cannons roared, and there he was—alone, blood red, roaring.

A shot rang out. Not from a volley, but from a single rifle. A bullet flew, cutting through the smoke, through the fog, and found him.

She spun him around, striking deep, a blow that went right through his bones. His body jerked, the axe half-dropped from his hand.

Silence. For a moment, it was silent; even the drums were silent.

Tecumseh staggered. His knees buckled. His breath was a gasp. But he raised his head once more. His eyes burned, his mouth opened.

And he screamed. Again. Loudly. Rawly. A scream that cut through the smoke, above the thunder, a scream that wouldn't die.

Then he staggered. The axe slipped from his hand, his body bent. He fell.

In the mud, in the blood, in the thunder.

The Americans stared at him. Some trembled, some lowered their rifles. No one cheered. No one laughed.

Because they all knew: This scream remained.

The body lay in the mud. Blood mixed with water, the ground greedily absorbing it, as if it had been waiting for it.

Tecumseh lay there, his face half in the mud, his hands still clenched into fists. His axe was a little further along, half sunk in. Everything about him was silent—except for the echo.

The echo of his scream still hung in the air, vibrating between the trees, between the men, between the drums. It was no longer a voice, no longer a breath. It was like an imprint, an imprint of defiance burned into the world.

The Americans stood around. Bayonets pointed, rifles still warm, faces covered in sweat and blood. But no one came closer.

Silence. Only the dripping rain, the distant thunder of the cannons still firing further back, as if they didn't know that everything here had already been decided.

A soldier finally stepped forward, cautiously, his rifle still at the ready. He stared at the body in the mud. "Is he dead?" Another nodded. "He has to be. No human being can live after so many bullets." But the words sounded hollow.

A third murmured, "But I can still hear him." Everyone looked at him. "I swear," he continued, "I can still hear him screaming."

The men were silent. Some swallowed, some looked away.

An officer yelled, "Move! Keep marching! He's just a savage, nothing more."
But his voice trembled, and no one believed him.

They had seen what he was. Not "just" a simple enemy. A man who had fallen,
but not like others.

Some soldiers ventured forward, lifted the body, wanting to carry it away as a
trophy, as proof. But the mud held it tight, as if the earth wanted it for itself.
They tugged, cursed, and one finally tore himself free. "Leave him. The ground
wants him."

So he remained there, half submerged, half visible, like a figure between world
and shadow.

And the echo remained.

The victors didn't cheer. They stepped back, they whispered, they stopped
looking. Some spat to hide their fear, others secretly crossed themselves, as if
they had seen not a man but a demon.

Tecumseh lay still, but his cry still hung over the field. Like smoke, like thunder,
like a curse.

The cannons continued to thunder, but their sound was fainter. Because
everyone knew: the loudest thunder had fallen—and it had drowned them all
out.

Bloody ground, broken ranks

The thunder slowly faded away. First the drums, then the cannons, then the
final shots. What remained was a silence that weighed more heavily than
anything else.

The floor was a slaughterhouse. Mud, blood, bodies—mixed, squashed,
indistinguishable. You couldn't step without stepping on flesh.

The Americans were still standing, ranks broken, men trembling, faces white as
chalk. They had won, so their officers said, so the numbers said. But it didn't
feel like a victory.

They looked around them. Corpses, eyes wide open, mouths still twisted in screams. Some with bayonets in their chests, some with half their heads cut off. Everywhere, bodies torn apart, as if the field itself had swallowed them and spat them out again.

A soldier wiped his mouth, his rifle still in his hand. "We did it," he murmured. But he didn't sound convinced.

Another stared at the corpse of a Shawnee warrior, still clutching the axe tightly as if it were part of his body. "If this is victory," he said quietly, "then I don't want another one."

The officers moved among the men, shouting orders, trying to establish order, trying to cover up the chaos. But they were nervous. They had seen it: how Tecumseh stood, how he fell. His scream was still stuck in their minds.

A sergeant spat into the mud. "Go on! Leave them there. They're nothing." But his eyes betrayed him. He didn't look at the bodies. He didn't dare.

A few soldiers tried to scavenge for loot—knives, jewelry, moccasins. But when they reached Tecumseh's body, they stopped. He lay there, half in the mud, half visible, and his face was rigid but not blank. His eyes half-open, as if he were still looking at her.

"Don't touch him," murmured one. "Why?" asked another. "Because he can see it."

They moved on, leaving him lying there. The mud sucked him deeper, bit by bit.

The battlefield smelled of iron and rot, of blood and gunpowder. The sun tried to break through the clouds, but it only brought a gray light that made the dead even paler.

A young American sat down on a rock, staring at his hands. They were shaking, covered in blood. He didn't know if it was his own or someone else's. He stared for a long time, then began to laugh. A short, harsh laugh that turned into a sob. No one cared. Everyone had their own ghosts.

The ranks were broken, the bodies were broken, and deep within them the victors were also broken.

They had shot the man who screamed like thunder. But no one felt any bigger for it. Rather, they felt smaller.

The field itself still seemed to vibrate, as if the ground had absorbed the scream.

Bloody ground. Broken ranks. A victory that felt like a defeat.

The ranks sorted themselves slowly, stumbling, shoulders slumped. No strenuous victory march, no heroic departure. More like men trying to stand up straight after a nightmare.

Officers shouted orders, but their voices were thin. "Post guards! Secure the flanks! No one leaves the field!" The men nodded and set off, but without enthusiasm. Every step was heavy. Every kick, bruising, reminded them of the scream.

Some soldiers were looking for trophies. They went through the corpses, stripping off knives, chains, ribbons, and feathers. Some laughed, trying to show toughness. But their eyes flickered, as if they were about to look away at any moment.

One held up a chain and shouted, "Look! Indian jewelry!" Another spat in the mud. "They were dogs." But a third, young and pale, shook his head. "Dogs don't scream like that."

They passed Tecumseh again and again. His body lay there, half buried in the mud, half visible, his eyes open, as if he were watching them.

Nobody wanted to be the first to touch it.

"Should we rescue him?" one asked quietly. The sergeant snorted. "For what? To haunt us at night? Leave him here." Another ventured: "But he was their leader. Their hero." "Then he's their dead hero now," the sergeant growled. "Bury heroes in the mud."

They laughed, forced, harsh, hollow. But no one really got close.

A few officers were discussing his death. Who had fired the shot? Who deserved the glory. Voices grew louder, hands waved. Fame was gold, and gold made men greedy. But the argument seemed small, pathetic, next to the body in the mud.

A soldier stepped too close, staring into Tecumseh's face. He stumbled back, cursing. "Damn it, he's looking at me." "He's dead," said his comrade. "Then death has open eyes."

The battlefield had become quieter. Only the occasional groaning of the wounded, whom no one wanted to rescue anymore. The drums were silent, the cannons silent. All that remained was the stench—and the weight.

Some men sat down, cleaned their rifles, and rubbed blood from their hands, to no avail. The red wouldn't go away. Others stared at their boots, stuck in the mud, as if they could never get free again.

And again and again the eyes slid to Tecumseh.

There he lay, a man who, alone, had seemed like an army. A man they had shot, but whose scream they could still hear.

Some said it out loud: "It's not over." Others remained silent, but their eyes said the same thing.

They had secured the field. But in their minds, it wasn't safe.

For there he lay, half in the mud, half still alive in everyone who had seen him.

The officers stood together, voices sharp, faces hard, but uncertainty flickered in their eyes. "We have to recover the body," said one, a man with a clean coat, barely a drop of blood on him. "For the reports. For the glory." Another shook his head. "And then? In the newspapers? An Indian chief as a trophy?" "Yes," growled the first. "The men need this. We need this."

A third officer, older and more taciturn, looked toward the field. His gaze settled on Tecumseh. "I say, leave him. The ground wants him. Whoever moves him curses himself." The others laughed, too loudly, too forcedly. But the laughter quickly died.

A sergeant stepped forward, hard as iron, but his hands trembled slightly. "My men... they won't go any closer. They say he's looking at them. Even dead." The officer with the clean coat snarled, "Superstition. Nonsense." "Perhaps," muttered the sergeant. "But they won't touch him."

The discussion swirled, loudly, quietly, about fame, about honor. But no one dared to take the first step toward the body.

Tecumseh lay there, half submerged, half visible. His face was pale but hard, his eyes half-open. It was as if the mud wouldn't give him up, but was pulling him in piece by piece.

A few soldiers, young, stupid, or simply too proud, tried anyway. They grabbed him by the arms, pulled, cursed. But the mud held him tight, pulling him back as if it wouldn't let him go. "Damn it," one gasped, "he's heavy as a stone." Another spat. "Heavy because he's more than one."

They let go, stepped back, and wiped their hands as if they had been burned.

An officer yelled, "You cowards! He's dead!" But no one listened to him.

The men whispered. Not loudly, not openly, but the word spread: *The soil retains it.*

An old soldier, scarred on his face, muttered: "Some dead men don't bury. They bury themselves."

The officers pretended not to hear it. But they all heard it.

The sun briefly broke through the sky, casting a pale light over the field. It glistened on blood, bayonets, and puddles of water. And in the middle of it all lay he, silent, but taller than everything.

The men gathered rifles, set up sentries, and dragged the wounded. But every step, every movement revolved around the same point: him.

It was as if the whole field was just a backdrop, and the dead man in the mud played the main role.

