

The Secret of Tecumseh's Gold is a young adult historical fiction book, built around the real-life legend of Indian gold that was hidden in White County, Indiana during the Prophetstown Indian Confederacy years, circa 1808 - 1813.

The Secret of Tecumseh's Gold

By Jeff Darnell

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SEQUEL TO *The Mystery of the Tomahawk Pipe*

THE
SECRET
of
TECUMSEH'S
GOLD



JEFF DARNELL

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Print ISBN: 978-1-64718-752-1

Epub ISBN: 978-1-64718-753-8

Mobi ISBN: 978-1-64718-754-5

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2020

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Darnell, Jeff
The Secret of Tecumseh's Gold by Jeff Darnell
Library of Congress Control Number: 2020913570

Chapter 1

White County, Indiana, July 1854

The old man dipped his paddle into the creek and pushed his dugout farther upstream. Strange, he thought, how many times he had made this same journey over his lifetime. This, though, would be the last. There would be no need to come to this spot, again, after today. Besides, Nipoowi would surely come to him before many more moons and his spirit would then join those in the afterlife.

Fog lifted as the morning sun burned it off, the scent of honeysuckle and Queen Anne's lace lifting with it. Frogs leapt off the banks as the canoe passed. The old man closed his eyes and drifted. A breeze rustled the leaves of the sycamores and cottonwoods that lined both sides of the creek. The sounds and smells of the early morning always made him think back to his childhood.

He had been born into a Mekoche tribe of the Wapakoneta Shawnee, and the raucous infant was given the name Abooksigun, the wildcat. As a boy he completed his pa-wa-kah, his trials to manhood, and it was then the mighty Black Hoof took him to meet a young chieftain, Tecumseh, with whom he forged a fastness and respect that remained these many years later.

He grew into a young brave, followed Tecumseh and his growing band into skirmishes against the wasicu, the white devils, then followed the chieftain out of Ohio into the Indiana Territory. With his brother, The Prophet, Tecumseh established a new settlement on the bluffs of the Wabash River to which thousands flocked. Here they would be pushed no more. Warriors from the Miami, Iroquois, Chickamauga, Ojibway, Mascouten, Kickapoos, Winnebagos, Wyandot, Piankashaw, Seneca, Wea, Fox, Sac, and Potawatomi nations joined the Shawnee at Prophetstown to fight the ever-encroaching whites.

In 1811, the warriors needed guns. Tecumseh secretly gathered sixteen of his most trusted warriors and instructed them to journey to Canada with two hundred bars of gold to buy guns from the British. Abooksigun was among them. Each warrior made a vow to Manitou, the Great Spirit: The gold

would be used for no other reason; it must be used to fight the white devils and recapture what had been taken from them. But, short into their journey, the warriors happened upon white militia, and to keep the gold from falling into hands of the whites, they hid it in a cave along a creek. Half of the warriors were killed in the battle. Those who were not each made a second vow: They would never tell others where the gold was hidden, and they would watch over it to make sure no others discovered and removed it.

Upon their return to Prophetstown they learned Tecumseh had left to recruit more warriors among the northern tribes. Shortly thereafter, Prophetstown was attacked by American forces under William Henry Harrison. The warriors were defeated, and the settlement was burned to the ground along with their fields of corn. Abooksigun and the surviving warriors followed Tecumseh north to fight the Americans alongside the British, but when Tecumseh was killed at the Battle of the Thames in Ontario, Canada, the dreams of the Indian confederation died with him.

Abooksigun and the last few braves from Tecumseh's original secret pact returned to the Indiana Territory. They had to keep their vow to watch over the gold—they must wait for

another great chief to rise up and lead the people against the whites. Seasons passed. Years passed. All but Abooksigun had died. He was alone. Even his own son, Askuwhteau, had left him—angered that his father would not trust him with the secret.

Once, when the fever was bad, and he was certain Nipoowi was upon him, he had sought help from a young white frontier doctor who had built a cabin on the banks of the creek. With help from the doctor, the sickness passed. But, Abooksigun realized he had to plan for the future. He would die sometime, and he could not let the secret of the gold die with him. He had to pass it to another as a safeguard. With no one else he could trust, and knowing the young white to be honorable, Abooksigun gave him the secret of the gold's location even though the young white was unaware he was doing so at the time. Abooksigun gave the young doctor the gift of a tomahawk pipe—a beautifully carved and painted ritual pipe. It was a trick taught him many years ago by Tecumseh. A message could be coded into the carvings that only one of The People could decipher. To the unknowing, it would appear to be an ornate pipe, nothing more. In doing so, the secret could be passed and preserved. It might eventually find its way to one of The People.

