

THE FALCON

A Narrative of the Captivity and
Adventures of John Tanner

With an Introduction by
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PENGUIN BOOKS

Shab-a-wy-a-gun. The corn was ripe when we reached that place, and after stopping a little while, we went three days up the river to the place where they intended to pass the winter. We then left our canoes and travelling over land, camped three times before we came to the place where we set up our lodges for the winter. The husband of Net-no-kwa was an Ojibeway, of Red River, called Taw-ga-we-ninne, the hunter. He was seventeen years younger than Net-no-kwa, and had turned off a former wife on being married to her. Taw-ga-we-ninne was always indulgent and kind to me, treating me like an equal, rather than as a dependant. When speaking to me, he always called me his son. Indeed, he himself was but of secondary importance in the family, as every thing belonged to Net-no-kwa, and she had the direction in all affairs of any moment. She imposed on me, for the first year, some tasks. She made me cut wood, bring home game, bring water, and perform other services not commonly required of the boys of my age; but she treated me invariably with so much kindness that I was far more happy and content than I had been in the family of Manito-o-gezhik. She sometimes whipped me, as she did her own children; but I was not so severely and frequently beaten as I had been before.

CHAPTER II.

First attempt to hunt — measles — trapping martins — emigration to Red River — death of my foster father and brother — arrival at Lake Winnipeg.

Early in the spring, Net-no-kwa and her husband, with their family, started to go to Mackinac. They left me, as they had done before, at Point St. Ignace, as they would not run the risk of losing me by suffering me to be seen at Mackinac. On our return, after we had gone twenty-five or thirty miles from Point St. Ignace, we were detained by contrary winds at a place called Me-nau-ko-king, a point running out into the lake. Here we encamped with some other Indians and a party of traders. Pigeons were very numerous in the woods and the boys of my age, and the traders, were busy shooting them. I had never killed any game and, indeed, had never in my life discharged a gun. My mother had purchased at Mackinac a keg of powder, which, as they thought it a little damp, was here spread out to dry. Taw-ga-we-ninne had a large horse-man's pistol; and finding myself somewhat emboldened by his indulgent manner toward me, I requested permission to go and try to kill some pigeons with the pistol. My request was seconded by Net-no-kwa, who said, "It is time for our son to begin to learn to be a hunter." Accordingly, my father, as I called Taw-ga-we-ninne, loaded the pistol and gave it to me, saying, "Go, my son, and if you kill any thing with this, you shall immediately have a gun, and learn to hunt." Since I have been a man, I have been placed in difficult situations; but my anxiety for success was never greater than in this, my first essay as a hunter. I had not gone far from the camp, before I met with pigeons, and some of them alighted in the bushes very near me. I cocked my pistol, and raised it to my face, bringing the breech almost in contact with my nose. Having brought the sight to bear upon the pigeons, I pulled

trigger, and was in the next instant sensible of a humming noise, like that of a stone sent swiftly through the air. I found the pistol at the distance of some paces behind me, and the pigeon under the tree on which he had been sitting. My face was much bruised, and covered with blood. I ran home, carrying my pigeon in triumph. My face was speedily bound up; my pistol exchanged for a fowling-piece; I was accoutred with a powder horn, and furnished with shot, and allowed to go out after birds. One of the young Indians went with me, to observe my manner of shooting. I killed three more pigeons in the course of the afternoon, and did not discharge my gun once without killing. Henceforth I began to be treated with more consideration, and was allowed to hunt often that I might become expert.

Great part of the summer and autumn passed before we returned to Shab-a-wy-wy-a-gun. When we arrived we found the Indians suffering very severely from the measles; and as Net-no-kwa was acquainted with the contagious nature of this disease, she was unwilling to expose her family, but passed immediately through the village and encamped on the river above. But, notwithstanding her precaution, we soon began to fall sick. Of ten persons belonging to our family, including two young wives of Taw-ga-we-nine, only Net-no-kwa and myself escaped an attack of this complaint. Several of them were very sick, and the old woman and myself found it as much as we could do to take care of them. In the village, numbers died, but all of our family escaped. As the winter approached, they began to get better and went, at length, to our wintering ground, at the same place where we had spent the former winter. Here I was set to make martin traps as the other hunters did. The first day I went out early, and spent the whole day, returning late at night, having made only three traps; whereas, in the same time, a good hunter would have made twenty-five or thirty. On the morning following, I visited my traps, and found but one martin. Thus I continued to do for some days, but my want of success, and my awkwardness, exposed me to the ridicule of the young men. At length, my father began to pity me, and he said, "My son, I must go and help you to make traps."