The officers continued to argue: glory or peace, trophy or grave. But the ground had long since decided.

Tecumseh did not go with them.

He stayed where he fell.

Night fell slowly, a black blanket covering the blood and mud. The smoke still hung in the air, thick and stinking, like the breath of a dying animal.

The battlefield fell silent. No more drums, no more commands. Only the crackling of fires, the howling of wolves in the distance—and the groans of the wounded, whom no one wanted to rescue.

The Americans set up camp as best they could. Tents in the mud, fires barely burning. Men sat there, silent, their faces flickering in the light, their eyes empty.

No one spoke much. If they did, it was only briefly, harshly, to fill the silence. "We won." "Yes." But it didn't sound like a victory. It sounded like an excuse.

Some drank from canteens, from stolen bottles. The whiskey burned, but it didn't extinguish anything. Not the image of the man in the mud. Not the scream that everyone still had in their heads.

A young soldier woke up, drenched in sweat. "Did you hear that?" he asked hoarsely. "What?" "The scream. It was there again." The others laughed, but no one laughed for long. One muttered, "I heard it too."

This continued throughout the night. Men tossed and turned restlessly in their sleep, muttering and tossing. Some called out names, others suddenly roared. Everyone dreamed the same thing: smoke, mud, blood—and the scream.

An officer walked through the camp, his hands behind his back, his brow deeply furrowed. He acted as if he had everything under control. But he heard it too. The whistling of the wind through the trees sounded like a voice. A voice that refused to die.

The body still lay at the edge of the field. No one had moved it. No one dared. The moon cast a pale light, and it looked as if it were still breathing.

A few men on guard stared, their hands clasped around their rifles. "He's dead," one muttered. "Then don't say it so often," the other replied. "Otherwise no one will believe it."

The hours crept by. Fires flickered, rain fell, men drank, men trembled. The silence was heavy, almost oppressive.

And something hung over everything. Like smoke, like fog, like an echo. The scream that hadn't yet gone.

The victors had the field. But the night belonged to him.

The morning crept across the field like a tired dog. No golden sunrise, no fresh light. Only a gray, pale glow that made the smoke and blood more visible.

The battlefield stank. Of gunpowder, of shit, of slashed flesh. Ravens perched on bodies, pecking with their beaks, fluttering up when a human came too close, and then immediately settling down again.

Tecumseh was still lying there. Half in the mud, half visible. His face pale, his eyes half-open, as if he were still watching.

The first looters arrived. Men who had no dreams but greed. They crawled through the dead, taking knives, boots, rings. For them, every body was a market stall.

Two of them approached Tecumseh. They grinned and whispered. "That's him. The chief. His things are worth more than ten of the others." "Then go. Take his ribbon. Or his blanket."

The first one bent down, reached for the chest, for the jewelry Tecumseh had worn. His fingers touched the cold flesh—and he recoiled. "Damn," he cursed, "as if it were still warm."

The second one laughed nervously. "Go on. He can't see you." But he hesitated himself.

Both looked into the dead man's face. His eyes half-open, his chin set, his expression unbroken. Not a peaceful dead man. Not an empty one. More like he was about to clench his fist and spring to his feet.

"Screw it," one muttered, reaching again. He ripped off the tape and stepped back. And at that moment, he slipped, falling into the mud, right next to the corpse. He screamed as if he'd been burned. His hands trembled, he pulled himself up, and ran away. "I'm telling you," he gasped, "the ground's holding him. It doesn't want us to take him."

The other grabbed his arm. "Shut up. He's dead." "Then why can I still see him?"

They left. Quickly, without looking back.

Other looters tried. One cut off a piece of his shirt, intending to keep it as a relic. But he immediately lost it in the mud. Another took his knife, but the blade later broke during use.

Everything that was taken from him seemed cursed.

Soon, even the greediest avoided his body. They took from everyone else, they pulled off the boots of the dead, they tore jewelry from the decomposing. But they left him.

Not out of respect. Out of fear.

He lay there, half in the mud, half in the light. As if even in death he were saying: "Not by your hands."

The men in the camp whispered. "He belongs to the earth." "He belongs to the spirits." "Perhaps he'll rise again."

The officers snorted, mocked, and shouted. But even they didn't dare to put their bodies under pressure.

So he stayed there, motionless, and the ground took him deeper and deeper.

The day dragged on. The Americans assembled their columns, counted heads, and dragged the wounded. It was not a proud departure, not a march of victors. It was a caravan of blood and silence.

The officers shouted orders, but their voices sounded brittle. Each order was like a bandage on a broken leg. They wanted order, but the field didn't allow for it.

Men trudged through the mud, past corpses, some casting quick glances, others staring stubbornly ahead. Everyone wanted to get away. Just get away.

Tecumseh still lay there. Half submerged, half visible. His face pale, but not blank. His eyes half-open, as if watching the departing soldiers.

Some glanced back, paused briefly. One murmured, "We'll leave him here?" His comrade nodded. "Where else? He belongs here." "But he was their leader." "Then he should remain leader. In the ground."

So they marched on, each with his own silence.

The battlefield grew emptier. Ravens returned, croaking, hungry, perched on corpses. The wind blew through the grass, which would soon grow again as if there had never been a battle.

But where Tecumseh lay, nothing grew. The ground held him fast, the mud sucked him deeper, slowly, inexorably. It wasn't a quick burial. It was a swallowing, a taking in, as if the earth were taking him back—piece by piece.

His hand, still clenched into a fist, disappeared first. Then his chest, furrowed by bullets, drenched in blood. His face remained visible the longest. Hard, unbroken, as if still saying, "I see you."

The last soldiers leaving the field saw it. One made the sign of the cross and murmured a prayer. Another spat, but his spitting sounded more like fear than contempt.

No one touched him. No one dared.

And as the rows disappeared into the distance, as only the crashing of the ravens remained, the ground began to take him further.

Not as prey, not as a trophy, not as a corpse. But as a part of oneself.

He belonged to the earth. He belonged to the river.

The victors had left the field. But they didn't take him with them.

Because they couldn't.

The battlefield lay silent. No drums, no shouts, no more orders. Only the wind blowing through the trees, the screeching of ravens, the gentle dripping of rain.

The dead lay scattered, rigid, their eyes open, their mouths wide. Occasionally a body moved, but it was only the weight of a bird that had swooped down on it.

Tecumseh was still lying in the same spot. Half in the mud, half visible. The rain ran down his face as if trying to wash it, but it remained hard, unbroken. His eyes were half-open, as if still looking upward.

Slowly, very slowly, the ground carried him further. The mud sucked, the earth pulled. First his shoulders, then his chest. Every drop of rain seemed to press him deeper.

The ravens circled, landed, and fluttered back up, as if in respect or fear. They pecked at other corpses, leaving him alone.

The wind grew stronger. It whistled through the grass, through the branches, and to anyone who heard it, it sounded like an echo. Like a scream. Not loud, not clear—but there.

The sun tried once more to break through the clouds, but it couldn't. Only a pale light colored the ground gray.

And bit by bit, he disappeared. His chest was gone, his stomach, his legs. Only his head remained, his eyes half-open, his mouth slightly open.

As if he hadn't given his last breath.

Somewhere far away, in the victors' camps, men whispered. "He's still there." Others nodded, smoked, and drank. "Yes. But not for long." "What do you mean?" "I mean, he's no longer ours. No longer of this world."

And in the field, the earth took what was left. The lips disappeared into the mud, the eyes, the face. Only a shadow, then nothing.

The wind carried it away. Not the body, but the feeling.

Not defeated. Not dead like the others.

But recorded.

The victors had the field. But the country had him.

And those who spoke about it said it quietly, almost like a prayer: "Tecumseh is not dead. He is in the ground. And as long as we tread this ground, we tread on it."

The battlefield fell silent. The scream could no longer be heard, but it was there. In the earth, in the water, in the wind.

Bloody ground. Broken ranks. And a dead man who didn't want to be one.

A ball in chaos

It wasn't the first bullet. Not the second. Not the tenth. Tecumseh already had lead in his flesh, in his shoulder, in his chest, in his leg. Every bullet was a blow, and yet he was still standing.

But then this one came along.

The battlefield was an orchestra of noise. Gunshots, cannons, screams, horses, drums. All at once, all without order. You couldn't tell where a shot began and where it ended.

And somewhere in there, a trigger was pulled. By whom? No one knew. A soldier, nervous, sweating, blindly staring into the smoke. An officer, cold, calculating. Perhaps a simple boy who didn't even know who he was aiming at.

The rifle cracked, the lead flew. A bullet, nothing more, a piece of metal. But she found him.

She came through the smoke, through the thunder, through the stench. And she hit.

In the middle of the chest, deep, heavy.

Tecumseh opened his eyes, spat blood, and staggered back. His axe wobbled in his hand, his breathing became a ragged gasp.

For a moment, the world was silent. So silent that even the drums fell silent. As if everyone had realized: That was it. The bullet.

The Americans held their breath. Their own men stared. Even the wind seemed to stop blowing for a moment.

He remained standing for a heartbeat. Blood spurted from the wound, his body swayed, but his eyes burned.

He raised his head, spat red into the mud, and roared. One last scream, louder than anything. Louder than the cannons. Louder than the entire damned battle.

"I am Tecumseh!"

Then came the second blow. Not from a bullet, but from the weight pressing down on him. His body buckled, his legs gave way. He fell.