Thus, to the young doctor, the pipe was simply a gift from Abooksigun for nursing him back to health. Throughout his life he had in his possession the location of a treasure and never knew it.

The gold was safe for many years, but now countless more whites had settled on farms, and a railroad was being built not far from the creek. The gold must be moved, or Abooksigun must chance its discovery by others.

Abooksigun opened his eyes and again dipped his paddle into the creek. He was in no hurry. Old men cannot be. He lifted his weathered face and squinted at the sun through the lifting fog. He had time to make one more trip before the white workers began their day. He saw in front of him a sharp bend in the creek. He was almost there.

Rounding the bend, he came to a solid rock wall with a fissure just large enough for a small man to squeeze through. He took a grass rope and with both hands wedged the rope into a small crack in the rock face. He tied the other end to the dugout so it would not float away. He carefully lowered one leg into the creek, felt for the bottom, and lifted the rest of his body out of

the canoe. He'd had to wait until the dry season, when the water was low enough to allow him to stand in the creek. Even so, it was still chest high and the current was tricky.

He worked his way along the rock wall to the fissure, turned sideways, and carefully worked his way through. Once inside the small cave he waited a moment until his eyes adjusted to the dim light. The chamber was about eight feet deep and five feet wide. He had to stoop a little to not hit his head on the roof of the cave. He took a deep breath and lowered himself into the water, felt with his hands, and pulled up a smooth stone bar. Even in the shadows of the cave, the reflections of light off the water showed the luster of the gold. Abooksigun was always taken by the weight of the dense metal. Funny that a thing so small required such strength to handle it.

He slowly inched his way to the opening and out into the creek. He placed the gold bar on the floor of the dugout, then made his way back for another, and another, and another, placing each for good balance.

With the seventh stone in the canoe, he paused. It was the last of the gold bars—no more remained in the cave. How many times had he made this same trip to move all the others? It had started with the last new moon. And, now, there would be

another new moon tonight. He had made many trips. But this was the last, and it troubled him. If the time should come when the yellow metal was needed, how would any of The People know where to look? The vows—even the message on the pipe given to the white doctor—pointed to this place. He must leave a message for others to find, should they look. The old man stood waist deep in the creek, hands holding onto the dugout with a bowed head. Slowly he looked up, nodded his head, grinned, and thought, yes, it is a good plan.

He slowly worked his way back into the dugout and turned over the last bar of yellow metal so that the flat bottom of it faced him. He drew his knife from its deerskin sheaf and etched into the flat surface of the yellow bar.

Once more he slid out of the dugout and into the water. He reached back into the dugout, grabbed the yellow bar and carried it back toward the opening of the little cave, slowly working his way through the current of the creek. He turned sideways, squeezed through, and moved to the center of the small cave. He looked to make sure the golden bar was sitting in his hands properly—the flat bottom with his etching down. He took a breath and then lowered it to the sandy bottom and firmly

pushed it into its resting place. Rising, he paused. Yes, it is good. My work is almost done.

He paddled his dugout down the creek and looked at all the familiar sights—a boulder jutting up from the water here, a large sycamore hanging over the bank there. *I may never see these again. This is my last time. No need to make the journey to this place again.* He was not sad—it was simply the truth.

The dugout reached the mouth of the creek and the old man worked his way out into the larger river and turned south, staying close to the east bank. He let the current carry the dugout, using his paddle as a steering tiller. He passed under the new bridge that carried the railroad and looked to the opposite bank. He could see and hear people in the town starting their day. He always shied away from contact with them and only went to the town when he had to trade for sugar, flour, and coffee.