So he went out and spent a day in making a large number of traps, which he gave me, and then I was able to take as many martins as the others. The young men, however, did not forget to tell me, on all occasions, of the assistance I had received from my father. This winter was passed like the preceding; but as I became more and more expert and successful in hunting and trapping, I was no longer required to do the work of the women about the lodge.

In the following spring, Net-no-kwa, as usual, went to Mackinac. She always carried a flag in her canoe, and I was told, that whenever she came to Mackinac she was saluted by a gun from the fort. I was now thirteen years old, or in my thirteenth year. Before we left the village, I heard Net-no-kwa talk of going to Red River, to the relations of her husband. Many of the Ottawaws, when they heard this, determined to go with her. Among others, was Wah-ka-zee, a chief of the village at War-gun-uk-ke-zee,* or L'Arbre Croche, and others; in all, six canoes. Instead of leaving me, in this instance, at Point St. Ignace, they landed with me in the night among the cedars, not far from the village of Mackinac; and the old woman then took me into the town, to the house of a French trader, (Shaboyer,) with whom she had sufficient influence to secure my confinement for several days in the cellar. Here I remained, not being allowed to go out at all, but was otherwise well treated. This confinement seemed to be unnecessary, as subsequently, when we were ready to go on our journey, we were detained by head winds, at the point now occupied by the mission-aries, when I was suffered to run at large. While we remained here, the Indians began to be drunk. My father, who was drunk, but still able to walk about, spoke to two young men who were walking together, and taking hold of the shirt sleeve of one of them, he, without intending to do so, tore it. This young man, whose name was Sug-gut-taw-gun, (Spunk-

* *War-gun-uk-ke-zee* means, as Tanner says, the bent tree; and the pine, which gave name to the place called by the French *L'Arbre Croche*, was standing when he first visited that village. He spoke with great indignation of the Indian who, through mere wantonness, cut down this remarkable tree.

wood,) was irritated, and giving my father a rough push, he fell on his back. Sug-gut-taw-gun then took up a large stone, and threw it at him, hitting him in the forehead. When I saw this, I became alarmed for my own safety; and, as I knew that Me-to-saw-gea, an Ojibwey chief, was then on the island, with a party going against the whites; and, as I had understood they had sought opportunities to kill me, I thought my situation unsafe. I accordingly made my escape to the woods, where I hid myself for the remainder of the day and the night. On the following day, being pressed by hunger, I returned and secreted myself for some time in the low cedars near our lodge in order to observe what was passing, and to ascertain if I might return. At length, I discovered my mother calling me, and looking for me through the bushes. I went up to her, and she told me to go in and see my father who was killed. When I went in, my father said to me, "I am killed." He made me sit down with the other children, and talked much to us. He said, "Now, my children, I have to leave you. I am sorry that I must leave you so poor." He said nothing to us about killing the Indian who had struck him with the stone, as some would have done. He was too good a man to wish to involve his family in the troubles which such a course would have brought upon them. The young man who had wounded him, remained with us, notwithstanding that Net-no-kwa told him it would not be safe for him to go to Red River where her husband's relatives were numerous and powerful, and disposed to take revenge.