Not like an ordinary man. Not quietly. But like a tree that stood too long, braving the storm for too long, until lightning struck.

The ground shook as he hit the ground. Mud splashed, blood flowed.

And the scream still hung in the air, while the body was already lying.

The men around stared. Some with open mouths, some with tears, some with blank expressions. No one cheered. No one laughed.

Because everyone knew: That bullet hadn't just hit his chest. It had ripped through the entire field. Through the dream. Through the last shred of hope his warriors had.

A ball in chaos.

A bullet that killed more than one man.

The bullet was small. A piece of metal, formed, loaded, and fired. Nothing special. Thousands of them flew on every battlefield. But this one sank deeper than it should.

It didn't just go into his chest. It went through him into everyone standing there.

The Shawnee fighting beside him heard the scream and saw him stagger. They saw the man who had always stood like iron suddenly soften. And they felt something break within themselves.

The Americans who met him, who saw him fall, felt it too. No cheering, no triumph. Just a hole. A silence that was heavier than all the drums combined.

The shot echoed. Not like a gunshot, but like a judgment.

One of the soldiers stared at his rifle, his hands shaking. "Was it me?" His comrade shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. Does it matter?" "Yes, it does," whispered the first. "If it was me, I'll always hear him."

The officers tried to rouse the men. "He's fallen! A victory! March on, men!" But their voices sounded thin. No one wanted to see victory in the bullet.

The Shawnee screamed and howled, some ran forward in fury, others collapsed at the same moment. It was as if the bullet had taken away their spines.

Tecumseh was more than a warrior. He was the face, the voice, the cry, the heart. And when he fell, they heard their hearts stumble in their chests.

The scream still lingered, but the lead had smothered it.

The bullet had disappeared into the mud, somewhere deep, invisible, lost. But its trace remained. In the men's eyes, in their bones, in their sleep.

Some soldiers later said they heard him screaming as he fell. Others swore he tried to push himself up again. Maybe it was his imagination. Maybe it was true. But it remained.

The bullet wasn't just metal. It was a cut that separated everything: before and after.

Before: a scream, a man taller than the field. After: a corpse in the mud, a dream shattering into pieces.

The men knew it. They carried it with them, whether they wanted to or not.

A bullet in the chaos. A shot that changed everything.

The bullet was in, deep inside, and the man no longer stood like a mountain, but like a house with a broken foundation. Everything trembled. Everything collapsed.

For the Shawnee, it was as if someone had shot the sky. They had always thought it couldn't fall. Not by lead, not by steel, not by some white bastard with dirty hands. And yet there it lay, blood in its mouth, a scream in its throat, half man, half shadow already.

An old warrior fell to his knees, threw back his head, and screamed into the smoke. It was no longer a battle cry; it was a sound of loss, of pain. Others ran forward, blind, as if they wanted to attack the bullet itself, the wind, the smoke, the invisible archer. They fell quickly, pierced by bayonets, torn apart by bullets.

The ranks broke. Not just the ranks, but also the hearts. Some threw down their weapons, others froze. One knelt down, pressing his forehead into the mud. "Brother," he murmured, "you mustn't. Not like this."

The Americans stared. No one immediately raised a drum, no one shouted "Victory!" They saw him fall and knew: This wasn't a victory, this was a hole.

A young soldier, barely a beard on his face, stared at his rifle. "Maybe it was mine," he whispered. His hands trembled. "If it was mine, then..." His comrade slapped him on the shoulder. "Shut up. It wasn't." "How do you know?" "I don't know. But shut up."

Further back, an officer, proud, with a saber and a clean coat, tried a different approach. "Men! We've got him! This is victory!" His voice echoed, but it didn't register. It was as if he were talking to walls. The faces remained blank. Some spat into the mud. Others averted their gaze.

For they all had the same thought: If one man like him could fall, then they would all be nothing but dust.

The bullet wasn't just lodged in Tecumseh's chest. It was now lodged in their heads as well.

The Shawnee knew: It was over. Without him, the fire had broken out. Their gaze slid from his body into the smoke, into nothingness. There was no more support.

The Americans knew: they had destroyed something greater than themselves. And that would stay with them, longer than the stench of blood and smoke.

One muttered, "We didn't kill him. The bullet did." Another laughed harshly. "And whose bullet was it?" No one answered.

The battle continued, noise, gunfire, screams. But inside, it was already over.

The ball in the chaos had changed everything.

It was a crash like a thousand others. No one saw the bullet, no one could tell which barrel it came from. But everyone saw the impact.

It struck Tecumseh's chest, a dull, fleshy thud. Not clean, not noble. A filthy sound that ripped flesh and splintered bone. Blood spurted, hot, dark red, like a burst hose.

He twitched as if struck by lightning. His body tensed, bent, almost falling back. His muscles twitched, his legs trembled.

His breathing immediately became a wheeze. A gurgle, as if he were drowning. Blood ran from his mouth, dripping onto his chest, mingling with the dirt.

But his eyes remained open. Large, burning, full of rage. No shock, no astonishment. Just fire.

The men around him held their breath. It was as if time had stood still for a moment. Everyone heard the wheezing, the squelching of mud beneath their boots, the cawing of ravens in the distance. Everything else fell silent.

He staggered backward, fell to one knee, and braced himself with his hand. Blood trickled between his fingers, warm and sticky. But he didn't let go of the axe.

He raised his head and spat a stream of red into the dirt. He snorted, wheezed—and laughed. A short, throaty laugh that made everyone who heard it choke.

Then he raised his voice. A scream. Not a human sound. An animal, a storm, thunder, all at once. It came from deep within his chest, mingled with blood and smoke, and yet it was louder than anything.

“I AM TECUMSEH!”

His body swayed, the wound gaped, blood continued to spurt. But he remained standing. One heartbeat, two, three.

The Americans stared, the Shawnee stared. No one moved.

Then his legs gave way. He fell, slowly, heavily, like a tree that's stood too long. The impact was dull and muddy. His face turned to the side, his eyes still half-open.

Silence.

No one cheered. No one screamed.

All they could think of was this sound: the cracking of flesh and bone, the gurgling of his breath, the thunder of his final scream.

It wasn't just a bullet. It was a damning verdict.

When he fell, everything stopped.

Not long, just seconds, but they stretched, became minutes, hours.

No one moved. No soldier, no warrior, no officer. It was as if the shot had shattered the air itself and made them forget how to breathe.

The drums fell silent, the horses stopped snorting, even the wind seemed to stand still. A silence so thick it was almost roaring.

Tecumseh lay in the mud, his face half-turned, blood in his mouth, his eyes half-open. An image no one could forget, no one wanted to forget—but everyone immediately wanted to suppress it.

The Shawnee stared. Some fell to their knees, others threw their hands in the air, some howled like wolves. An old warrior beat his chest, roaring as if trying to replace the lost scream with his own. But he couldn't stop it.

The Americans stared too. But differently. Not with sadness, but with a kind of shame they couldn't name. They had won, but it felt as if someone had set the price too high.

A soldier whispered, barely audibly: "He's fallen." Another, beside him, pressed his lips together. "Don't say it."

"Why not?" "Because it sounds like it's wrong."

An officer raised his arm, about to give the order to advance, to march on. But his voice broke before it could reach him. He coughed, cleared his throat, pretended he'd just swallowed the smoke. But the truth was: the smoke was nothing compared to the lump in his throat.

The seconds ticked by. Then people began to breathe again. No one breathed deeply, no one breathed freely, but in gasps, as if they had all forgotten how.

A young Shawnee, barely more than a boy, leaped forward, trying to reach the body. He screamed, but he didn't get far. A bayonet rammed into his chest, and he slumped down next to his leader. But his face showed no fear. Only submission. As if he were happy to lie in the same mud.

The ranks of warriors shattered. Some ran, some continued fighting like madmen, but it was all over. The blow had fallen, the dream lay on the ground.

The Americans advanced, slowly, almost reluctantly. As if they were forced to cross a border they themselves feared.

A soldier raised his rifle, aimed at Tecumseh's motionless body, and prepared to fire again, just in case. "Leave it," his comrade growled. "He's already more dead than you can make him."

And so he remained lying there. Half in the mud, half in everyone's heads.

The seconds after the fall were the hardest. Because they showed everyone: This wasn't an ordinary death. This was a hole in the sky, and now they had to continue living as if it were just another name on a list.

But the silence betrayed them. They knew there was more.

The officers gathered. One wiped blood from his face, straightened his uniform, and held his saber in his hand like a theatrical prop. They wanted to show some poise, poise where none existed.

"Men!" one yelled. "We got him! This is the victory we've been waiting for!" His voice echoed, but it didn't reach him. It bounced off like a stone against a wall.

The soldiers stood there, rifles in hand, faces gray, eyes empty. Some stared at the mud, some at the sky, none at the officer.

A second tried. "Look at him lying there! The great Tecumseh! You defeated him! You are heroes!" But no one cheered. One spat, another scratched his beard. Heroes felt differently.

A third raised his hand, brandishing his saber as if to replace a flag. "Forward! March on, men! We've made history!" But history felt like a pile of manure that had been walked on barefoot.

The ranks barely moved. They trudged, trudged, and dragged their boots through the mud. No pride, no fire. Just movement, because movement was easier than standing still.

A sergeant tried to shout the ranks together. "Stand at attention! You are victors! Act like them!" A soldier laughed harshly. "Victors? Then why do I still see him?" The sergeant hit him, but the words hung in the smoke.