Mile after mile the river wound like a snake. He let the current take him. The sun was directly above in the sky now. It would not be long. He was almost there. He saw the familiar point of the sandbar jutting into the river and worked the dugout around the sharp bend, then back up into a small horseshoe-shaped hollow that cut back into the land. The little cove was

perfectly protected from the flow of the river. He let the weight of the dugout slide up onto the sandy beach and then allowed himself to sit and rest. He thought about the years from long ago, of Tecumseh and the original band of warriors who had been charged with this secret. *Yes, my brothers. I have kept our vows, but I am almost finished.*

He picked up the first of the bars from the bottom of the dugout, cradled it with his two arms, stepped out of the dugout, and slowly walked up the sandy path he'd forged through the underbrush, vines, and trees. A rock cliff formed part of the face of the bluff. A booksign walked straight to it. Only standing close in front of the wall could he see the shallow indentation—a shallow, natural alcove in the face of the cliff. From afar it blended in with the rest of the rocky face.

He stepped into the alcove and could then see the low opening of the cave on the right, close to the ground. This was the hardest part. On hands and knees he reached out and placed the yellow bar on the ground in front of him, crawled to it, moved it farther in front of him, crawled to it, and continued the process as he moved into the darkness of the cave.

Once inside, the space opened and he could stand. He paused for a moment and let his eyes adjust. He looked to the

far end of the cave, and even in the poor light the wall of golden bars reflected a yellow glow. Yes, he thought. They are wondrous to look at. He placed the new bar on the pile, sat down to rest on the cool sandy floor, and leaned back against the yellow metal to rest before the repeated trips to fetch the others from the canoe.

A few hours later, he had finally made the last trip to the cave. The task was done, now all of the gold had been safely moved to a new place, miles away from the ever-growing town. *There will be no whites working here. No farmers, no railroads. There is no need for any of them to come to this place, to the bottom of this cliff below the bluff.*

Scattered along the bottom of the cliff lay rocks and boulders that over the eons had fallen as the cliff eroded. He found one the right size, and with much effort he rolled it over and over again until he fit it into the front of the entrance to the cavern. For extra caution he dug up samplings of cottonwoods and sycamores and transplanted them across the front of the alcove. They would grow fast and live for a hundred years, and they would drop seeds. Before many years, the area would be a dense grove.

The sun had set, and it was too late to venture back up the river. Besides, he was too weary to fight the current for the miles needed to go back past the town to his cabin on the bluff beyond. He sat on the large rock he had rolled in front of the cave entrance and leaned back against the cliff wall. *Just for a little while*, he thought. *Then I will go to the river and sleep in the dugout.* He closed his eyes and sleep was upon him.

A sound woke him. He blinked a few times and waited for his head to clear. The moon had not yet risen, so the sky was full. More stars than grains of sands on the beach. Abooksigun never tired of gazing into a beautiful night sky. A meteorite shot across the sky and the old man thought once more about Tecumseh—in The People's language, his name had meant The Shooting Star.

A rustling brought him to awareness. He stood slowly and waited. There it was, again, and now Abooksigun could see him—or, at least his yellow eyes. *Ah, it is thee, ayapia*, he thought. *Did you bring your brothers?*

Whether there was one wolf or more, the old man knew there would be no sudden attack. He quickly gathered some dead grass and small sticks that were close at hand, made a pile at the mouth of the alcove, reached into his pocket, and brought

out his chert and steel. He held them low into the grass and with a few short strokes brought the sharp chert stone down onto the steel. Sparks flew and within a few seconds he had a small fire in the grass clump. He stacked small sticks, then larger ones. Within minutes he had a healthy fire. He knew wolves would not soon press into the light. Perhaps they wouldn't at all—they probably would not unless they had the rabid madness.

Abooksigun ventured out of the alcove to the edge of the light and gathered all the dead branches he could find. As he did so, the wolf backed farther into the shadows, his yellow eyes still watching. You will never attack straight on, Abooksigun thought. You would rather attack from behind, or from the sides. He glanced to the left. He could see another pair of eyes watching him and he found yet a third set of eyes watching him off to his right. *So, now we know, there are three of you.*

With his armload of branches, he backed into his alcove. With the cliff at his back and its walls wrapping around him, he was fairly protected. He was not afraid. He had lived with wolves his whole life. And, he had been born and raised a warrior—warriors do not fear battle or death.

He drew his knife from its sheaf, chose the two longest sticks from his woodpile, and sharpened the ends on both. He

sat on the ground behind the fire. From this vantage point he could easily watch the wolf to his front and those on either side.

The old man was weary from the day's labor. His body yearned for the relief of sleep and he had to force it from his mind. *It will be a long night*, he thought. *I must keep the fire strong.* He said a prayer to the spirit Manitou and settled for the wait.