The Shawnee retreated. Some still fighting, many staggering, some already dead before they knew it. But they, too, had no voice. Their cry had fallen with him.

And the Americans? They had the body, they had the field, but they had no victory.

They still heard him. Everyone. Whether they wanted to or not.

Later, in the officers' tents, they talked of tactics, of success, of reports to Washington. Words like coins, cold, metallic, weightless. But outside, by the fires, the men sat and stared into space. Drinking, smoking, silent.

One said, "If that's a win, I don't want another one." Another nodded. "I'd rather lose and live."

But they had "won." That's what the officers said. That's what the lists said. That's what the maps said. But the men knew: They only had one scream in their heads, and it couldn't be drunk away, slept away, or screamed away.

The ground had taken him. But the head kept him.

A ball.

Just a piece of lead, round, blunt, fired from some barrel. No one knew by whom. Some wanted to know for the glory of it, others never wanted to know because they couldn't bear the weight.

But one thing was clear: this bullet had shot through more than just flesh.

It went through Tecumseh's chest, but it also shattered the dream. The dream of a covenant, of a land that would not be sold, betrayed, or stolen. A dream that was greater than the Shawnee alone, greater than one man.

With this bullet, not only did a body fall into the mud. With it, an entire nation fell into silence.

The Shawnee continued to scream, fight, and die, but their voices sounded hollow. It was like drums without skin, like whistles without wind. The core was gone, the heartbeat broken.

The Americans stood there, looking at the corpse, knowing they'd hit more than they intended. They'd stifled a scream—and the scream would still remain.

Men whispered in the ranks. "He's gone." Another shook his head. "No. Not gone. Just somewhere else." "Where?" "In the ground. In the wind. In you."

The officers wrote reports. "Great victory. Tecumseh killed. The matter is over." They signed their names and sent them east, to Washington, where men in clean suits would nod as if that settled it.

But nothing was clear on the field.

The men who stood there, who heard the bullet, heard the scream, saw the blood – they knew: Nothing ends so easily.

The ball was small, but the echo was big.

It entered minds, dreams, and nightmares. It echoed in the nights of the soldiers who tossed and turned in their sleep, believing they could still hear him screaming. It echoed in the Shawnee tribes who wandered like shadows through the forests without their leader.

And it echoed throughout the land itself. Every gust of wind over the river, every rustle of the trees sounded like a memory.

The bullet had hit. But it hadn't won.

Because a scream remains.

A cry louder than all the drums, all the cannons, all the reports.

A scream that drowns out even death.

The body disappears, the dream shatters

They had seen him fall. They had heard him scream, blood in his mouth, mud on his face. But as night fell over the battlefield, something strange happened.

His body remained there, visible, tangible – and yet he was no longer there.

The soldiers who came too close retreated as if they had felt an electric shock. Looters had tried to take his jewelry, but his fingers trembled, the lead seemed heavier in his pockets. One swore he saw eyes still burning in the darkness.

In the morning, as fog rolled in from the river, it was still there. But not completely. The mud had taken it deeper, the earth slowly drawing it in. Some

said they saw it sink deeper with each passing hour, without anyone touching it.

The officers argued. Some wanted to recover him, send the body east as evidence, as a trophy. Others said it would be better to let him rot here, in the filth, anonymously. But no one took the first step.

And then, at some point, he was gone.

No one could say how. Disappeared. Swallowed. Perhaps in the mud. Perhaps taken by hands that came at night, quietly, invisibly. Perhaps the Shawnee had retrieved him, secretly, under cover of darkness. Perhaps he had simply sunk into the ground, where no white man could follow him.

The Americans remained silent. They told stories, contradictory and grotesque. One swore he had been dismembered and distributed as a trophy. Another, he had been burned. Yet another, he had been dragged away alive. No one knew anything.

And the Shawnee? They told a different story. They said: His body is not lost. He is with the earth. With the spirits. He is not in a grave because he was bigger than a grave.

But the dream – the dream he had carried – lay in pieces.

Without him, there was no alliance, no unity. The tribes that had followed him withdrew, scattered, each on their own. Some made treaties, others fled, most fell silent.

The British, who still needed him as an ally, shrugged their shoulders. Without Tecumseh, the alliance was worthless. They had whiskey, they had cannons, but they no longer had a man to hold their hearts together.

What remained was a battlefield full of dead, a few conflicting stories – and a dream that shattered in the mud like a jug on stone.

A dream that everyone knew was bigger than the men who had shot it to pieces.

But dreams without bodies have a hard time in this world.

A body that was no longer there was worse than a dead person left lying there.

Had he stayed, they would have photographed him, if cameras had existed. They would have hung him, stuffed him, dragged him through the streets as proof of their victory. A piece of meat that said, "Look, he was just a man."

But he didn't stay. He disappeared.

And so the gossiping began.

One soldier swore he saw officers dismember the body and distribute pieces of flesh as trophies. He himself had seen a scrap of skin, picked it up, and then thrown it away in disgust. Another claimed he had been placed in a barrel, steeped in whiskey, and sent east. A third, with trembling hands, recounted how the Shawnee had come at night and carried him away on a blanket, silent, like shadows.

All the stories contradicted each other. All were ugly. And all were too small for him.

The truth? No one knew. Perhaps the ground really did swallow him. Perhaps the spirits took him, as his warriors believed. Perhaps greedy hands shoved him somewhere to later earn coins from his death.

But that's exactly what made him bigger.

A dead body can be buried. A missing body becomes a legend.

The Americans hated it. They wanted proof, a photo, a statue of his dead face. Instead, they only had stories, lies, anecdotes. And each one made him stronger. Some soldiers later recounted in taverns: "I was there when he fell." But when asked about the body, they looked away, drank faster, and cursed.

But the Shawnee smiled. Bitterly, broken, but with a shred of pride. They said: "You don't have him. You only have the blood, the noise. But the man? You'll never get him."

And that's exactly how it stayed.

The body disappeared. The truth evaporated. What remained was smoke, rumor, myth.

And the dream? It lay in pieces. Without it, the alliance crumbled like rotten wood. The British turned away, the tribes scattered, the treaties were signed, the land was sold.

But the myth lived on.

In every story, in every whisper around the campfire, in every gust of wind through the woods that sounded like a scream.

The victors had killed the man. But because they didn't have the body, they never fully secured victory.

The British were the first to turn their backs.

For them, Tecumseh had been a useful dog, barking when needed and biting when unleashed. As long as he lived, he was a pawn against the Americans, a tool, a wild ace up their sleeve.

Now he was dead. Or gone. What did that matter to her?

In their reports, they wrote soberly: "Tecumseh fallen. His influence overestimated. The alliance no longer viable." Not a word about the scream. Not a word about the man who had held them together with more than their red uniforms and empty promises. For them, it was over. Whiskey and cannons would suffice again.

The Shawnee, on the other hand, stood in the rain like shadows without bodies. Some didn't cry, they just stared. Others called out into the forest, sang softly, and spoke with spirits. They knew the body was gone. But they also knew this wasn't the end.

"He's not here," murmured an old woman. "He's in the ground. He's in the wind. Every step on this land steps on him." The younger ones nodded, clinging to these words like the last coals on a cold night. But deep down, they felt: without him, their dream was shattered. The tribes would disperse, the British would abandon them, the whites would take the land, piece by piece.

The Americans?

They had the battlefield, they had the smoke, they had the dead. But they had no body. That gnawed at them. A dead man without a body was no proof. No trophy head to haul back to Washington.

And so they told stories, each more disgusting than the last. One boasted they had skinned him. Another swore they had mutilated him and distributed the skin as a souvenir. Yet another said he had seen Indians carry him away like shadows in the fog.

All lies, all half-truths, all faint noise trying to drown out the silence.

The truth remained unclear. And that's exactly what made him stronger.

Because a missing body never stops asking questions.

The British forgot him. The Americans tried to downplay him. But the Shawnee? They held him. Not in the flesh, not in the grave, but in myth.

A myth that grew because the body disappeared.

Fires burned in the American camp, but they didn't warm anyone. The smoke rose, and every time it changed direction, the men felt as if it brought something with it—an echo, a shadow, a scream.

They drank. Whiskey from bottles they had captured, adulterated liquor, anything that burned their throats. But the intoxication brought no sleep, only darker dreams.

One tossed and turned, screaming in his sleep, his eyes wide open as if he had bullets in his ribs. "He was there!" he gasped. "He got up again!" His comrades didn't laugh. They just added wood to the fire, stared into the embers, and remained silent.

Another sat up, his eyes glazed over. "If we had him... the body... then it would be over. But like this? It's not over like this." A sergeant yelled, "He's dead, damn it! Dead!" But his voice sounded like a command to himself, not to the men.

Again and again the same question, like a splinter piercing the night: Where was the body?

Some said the Shawnee had taken him. Some said the ground itself had taken him. One swore he saw him sink slowly in the darkness until only his face remained, and that, too, disappeared into the mud.

Nobody knew anything. But everyone had images in their heads.

This made her sick. No grave, no proof, no end.

So they sat, smoking, drinking, and cursing. Some told boastful stories about how they had been "there." But as soon as someone asked—"So? Did you see the body?"—they fell silent.

The officers acted as if they had everything under control. They gave speeches, talked of victory, of glory, of Washington. But at night, they themselves crept to the fire, stared at the shadows, and drank like the men.

No one was free from the hole.

A dead body is one thing. A missing body is a curse.

And that was exactly it.

The man was gone, but he was everywhere. In the smoke, in dreams, in whispers, in sips of whiskey. The soldiers couldn't bury him, so he buried himself in their minds.

In the cities far from the battlefield, they talked as if they had been there.

Men in taverns, with beer mugs and foul breath, recounted the day Tecumseh fell. Everyone had a different version, each one sounding different. One swore he saw the body brought to Canada. Another said it was cut into pieces and distributed among the officers. Yet another said it was burned, ashes scattered over the river.

No one had the truth. But that didn't stop them from selling it with smarmy words.

In the taverns, Tecumseh was both a curse and a coin. Some drank to his death, others drank to his spirit. Some made money by selling supposed "souvenirs"—feathers, knives, bones, all fake, but who would know?

The more they lied, the bigger the man they supposedly killed became.

In the settlers' villages, where the forest began, they whispered differently. There, people said he wasn't dead at all. That he lived in the forest, that he would return, that one night he would storm back into the houses with a thousand warriors. Children heard it by the fireplace, mothers nervously looked to the edge of the forest.

And in the Shawnee camps, the whispering was even louder. Old women said, "His body is with the earth. But his voice remains in the wind." Young warriors heard it, held their fists, even though they knew the weapons would soon have to fall silent.

The British said nothing. They sent out reports, sober and cold: "The chief is dead. The alliance dissolved." To them, he was dust in the papers.

But outside, in the alleys, in the fields, by the river, he lived on.

Rumors are like weeds. You can't kill them unless you take hold of their roots. And since there was no body, there were no roots. Only smoke, which grew ever thicker.

Some said he appeared as a ghost over the river on foggy nights. Others swore they heard him in dreams. And everyone who saw or heard him made the story bigger.

That's how it was: a missing body creates the myth.

And as the Shawnee fell apart, as the Americans took their land, the shadow of Tecumseh grew.

Not in the flesh. Not in the blood. But in words, in rumors, in people's minds.

The dream was shattered, yes. But the man who had carried it grew bigger the more they searched for him—and didn't find him.

The Shawnee had little more than smoke and memories. But they clung to them as if they were weapons.

For her, the absence of the body wasn't a loss. It was a sign.

"A man like him," said an old warrior with scars on his face, "can't lie in the dirt like a dog. The earth will take him because he belongs to the earth."

The elders told the story around the fire: His body had returned to where it belonged. Not stolen, not buried, but taken in. Like rain sinking into the ground, like blood dripping into the earth.

The younger ones listened, nodded, half-believing, half-doubting. But even their doubt made him stronger.

Some claimed they had seen him in a dream. He had walked through the woods, his chest bloodied, but standing upright, the axe still in his hand. He had said nothing, just looked. And the look alone was enough to wake them, with sweat on his brow and fire in his heart.

Others said they heard him on the wind. On stormy nights, when the trees bent and branches cracked, it sounded like his cry. No coincidence. No sound. Tecumseh.

There were those who swore his spirit had entered the river. That you could feel him in the current if you dipped your hand deep into the water.

Thus, the absence of the body became a kind of belief.

No gravestone, no place. But a sign everywhere.

And this belief was bitter. Because it didn't make the loss smaller. It made it greater. Every day without him showed how empty they were, how fragmented. But it also showed: The Americans could kill the man, but they couldn't possess him.

"They have the blood," the women said. "But we have the spirit."

But ghosts don't feed children.

The camps shrank. Hunger crept into people's stomachs, the fires dwindled. The British no longer paid attention. Each tribe was forced to survive on its own. And many had to submit to the whites, sign treaties, and surrender land.

But at night, by the fire, they captured the image: No body. No grave. He was in the ground, in the wind, in the water.

A faith that hurt, but sustained.

Thus, precisely because of his absence, Tecumseh became greater than any warrior they had ever had.

Without him the alliance was nothing.

The Creeks went home, the Cherokee looked the other way, the Choctaw sold land for glass beads and alcohol. Each tribe was alone again. Like dogs set against each other.

The British wrote their final reports, packed their crates, and left. "No longer of any use," read between the lines. For them, Tecumseh had been a piece on the chessboard, and now he was swept off the table.

The Americans continued to advance. They had treaties in their hands, bullets in the barrel, whiskey in the barrels. And they took what they wanted: land,

forests, rivers. Everything green and living was transformed into property on paper.

The alliance was dead before the bodies were cold.

But the man who had fallen was missing. And because he was missing, he remained.

The victors couldn't show a head, a stuffed body, or a trophy. Only stories, only lies, only contradictions. And the more they lied, the bigger the hole became.

The Shawnee felt the rupture. They starved, they scattered, they lost. But at night, by the fire, they told of him. Not as he had fallen—not bloody, not in the mud. But greater. How he stood, how he screamed, how he held everything together.

That was the irony. His dream shattered, but his figure became unbreakable.

The body disappeared. The dream lay in pieces.

But what remains when the body is gone? Words. Stories. An echo that cannot be killed.

The victors drank, wrote, and celebrated. But deep down, they knew: they had shot a man and created a myth.

The victors celebrate, the dead remain silent

The night after the battle smelled of smoke, blood and cheap liquor.

There was fire in the American camp. Fire in the wood, fire in the bottles, fire in the eyes. The officers toasted and made speeches as if they had conquered the heavens themselves.

"Men! We've got him! We've brought down the greatest enemy we've ever faced!" The words stumbled from the major's mouth, already half drunk, half insane. His voice sounded like a drum beaten too often.

The soldiers listened, drank, and remained silent. Some laughed too loudly, others stared into the fire. Everyone had their own image in their minds: blood, mud, eyes still open.

But they raised their cups. They drank. Because it was easier to swallow victory than silence.

And outside, beyond the firelight, lay the dead.

No cheering from them. No speeches, no bottles. Just open mouths, staring eyes, cold fingers. Some on their backs, some on their stomachs, some wedged together like wood thrown about in a storm.

They said nothing. But they said everything.

Every body told what no speech in the officers' tent said aloud: that the price was high, that the ground was rich, that victory stank of rot.

The ravens circled above them, waiting, pecking here and there. No trumpet call disturbed them. No sermon chased them away. The ravens knew the truth: Man talks of victory, but he only provides food.

The officers drank, laughed, and promised each other medals and promotions. They painted pictures of the glory they would bring home. Washington would thank them, and newspapers would print their names.

But the men around the fire knew better. They saw the shadows between the trees, heard the wind, smelled death. They knew Tecumseh hadn't completely fallen. Not as long as they had his scream in their heads.

The victors celebrated. The dead remained silent.

And the silence of the dead was louder.

The celebration in the camp was a lot of noise that didn't even convince itself.

The officers sat in the large tent, a barrel of whiskey in the middle, the floor covered with spilled drops. They shouted among themselves, clinked glasses, and told stories that grew longer by the minute. "He fell by my bullet!" said one. "No, by mine!" cried another. A third laughed and banged on the table. "You idiots, I got him with my bayonet." No one believed anyone else. But everyone acted as if it had mattered.

One was already writing a report for Washington. "A glorious victory. The enemy leader dead, the alliance broken." Words on paper, smooth and neat, as if the writer had never smelled blood.

Outside, by the fire, sat the ordinary soldiers. None of them laughed so loudly. They drank, yes, but their faces remained gray, like worn masks.

"They act as if we shot God," one muttered, "but we only saw one man fall."
"And what a man," whispered the one next to him. He stared into the fire as if he could hear the scream there again.

A boy, barely twenty, pressed his hands to his forehead. "I can still hear it. Again and again. That burning..." An older friend placed a hand on his shoulder. "Drink. It'll go away." But both knew it wouldn't go away. Not with one bottle. Not with a hundred.

The celebrations were a facade. A thin curtain of noise over a hole that grew larger the longer they remained silent.

A sergeant tried to keep spirits high. "Men! You're heroes! The newspapers will be talking about you tomorrow!" One laughed dryly. "Newspapers lie faster than we breathe." The sergeant hit him, more out of desperation than severity.

At the far end of the camp, a man sat alone, bottle in hand, staring at the ground. He muttered to himself, "If we really have him... why do I feel like he has us?"

The victors celebrated, yes. But every cup sounded hollow, every speech stank of lies.

And the same sentence still echoed in the men's minds: "I am Tecumseh."

The dead had their own celebration.

No whiskey, no talking, no lies. Just silence, mud, and the rustling of wings.

They lay there, scattered like overturned dolls. Some with their eyes open, staring at the sky, others with their faces in the dirt, their mouths full of earth. Arms outstretched, fingers crooked, as if still holding a weapon long since snatched away.

The battlefield smelled of iron, of blood, of decay that had already begun as the victors raised their cups.

The ravens were the first to have the courage to enter the square. They fluttered, perched on shoulders, and pecked at open wounds. An eye here, a

piece of meat there. They made no distinction between Shawnee and American. To them, everyone was the same: meat, hot or cold.

An American soldier lay with his stomach ripped open, his intestines half out. A raven sat on it, tugging at a thread that fluttered in the wind like a flag. A young Shawnee, still holding an arrow, had turned his head to the side. A bird perched on his chest, croaking and pecking as if writing a message.

The corpses didn't speak. But they told stories.

Every wound was a story. Every shot-through chest, every broken bone said: There was no glory here. Here was only dirt, only pain, only chaos.