The moon rose now and cast its brightness. He could see the three wolves. *They are huge beasts*, he thought. *I, myself, cannot be much bigger.* The two on the sides sat. The one straight across from him in the edge of the brush stood, his tail wagging, his head held high, ears erect and his mouth open. *So*, the old man thought, *you will stay and fight tonight. It is well, ayapia, I am ready.*

An hour went by, and Abooksigun fed the fire. When next he did so, he saw the three wolves had ventured closer. When he built the fire a third time they had moved, again, just outside the circle of firelight. They all sat now, watching, waiting. *How much longer?* he wondered.

Sleep pressed him and he stood to make himself stay awake. He used the rest of his wood to build the fire for a last time. He

was too tired to dance the hilenhenakawa, but he chanted the words of the war dance and spoke aloud the words that always preceded battle. “My brothers, the enemy is at hand. We must fight. Retreat would be disgraceful. We shall conquer if we are brave. The water will wash them away, the wind will blow them down, darkness will come upon them, and the earth will cover them.”

Finally, the tired body forced its way back to the ground. His head slumped, and the motion jerked him back awake. The wolves were standing now. He placed his two spears on the ground next to him, one on each side of where he sat, and stuck his knife point-first into the ground so he could grasp it easily. He thought of his namesake, the wildcat. *We will see tonight which prevails*, he thought—*the wildcat or the wolf*.

He lowered his head as if asleep, luring them in, moving his eyes from side to side, watching the wolves inch in. He knew they would attack from the sides, never first from the front. With a sudden motion and snarl the wolf from the right leapt. At the same time Abooksigun grabbed a spear, raised it and caught the wolf in midair, piercing him through the throat. The weight of the falling wolf knocked him over and he scrambled to find the other spear on the ground.

The wolf from the left attacked, and his jaws grabbed the old man by the ankle and started to drag him face-down across the sand. Abooksigun found the other stick, twisted, and swung it off-balance. He struck the head of the wolf, making the beast release his grip with a yelp, then with all his strength he dug the point of the spear into the wild animal's side. The wolf cried and lumbered into the darkness, dragging the spear with it.

Panting, the old man rolled over and sat up. He slumped to catch his breath, but carefully watched the third wolf directly in front of him across the fire. He felt for his knife sticking up out of the sand, fitting the leather handle firmly into his hand, and smiled. *Come ayapia*, he thought, and he pulled the knife from the ground. *Come. Let us see if the wildcat can prevail.*

The wolf leapt straight through fire. Its tail hit the embers and sent a shower of sparks into the night sky. The weight of the animal knocked Abooksigun to the ground as the two fought. With one arm he wrestled to pin the wolf, and with downward motion he dug the point of his knife into the animal again and again, but the wolf was too strong for the old man. Its jaws finally found and closed on Abooksigun's throat. As darkness took him, the old man brought the knife one last time

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deep into the wolf's body, and the two—still locked in battle—became still.

Chapter 10

Billy Mac walked into the one-room cabin and saw Joseph had made a pallet for him in the middle of the floor facing the fireplace. There were a few blankets on top of the wood floor and a few more folded and stacked for him to lean back on. Billy Mac sat on the pallet a little unsure of himself, not quite sure what to do.

Joseph lit the fire he had already built in the hearth. He had lined the inside with large stones to help radiate the heat. Then he came and sat down on the floor opposite Billy Mac.

“What’ll I do?” Billy Mac asked him.

“Nothing,” Joseph shrugged. “Whatever you want to do or whatever you feel like doing. Once it gets heated up in here, you’ll likely want to undress some because you’ll start to sweat. I’ll fix your tea. It may help you relax, and it may help you kind of daydream. Or, it may not. You’ll just have to see. The goal is to spend time in the sweat. I’ll do the sweat with you. We’ll

know when it's time to stop. I'll then leave you inside the cabin by yourself to continue with your fast and meditation. I'll leave some wood next to the hearth with some resin incense. Keep some coals going and add incense to the top of one of the heat stones every now and then. It will help you focus as you meditate. In the meantime, do whatever you'd like. I'll fix your tea now."