The winners could celebrate as loudly as they wanted. But the ground knew more.

And the ground wasn't truly silent. It absorbed the blood, letting it seep into the earth, and every drop was evidence that couldn't be captured on paper.

An officer arrived later with a few men, holding torches, and surveyed the field. "Count the dead," he said. The men counted, muttering numbers, but it was pointless. Every body was more than a number.

The officers talked of "casualties." But outside, in the mud, there were no casualties. There lay sons, brothers, fathers. There lay dreams, shattered like sacks of skin.

And the ravens continued pecking.

As silent as the dead were, the animals were just as loud. Every wing beat, every screech was like a comment no one wanted to hear.

The victors celebrated. The dead remained silent.

But their silence spoke louder than any cheer.

Laughter roared through the camp, no one taking it seriously. Whiskey flowed, voices tumbled, sabers clanged like toys. Officers toasted each other, recounting victories none of them had actually witnessed.

"We've made history!" one roared. "We've slain the wild dog!" another screamed. Glasses clinked, throats gurgled, but eyes were empty. Everyone knew it sounded like cheap theater noise.

Outside, not a hundred paces away, lay the field. There was no noise. There was only the buzzing of flies, the rustling of wings, the cracking of branches as a body gave way in the wind.

A drunken American soldier stumbled out of the camp at night and pulled himself to the edge of the dead meadow. He still held the bottle in his hand, but it was shaking. "I can hear him," he murmured. "Not in the tent, not by the fire. Out here. He's still screaming." He downed the last swig and dropped the bottle. The dull thud on the ground sounded like a heart stopping.

Other men crept out as well. Not in groups, always alone, as if they didn't want anyone to see them looking. They stood at the edge, gazing into the darkness where the ravens perched over the corpses. They saw the open mouths, the empty eyes. Some made the sign of the cross. Others spat into the mud just to clear their throats.

Then they crept back, heard the noise again, the fake laughter, the talking. But it wasn't gone from their minds.

An invisible wall hung between the camp and the battlefield. On one side, the attempt to celebrate. On the other, the truth that no one wanted.

And it was precisely in between that the men lived – in the crack, in the crevice, where the voices of the officers were worthless and the silence of the dead said everything.

They knew: You can drink victory until you vomit. But you can't drown the silence.

The silence of the dead was no ordinary silence. It was heavy, thick, sticky. It clung to the victors' necks, like a hand that never let go.

In the camp, they talked as loudly as they could. Songs, toasts, lies. But as soon as one of them was alone, he heard it. No wind, no birds, just this silence that pierced his ears like a knife.

One of the soldiers said, "I'd rather have bullets around me than this damn silence." His comrade gave a short, harsh laugh, but his eyes were empty. "At least you can hear the bullets."

The officers noticed it too, even if they didn't admit it. They shouted orders, gave speeches, wrote reports. But their voices sounded like tin cans rolling across the floor. Useless against the silence.

For the silence spoke.

Every dead body spoke in it, without a word. They spoke of how the victory was rubbish. That the price was too high. That none of those in the camp had truly won.

The men tried to drink it away. But drunkenness only made it louder. Then came the dreams in which Tecumseh stood, bloody but unbroken, staring at them. Some woke up screaming. Others weren't really awake at all, they crawled through the days like shadows.

A sergeant cursed: "Screw it, he's dead, the silence is only in your heads." But he heard it too. Every night, when he lay down in the tent, when the voices grew quieter, it was there.

The dead said nothing. But their silence filled everything.

It was in every spark that leaped from the fire. It was in every gust of wind that shook the tent. It was in every step through the mud.

And it was louder than any song, any cheer, any drum signal.

Silence was the true victory. No officer had it in his hands, no newspaper could print it, no general could command it.

It was just there. Inevitable.

The victors celebrated. The dead remained silent. And silence won.

The silence was no longer a small thing. It crept out of the bodies, out of the open mouths, out of the staring eyes, and settled over everything.

The forest embraced it, the trees held it. No bird sang, no leaf rustled, as if the wind itself were afraid to disturb the silence. The river flowed slower, thicker, as if bearing the weight of the missing voices.

The men in the camp noticed. They hardly dared to venture out when night came. Even the brave ones who went to the edge of the field with bayonets and bottles returned with pale faces. "You can't hear anything out there," they said. "Not even your own heart."

During the day, they tried to make the noise louder. Drums, commands, chants. But the noise shattered against the silence. It was as if the ground itself had swallowed the voice and would never give it back.

The officers continued writing reports. "Great victory. Enemy crushed." Words on paper so smooth they were almost transparent. But even they, when they laid down their pens and night fell, heard it: that silence that weighed heavier than any bullet.

One wrote in his diary, quietly, just for himself: "We haven't won the war. We only have a field full of dead. And their silence haunts us."

The Shawnee felt it too. Their loss was different, bitterer, deeper. But they felt the same silence. For them, it wasn't a curse, but proof. Proof that their leader wasn't lying in the dust, but had become part of the earth.

They whispered, "The silence is his voice. It tells us he is here."

And so the silence had two faces. For the victors, it was a curse; for the vanquished, it was a memory.

But it ate its way into everything. Into the rivers, the forests, the fields. Every step on the ground sounded muffled, as if stepping on a drum that didn't respond. Every breath tasted of iron, of blood, of silence.

Victory was there, yes. But it tasted rotten. Like an apple, beautifully red on the outside, black and full of maggots on the inside.

The victors celebrated. The dead remained silent. And the country accepted the silence like a secret that will never be released.

The morning after the celebration, victory lay like a dead dog in the tent.

The fires were nothing but ash, the whiskey a burning hole in their stomachs. The officers snored in their uniforms, sabers beside them like useless toys. The enlisted men lay scattered, one in his own vomit, another with their eyes open, having seen nothing during the night.

The smoke was gone. But the silence remained.

It hung over the camp like a gray veil. No more laughter, no more speeches, no more false cheers. Only the crackling of ash, the fluttering of a torn tent canvas.

The men woke up with heavy heads, but the worst part wasn't the hangover. It was the hole. The feeling that they had shot something that wasn't dead.

A young soldier sat by the fire, rubbing his eyes, muttering, "We don't have him. He has us." No one objected.

The officers tried to maintain their composure. "We must set out, we have won, we march on." Words like stones in the mouth, heavy, tasteless. Even they knew that the glory they wanted to proclaim no longer held sway.

For outside, in the field, the dead still lay. And they were silent. No applause, no judgment, only the silence that was louder than all the speeches.

A few men were sent to bury the bodies, or at least bury them. They went out with shovels and returned in silence. One wept, not knowing why. "It's... it's just quiet out there," he murmured.

And this silence was worse than the thunder of cannons.

The celebration was over. The victory was over. All that remained was silence.

The victors had done what they wanted. But the dead had the last word.

And they said nothing.

What remains of the great river

The Ohio flowed on.

He didn't care about the dead, about victories, about dreams. He absorbed the blood, carried it away, diluted it until only a shadow remained. Fish fed on it, the current washed it away. Blood was nothing new to the river. He had seen more than any general could ever count.

Branches, washed-up wood, and scraps of fabric lay scattered on the shore. A feather drifted by, slowly, spinning until it disappeared.

This is what it looked like when the earth took care of the rest. No flags, no reports, no glory. Just water, taking what it was given.

The settlers who came later built houses along the river. They saw the water, glittering in the sun, and thought, "It's ours." They didn't know that it had already heard everything. Blood, bones, screams. They saw only the surface.

For the Shawnee, the river was more. It was a memory. Every drop could be a story. Every mist that rose in the morning was a spirit returning. They knew that water doesn't forget. It washes away, yes. But it keeps. Deep down, where no one can reach.

And so the great river remained, even when the alliance broke, even when Tecumseh fell, even when the victors celebrated.

It flowed. Always.

Sometimes, when the sun set, it shone red. Then the elders said, "That's the blood he'll never let go of." Sometimes, when the fog rolled in, they said, "Those are the voices that could no longer speak."

The victors only looked at the river and thought of trade, boats, and profit. The vanquished saw the river and heard what the victors would never hear.

That's how it was: the river took everything in – and gave nothing back.

And what remains of the great river? A mirror that doesn't say what it has seen. A mouth that doesn't speak, but knows everything. A stream that carried the dream away until only rumors remained.

The years passed, but the river remained.

Boats arrived, heavily laden with wood, iron, and people. Men in hats, women with children, entire settler families drifted on rafts as if the river were merely a convenient route west.

They saw the current, the sun, the expanse—and they thought it was freedom. But the river didn't laugh. The river remembered.

Of every wound he had rinsed. Of every face that had disappeared into its depths. Of every scream echo he had pulled into the fog to endure the night.

Some said the river was a border. Between the land of the white people and the land of those who were displaced. Between hunger and hope. Between yesterday and tomorrow.

Others said the river was a road. One that accelerated what should have been slow. Boats full of weapons, whiskey, and treaties were carried to the villages like poison.

But some knew: the river was a grave.

Not just for those who drowned in the water. But also for dreams. And for entire nations.

He took what was given to him. He knew no difference between settler or Shawnee, between winner or loser. When a body fell, he took it. When blood flowed, he drank it. When voices fell silent, he kept them.

On some nights, when the fog was thick, it seemed as if the river spoke. Not in words, not in sentences—in sounds. A rippling like a sigh, a rushing like a scream. The old heard it. The young ignored it.

The Americans built villages, cities, and bridges. They saw the river as their property. Something that could be tamed. But no dam, no bridge, no harbor could change what it was: a witness that never forgot.

And so it flowed on, unmoved.

Border, road, grave. All in one.

The victors celebrated on its banks, the vanquished wept on those same banks. And the river took both, without distinction.

What remains of the great river? A mirror of guilt. A scar that never heals.

The river had two faces.

By day, it seemed like oblivion. Wide, shining, smooth. The sun lay on the water, and everything looked peaceful. As if there had never been blood, no corpses, no screams. Children played on the shore, laughed, threw stones into it, and drew rings as if they were the only ones who had ever been there.

But at night the river was a memory.

Then came the fog. Thick, gray, heavy. It lay on the water like a sheet over a corpse. One could hear the roar, deeper, darker, as if the stream were whispering. Some swore they heard voices in the fog. Not clear, not understandable, just sounds. Screams, sighs, laughter, all jumbled together.

For the settlers, it was just their imagination. "The water doesn't talk," they said, and drank more whiskey to forget the fog.

For the Shawnee, however, it was certain. "The water never forgets," they said. "It carries away, but it retains."

That was the river: forgotten by day, remembered by night.

He did both at once. He washed away the dreams like chalk on a slate, but he left behind a shadow that never completely disappeared. Each new day looked fresh, each new fog brought back old faces.

You could sit on the bank, stare at the river, and suddenly everything was there: the scream, the blood, the body that disappeared. Not as an image, not as a film. As a feeling that was heavier than stone.

So lived the river. So lived the memory.

The victors wanted to forget, but they couldn't. They heard the river rushing at night and thought of all the dead they had never buried. The vanquished wanted to remember, but they couldn't hold on. Everything slipped away, faded, blurred, like water blurs writing.

Forgetting and remembering. Two sides of the same damned stream.

And that was what remained of the great river: A mirror that showed nothing and yet everything. A witness that didn't speak, but was never silent. A dream that was washed away – and returned as a shadow in the fog.

They all stood on the shore and everyone saw something different.

The settler stood with his boots in the mud, his hands on his hips. For him, the river represented land, property, and the future. "Here I'll build my farm, here I'll put up my fence, here it's mine." He didn't see the blood in the water. He saw cornfields, fences, children running across the yard. For him, the river was just a tool.

The merchant arrived with boats packed with whiskey, gunpowder, and pots. For him, the river was a road that brought money faster than any horse. He saw currents, but he saw only coins. Every wave crest was silver to him, every fog a risk that could be turned into profit.

But the warrior stood still. He saw the water, and he saw ghosts. Not directly, not visibly, but he knew they were there. For him, the river was memory. Every wave bore a face, every current a name. He saw brothers, fathers, friends who had remained there. For him, the river was not property, not a road. It was a grave that breathed.

The old man, already too tired for war and too poor for possessions, saw a mirror in the river. He crouched on the bank, gazed into the water, and saw his own face melt, grow older, grow younger, and dissolve. For him, the river was time itself, and time was a thief.

The boy, who had no scars yet, saw only water. He jumped in, laughed, dived, splashed. For him, the river was play, freedom, endless. He saw no dead bodies, no ghosts, no coins. He saw only coolness in the summer, a current for swimming.

So one stood next to the other, and each saw a different river.

But the river remained the same.

He took the dreams of the settlers, the greed of the traders, the grief of the warriors, the weariness of the old, the laughter of the young—and he carried it all away. No distinctions. No judgments. Everything became a stream, everything became a current.

And so was what remained of the great river: A thing that was never what people wanted it to be. A thing that took but never explained. A thing that was everything—and nothing.

The victors stood on the banks, raised their glasses, and sang songs. For them, the river was a symbol. "We have won! We have taken the land! The river is ours!"

They saw it like a medal made of water. Broad proof that their God was guiding them, that their guns fired accurately, that their hunger for land was justified. They praised the river as if it were their ally.

But the river wasn't listening. It flowed. It carried the sounds away, as it had carried blood, as it had carried corpses. To it, it was just more noise, which it swallowed.

The defeated also stood on the banks, but silently. They saw the same river, but it was not a triumph. It was a wound. Wide, deep, incurable. Every drop of water was, to them, a drop of blood they would never get back. Every current was a brother swept away. They sang no songs. They whispered, wept, and were silent.

And the river listened to them too – and lost them too in the roar.

So victors and vanquished stood by the same water, seeing two worlds, two truths, two lies.

But the river belonged to no one.

Not the settlers who built fences. Not the generals who proclaimed victories. Not the tribes who mourned their dead.

He belonged to himself.

And that was precisely the mockery.

The victors thought they had conquered him. The vanquished thought they had lost him. But in truth, he would not let anyone take him away or keep him.

It flowed as it always did. Indifferent, cold, stubborn.

What remains of the great river? A victory that no one truly has. A wound that no one can truly heal. A stream that carries both – and confirms neither.

The victors celebrated. The vanquished mourned. And the river laughed at both.

If the river could talk, it would vomit the truth.

But he doesn't speak. He murmurs. And in this murmur lies more truth than in all the generals' reports, in all the treaties, in all the victors' songs.

He saw the first hunters, the shadows between the trees. He saw the Shawnee bathing children in the water, carving canoes, singing in the mist. He heard their voices, and he kept them.

Then the white men came, with boats, with whiskey, with iron. He saw how they built wooden cities, how they cast nets, how they said, "This is ours." The river kept that, too.

He saw battles. Blood that colored its current. Bodies that sank, faces that never reappeared. He carried them away, but he didn't forget them. Not a drop of blood was lost, not a scream disappeared. They seeped into his memory like stones to the bottom.

He heard Tecumseh's scream. Loud, short, piercing. And he heard the silence that followed. He remembered that, too.

The river is a chronicler that no one reads. No paper, no pen, no testimony. Only water that flows and carries. Every drop a word, every current a sentence.

But he doesn't answer anyone.

The victors don't ask, they celebrate. The vanquished ask, but they receive no answer. The river says nothing.

It's roaring. And in that roar, everything is contained. But no one really wants to listen.

The settlers hear only opportunity. The traders hear only coins. The warriors hear only spirits. The old hear only time. The young hear only water.

And the river? The river hears everything.

He's the only one who doesn't lie. The only one who doesn't forget.

What remains of the great river? A memory that belongs to no one. A truth no one wants to hear. A chronicler who never writes—and therefore never lies.

In the end, nothing tangible remains. No grave, no memorial, no trophy head, no clear report. Only the river.

It flows on, indifferent. The victors march, the vanquished disperse, the merchants count their coins, the children laugh—but the river sees them all and carries them away, just as it has carried away blood and bones.

What remains is myth.

Tecumseh – the man without a grave. The warrior without a body. The endless cry. His name lingers on the river like fog not fully consumed by the sun. Sometimes clear, sometimes faint, sometimes vanished, then reappears.

What remains is emptiness.

A dream in shards. An alliance that shattered like rotten wood. A land sold before the dead were cold. The river carries the emptiness in its current, invisible but heavy. Anyone who listens too long can feel it in their bones.

What remains is truth without words.

The river knows what happened. It saw it, it remembered it. But it doesn't speak it. It lets the victors sing their songs. It lets the losers cry their tears. It rushes, flows, is silent – and in this silence lies more truth than in a thousand chronicles.

So the great river remains.

No monument, no victory speech, no dirge can compare to him. He is greater than all of that. He is the last testimony that has not been falsified. He is what remains when everything else has rotted away.

And when night falls, when the fog rises, you sometimes hear it: not words, not voices, but a weight in the murmur. That is what remains of the great river. A myth, an emptiness, a truth – that no one wants to hear, but no one can forget.

Smoke over the alliance dream

The smoke came slowly. No big fire, no bang. Just a residue, an aftershock. It hung over the forests, over the villages, over the river. Thin enough that it was almost overlooked, thick enough that it couldn't be ignored.

It was the smoke of the alliance dream.

Once it had been bright, a fire that called tribes together, a cry against treaties, against whiskey, against the settlers' axes. Tecumseh had lit it, piled wood, struck sparks. Now the fire was out. Only smoke remained.

The Shawnee felt it in their lungs when they awoke in the morning. It tasted bitter, of loss, of hunger. Some coughed, some remained silent. They knew: the dream was no more.

The victors also saw the smoke, but they gave it different names. "That's progress," they said when forests were burned to make way for fields. "That's civilization," they said when huts disappeared in the smoke and roads were built. For them, smoke was not a sign of the end, but a beginning.

But the smoke didn't lie.

It stank of burnt wood, of old flesh, of something that won't come back. It hung over everything, like a memory you can't get out of your clothes.

Some said, "It was inevitable." Others said, "It was treason." But everyone breathed the same smoke, victors and vanquished alike.

It crept into the huts, into the churches, into dreams. It made eyes red, voices hoarse, and nights heavy.

The smoke was the last thing that remained of the alliance dream. No land, no victory, no body. Only this smell, this veil that stretched over the years until no one knew where it began or ended.

A dream that died in the smoke. A dream that lived on in the smoke.

Because smoke never completely disappears. It dissipates, yes. But it lingers in cracks, in hair, in walls. And every time the wind changes, you smell it again.

So the smoke remained over the alliance dream. Thin, heavy, inescapable.

The smoke didn't go away.