Billy Mac looked around the cabin. Simple, nice, and neat. It looked exactly as it did when Askuwheteau had lived here. The cot in the corner, blankets folded neatly on it. A Franklin stove and sink with a well pump on one wall, a window above the sink. The hearth on the opposite wall. The back door with the pegs above it on which rested the shotgun that had belonged to Askuwheteau. Joseph had moved the table and chairs from the center of the room off to one side to make room for Billy Mac's pallet.

Billy Mac opened his backpack and took out his sketchpad and a few pencils. He flipped through it and studied the last few sketches he'd made. They were from his dreams of walking down the grassy lane in the mist toward the cabin. He flipped to a blank page, studied the room, glanced at Joseph fixing tea on the stove, and started sketching.

Thirty minutes later the cabin began to heat up. Billy Mac stowed his sketchpad and pencils into the backpack and sipped the tea Joseph had brought him. It tasted of mint. He took off his shirt, undershirt, shoes, and socks. He was definitely sweating. He glanced over at the cot—Joseph was sitting with his back straight, cross-legged with hands in his lap. He was bare to the waist, too. His eyes were closed, and he looked so peaceful taking slow, steady breaths.

Billy Mac copied Joseph's pose and closed his eyes. The tea was having its effect and it seemed to open the passages in his head. He could breathe easy, deeper, almost without effort. He felt relaxed and a little spacey. Or, maybe it was the heat of the sweat. *Maybe a little of both*, he thought. He concentrated into a rhythmic, comfortable deep breathing pattern. He couldn't remember a time when he'd ever felt more peaceful and relaxed.

He kept his eyes closed and his mind wandered, unaware of how much time passed. When he came back to awareness a time or two, he fought the impulse to open his eyes. He let the awareness fade and his mind wandered again.

Something was different. The heat was gone. Billy Mac was surprised at how much effort it took to open his eyes. He

blinked a few times and took a deep breath. The fire had gone out, only some glowing embers left. And, it was mostly dark. Faint light from a starry sky came through the two windows. He moved to put his undershirt and shirt back on. Then his shoes and socks. Although his skin crinkled from the dried, salty sweat, he surprisingly felt cleansed.

How much time had passed? No telling. Joseph was gone. He'd said he'd leave after the sweat. Next to Billy Mac on the floor was another cup of tea—now cold—and a glass of water. He took a long drink of each, crawled to the fireplace, put a split log on the coals to keep them going, took some incense resin from the bowl, and put it on one of the hot rocks lining the inside of the hearth. A small trail of smoke circled into the cabin—the smell of fresh pine trees.

Billy Mac crawled back to his pallet, leaned against the stack of blankets into a comfortable position, and closed his eyes, aware of the growling hunger in his stomach. *Hope Joseph's right*, he thought. *I hope these hunger pangs pass soon.* His stomach growled even louder.

Feeling a little fatigued from the sweat and lack of food, Billy Mac closed his eyes. The tea helped him relax and the pine incense did the trick—it did give him something to focus

on. In that realm between awake and asleep, between reality and dream, Billy Mac smelled the incense. He fashioned himself in the midst of a pine forest and drew himself into it.

Strange, the colors, he thought. Stunningly vivid. I thought all pine trees were green. Huh! Guess not. The purple ones are neat. Emmett would like those. He always did like the color purple. Maddie would like the pink ones. They look like cotton candy. Why is the sky yellow? Huh! Look at that funny little fox with the white spot on his forehead. What a remarkable place.

Billy Mac walked through the painted forest with an immense feeling of joy and peace. Time passed effortlessly. It could have been hours or days.

A noise brought him back to reality. He opened a lazy eye to see Joseph put more tea and water on the floor beside him, another small piece of wood on the embers in the hearth, and more incense on the heat stone, and then quietly leave the cabin. Daylight streamed through the windows.

Billy Mac sat up straight, the feeling of joy and peace still with him. He sipped the fresh tea and felt totally refreshed with a rush of energy. His hunger pangs were gone, and his senses quickened. Without moving he was somehow aware of

everything inside the cabin and out, as if an inner eye allowed him to see and know. He crossed his legs, closed his eyes, and focused on that inner eye, more awake and more aware than he'd ever been before.

Time didn't exist. Billy Mac's sense of peace and sense of self pervaded deep into his being just as his energy and awareness transcended outward. He could feel those forces radiate from him in a shower of color. He opened his eyes and saw the world differently, in a soft, milky haze. A rainbow of colors flowed from him and enveloped him. Everything shone through the site of the inner eye he had found. And, it brought a deeper peace, still. Time didn't exist.