It moved on. Across forests, across rivers, across new fields that had grown from scorched land. It crept through cracks in houses, hung in clothes, burned in throats.

In the Shawnee villages, it was bitter. It reminded them of what they had lost. Of the fire that had been great, and now stank of nothing but ash. Children coughed, women rubbed their eyes, men gazed silently at the sky, where the smoke hung like a veil.

In the victors' cities, it was different. There they called it "progress." The smoke from the forges, the chimneys, the brick kilns. A smoke that smelled of iron, of money, of a future that could only grow on burnt wood and broken land. They considered themselves masters of the smoke, but they were merely its next victims. Every breath carried it deeper into their lungs.

In the fields, it was more invisible, but no less real. A faint scent that lingered, even when the wind shifted. The smoke from burnt forests, the smoke from huts that were burned down, the smoke from fires where final speeches were made before entire tribes vanished.

It moved through the years. Always there, always different. Sometimes thick as a black curtain, sometimes thin as a breath that you can barely see but smell.

Some said, "It's just a figment of my imagination." But it was more real than the treaties signed in Washington. Paper tears. Smoke remains.

You couldn't hold him, you couldn't kill him, you couldn't possess him. He was simply there. Like a ghost that couldn't be caught.

So it hung over everything—over villages, towns, fields. An invisible trace. A final remnant of the dream Tecumseh had carried.

The smoke was the memory. Not clean, not clear, but burning, acrid, dirty. But real.

And that was more than the victors would ever understand.

The smoke wasn't just in the sky. It was in people's heads.

For the victors, it stank of guilt. Even if they didn't admit it, it crept into their dreams. They saw faces in the smoke that they had shot, heard screams that

had long since drunken them. One general wrote a report that contained no blood, only words like "victory" and "honor." But at night, he woke up, drenched in sweat, the smoke catching in his throat, even though the fire had long since gone out.

It was worse for the ordinary soldiers. They had heard the scream, they had seen the corpses. They knew that what they were celebrating smelled of burning flesh. The smoke settled in their uniforms, in their lungs. Even years later, when they were planting corn on a farm somewhere, they smelled it again. They coughed, without knowing why. And yet they knew why.

For the vanquished, the smoke was longing. Longing for the fire that had once been great. Longing for the dream that was smothered in the smoke. For them, it was a memory, bitter but precious. They smelled it and knew: There was something that belonged to us. Something they had taken from us. But as long as we can still smell the smoke, it is not quite dead.

The ancients told of how smoke once served as a sign. Smoke signals in the sky, messages between tribes. Now it was a sign of loss. But also of that which could never truly die.

The children heard these stories and breathed in the smoke, even if they didn't understand what it was. To them, it was just a smell, a cough. But it crept into their minds and became a memory before they even knew they were supposed to remember.

So the smoke became double-edged.

For the victors, guilt. For the vanquished, longing.

And both sides had it in their minds, whether they wanted to or not.

You couldn't get rid of the smoke. You couldn't drink it away, write it away, or preach it away. It remained. It was the invisible legacy of the dream that had burned away.

And every time the wind changed, he was there again.

The smoke also crept into the stories.

The victors told of glory, of courage, of brave generals who had supposedly turned the tide. They told it in taverns, in newspapers, in sermons. But the smoke was there. You heard it between the words. You smelled it when the

voice faltered, when the gaze remained on the ground for too long. Their stories were embellished, but the smoke softened the makeup until the dirt beneath it became visible again.

The vanquished told different stories. They told of Tecumseh, of the city on the Wabash, of the speeches that sparked fire. But even their words lingered with smoke. They told of the dream, and one could smell that it had burned. One could taste the ash, even though their voices remained strong.

Thus, two stories emerged: that of the victors and that of the losers. And both were obscured.

In the settlers' taverns, men with red faces squatted and swore they had fired the shot that killed Tecumseh. Everyone had a different version, everyone had a different weapon, everyone struck a different pose. But no matter how loudly they talked, the smoke hung in the air. It made their lies scratchy, their voices hoarse. No one truly believed what they were saying.

In the Shawnee huts, the elders spoke of him as if he were still there. They recounted his eyes, his words, his cry. But even here, the smoke crept through every story. It was a reminder that the fire he had lit was no longer burning. They spoke loudly, but one could hear the crackling of the ashes behind them.

And then there were the gaps. Things no one told. Things that disappeared in the smoke. Who really killed him. Where the body was. What happened in the final moment. No one knew, no one wanted to know, no one could hold on to it. The smoke swallowed the last bits of clarity.

Thus, stories became legends, legends became fog. The smoke was in every syllable, whether victors or vanquished. It made truth and lies equally vague, equally gray.

And that was the worst thing about the smoke: It wasn't just in people's heads, not just in the air. It was in the stories themselves.

And as long as you told them, you could smell him again.

The smoke didn't settle in one place. It kept creeping.

Those who had heard the scream eventually died. The soldiers, the warriors, the women, the children—they all left. But the smoke remained.

It was like an heirloom that no one wanted, but everyone got. No gold, no fields, no house. Only this smell, which clung to the memories, even if the memories were no longer fresh.

The children of the victors grew up in cities, in houses with chimneys that spewed their own smoke. They played by the river, they laughed, they heard stories of "glory days." But at night, when the wind shifted, the smoke of the old fire drifted through their dreams. It made them uneasy, even if they didn't know why.

The children of the vanquished heard the stories around the fire. Stories of Tecumseh, of alliance, of resistance. And as the elders spoke, they hung in a veil of smoke that never disappeared. For them, it was a link back to something that had been greater than their own lives. They breathed it in as something sacred, even as it burned.

So the smoke was passed on. Not in hands, not in coins. In lungs. In minds. In words.

The victors called it progress. They called it "the legacy of our bravery." But in truth, they smelled their guilt. The smoke stayed with them, even if they denied it.

The vanquished called it memory. They called it "the heritage of our people." But in truth, they smelled their loss. The smoke remained with them, even if they kept it romanticized.

And so he went on.

An invisible possession that could never be sold, never given away, never destroyed. An invisible thief who came into the room at night and entered one's dreams.

The victors breathed guilt. The vanquished breathed longing.

And the children on both sides didn't know why their throats sometimes scratched, why their dreams sometimes burned.

It was the smoke.

He was the legacy. The last piece of the alliance dream.

The smoke continued to drift, even as time passed.

New roads came, new cities, new flags. Old huts fell into disrepair, old names disappeared from maps. But the smoke remained.

Sometimes it hung over a field that had long since become a cornfield, but you could still smell the blood beneath it. The wind carried the scent, and sensitive people would suddenly cough for no reason. Sometimes it hung over a marketplace where children laughed, women bargained, men swore. But amid the noise, you could smell something bitter, something that didn't belong there. Sometimes it hung over a church when the pastor preached about God and victory. The smoke drifted through the windows, settled on the pews, and dried out throats.

People acted as if he were gone. They said, "That's history. Over." But history doesn't burn out. It smolders. And smoke is what remains when the fire is old.

In the minds of the victorious children, he was only a shadow. They knew nothing of Tecumseh, nothing of the alliance dream. But they knew the scratchy feeling in their throats when they lay awake at night, for no reason. They knew the dreams of rivers, of smoke, of voices that couldn't quite be grasped.

In the minds of the descendants of the vanquished, it was clearer. They knew names, they knew songs, they knew that something greater than themselves was being lost. The smoke was with them like an invisible thread, leading back to a dream they themselves had never seen, but breathed as if it were part of their own lungs.

So the smoke remained while the world changed.

He crawled through time, through generations, through walls, through memories. He was invisible, but not dead.

A child once asked his grandfather, "Why does it sometimes smell of fire here, even though none is burning?" The old man looked at the river for a long time, then said, "Because the dream is never completely gone. It no longer burns. But it still smokes."

Thus, the smoke became a bridge between past and future. Not clear, not bright, not pure. But dirty, scratchy, bitter. But real.

And he stayed.

Even if the names were forgotten. Even if the victors built monuments and the vanquished only whispered stories. Even if everything fell to dust.

The smoke remained because the dream was too big to simply die.

In the end, nothing tangible remained.

The battles were over. The victors moved on, built cities, wrote their reports, gave speeches in churches, and erected statues of men in uniforms that had long since rotted away. The vanquished shrank, moved deeper into the forests, lost their language, their land, and their hope.

But there was something else hanging over everything.

Smoke.

Not the smoke of a fire that was still burning. Not bright, not strong. But the smoke that lingers long after the flames have gone out. Thin, but persistent. Sometimes invisible, but always there.

He hung over the fields where corn grew on blood. He hung over the rivers that shone as if they had never seen anything. He hung in the minds of the old who whispered, "He's still alive." He hung in the dreams of the young who didn't know why their throats were scratchy.

The smoke was the last thing that remained of the alliance dream.

No country, no unity, no victory. Just this bitter stuff that you breathed in whether you wanted to or not. Guilt for the victors, longing for the vanquished.

He made no distinction. He crept into every lung, winner and loser alike. He reminded everyone that fire never disappears without a trace. That dreams don't simply die, but smolder until only smoke remains.

And so it ended.

Not with a scream. Not with a bang. Not with a monument.

But with smoke.

The dream was burned. But it never completely disappeared. It remained in the wind, in the fog, in the breath of those who came after.

And when you stand by the river today, when the fog rises and the air tastes bitter, you can still smell it. The smoke over the alliance dream.

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