Billy Mac knew he was there, even before he heard him. He wasn't startled, the serenity in him complete. He opened his eyes and as before, everything glowed with its own aura, including Askuwheteau sitting across from him. To the left of him sat a red fox with a white spot on its forehead, its green eyes watching Billy Mac intently.

“Be-zone, neekanhuh,” Askuwheteau said.

“Be-zone, akotha,” Billy Mac answered, using the respectful word Joseph had taught him to address an elder. “I had hoped you would come.”

“I have tried before but could not reach thee.”

“I know,” Billy Mac said. “I am sorry. I did not know how.” He nodded at the fox. “Who is this with you?”

“This paapankamw is my guardian spirit,” Askuwheteau said. “He I found as a kwiiwihs when I sought my vision quest. He watched over me during my lifetime—now he will watch over you during yours. You will know him by his mark.” Askuwheteau pointed to the white spot on the fox’s forehead.

“But why, akotha?”

“The paapankamw is cunning and wise,” Askuwheteau said. “He is aware but stays well hidden. He sees through the falseness of those who would harm him. He is clever to escape when danger abounds. So must you be. I sense a darkness—a presence of one who would harm thee and thy friends. The paapankamw will help you. Look to him for guidance.”

Billy Mac looked at the fox and nodded. “I will,” he said. “But, of what danger do you speak?”

“It is not clear. You must use your new vision and beware.”

“Is this why you sought me?” Billy Mac asked. “I thought perhaps there was more. You once tried to tell me where to find that which was hidden many years ago, that which was watched over by those of The People who had taken vows. Your father was one such.”

“Yes,” Askuwheteau answered. “This is true. ’Twas part of my journey to seek thee.” He turned to his right. “Can you see no other here, to my side?”

“No,” Billy Mac answered. “I see no other.”

“My father is here with me, he who watched over that which is hidden. It was he who moved it for safety. Our purpose was to let thee know to look for that which he left behind, for those after him to know the place. Seek thee his message. It will guide thee.”

“But, akotha, we found the cave where it had been hidden. There was no message. Nothing to tell us to look elsewhere. No clue or map. There must be a mistake. Can you tell me more?”

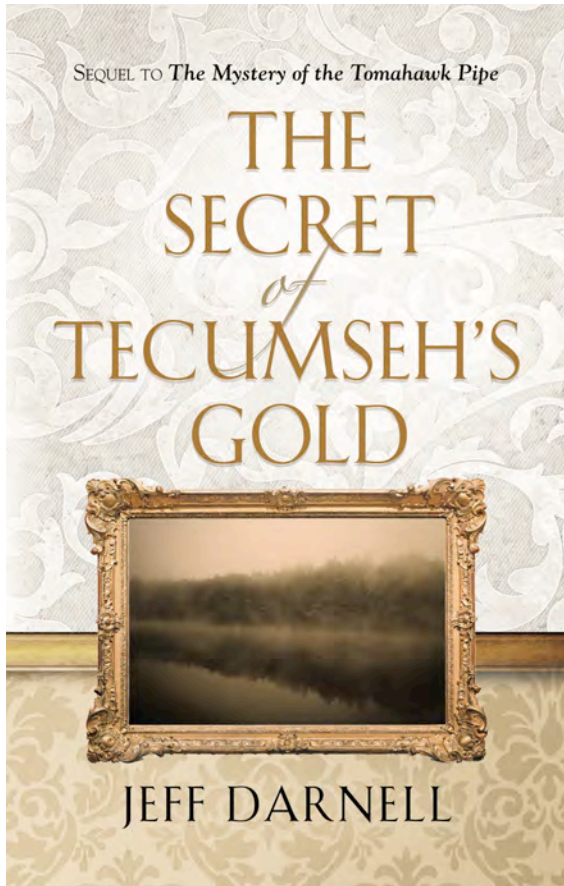
“Our visit ends, neekanhuh. Take guidance from paapankamw.” He nodded at the fox. “Beware the untruths of

darkness and seek the message left thee by him who came before.”

“Wait—I don’t understand,” Billy Mac pleaded. “Wait, akotha!”

“Goodbye, neekanhuh. Peace be with thee.”

Then, he and the fox were gone.



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