When we came to the Saut of St. Marie, we put all our baggage on board the trader's vessel, which was about to sail to the upper end of Lake Superior, and went on ourselves in our canoes. The winds were light, which enabled us to run faster than the vessel, and we arrived ten days before it at the Portage. When she at last came and anchored out at a little distance from the shore, my father and his two sons Wa-me-gon-a-biew, (he who puts on feathers,) the eldest, and Ke-wa-tin, (the north wind,) went out in a canoe to get the baggage. In jumping down into the hold of the vessel, the younger of these young men fell with his knee

upon a knot of the rope tied around a bundle of goods, and received an injury from which he never recovered. The same night his knee was badly swollen, and on the next day he was not able to go out of the lodge. After about eight or ten days, we commenced crossing the Grand Portage: we carried him on our shoulders by fastening a blanket to two poles; but he was so sick that we had to stop often, which made us long in passing. We left our canoes at the trading-house, and when we came to the other side of the Portage, were detained some days to make small canoes. When these were nearly finished, my father sent me, with one of his wives, back to the trading-house to bring something which had been forgotten. On our return, we met the two boys at some distance, coming to tell me to hasten home, for my father was dying, and he wished to see me before he died. When I came into the lodge, I found that he was indeed dying, and though he could see, he was not able to speak to me. In a few minutes he ceased to breathe. Beside him lay the gun which he had taken in his hand a few minutes before to shoot the young man who had wounded him at Mackinac. In the morning, when I left him to go to the Portage, he was apparently well; my mother told me it was not until afternoon he began to complain; he then came into the lodge, saying, "I am now dying; but since I have to go, this young man, who has killed me, must go with me. I hoped to have lived till I had raised you all to be men; but now I must die, and leave you poor, and without any one to provide for you." So saying, he stepped out, with the gun in his hand, to shoot the young man, who was at that time sitting by the door of his own lodge. Ke-wa-tin, hearing this, began to cry, and, addressing his father, said, "My father, if I was well I could help you to kill this man, and could protect my young brothers from the vengeance of his friends after he is dead; but you see my situation, and that I am about to die. My brothers are young and weak, and we shall all be murdered if you kill this man." My father replied, "My son, I love you too well to refuse you any thing you request." So saying, he returned, laid down his gun, and, after having said a very few words, inquired for me, and

CHAPTER III.

Friendly reception among the Indians on the Assiniboin — Prairie Portage — Net-no-kwa's dream, and its fulfillment — meet with Pe-shau-ba, a distinguished warrior of the Ottawaws — journey to Kan-wau-koning, and residence there — return towards Lake Superior — war-party against the Minnetauks — mouth of Assiniboin river.

After a few days, we started to go up the Red River, and in two days came to the mouth of the Assiniboin where we found great numbers of Ojibbeways and Ottawaws encamped. As soon as we arrived the chiefs met to take our case into consideration, and to agree on some method of providing for us. "These, our relations," said one of the chiefs, "have come to us from a distant country. These two little boys are not able to provide for them, and we must not suffer them to be in want among us." Then one man after another offered to hunt for us; and they agreed, also, since we had started to come for the purpose of hunting beaver, and as our hunters had died on the way, that each should give us some part of what they should kill. We then all started together to go up the Assiniboin river, and the first night we camped among the buffalo. In the morning, I was allowed to go out with some Indians who went to hunt buffaloes. We killed one of four bulls which we found. We continued to ascend the Assiniboin about ten days, killing many bears as we travelled along. The Assiniboin is broad, shallow, and crooked, and the water, like that of the Red River, is turbid; but the bottom is sandy, while that of Red River is commonly muddy. The place to which we went on the Assiniboin is seventy miles distant by land from the mouth; but the distance by water is greater. The banks of the river on both sides, are covered with poplar and white oak, and some other trees which grow to considerable size. The prairies, however, are not far distant, and sometimes

come into the immediate bank of the river. We stopped at a place called Prairie Portage where the Indians directed the trader who was with them to build his house and remain during the winter. We left all our canoes and went up into the country to hunt for beaver among the small streams. The Indians gave Wa-me-gon-a-biew and myself a little creek where were plenty of beaver and on which they said none but ourselves should hunt. My mother gave me three traps, and instructed me how to set them by the aid of a string tied around the spring, as I was not yet able to set them with my hands as the Indians did. I set my three traps, and on the following morning found beavers in two of them. Being unable to take them out myself, I carried home the beavers and traps, one at a time, on my back, and had the old woman to assist me. She was, as usual, highly gratified and delighted at my success. She had always been kind to me, often taking my side when the Indians would attempt to ridicule or annoy me. We remained in this place about three months, in which time we were as well provided for as any of the band; for if our own game was not sufficient, we were sure to be supplied by some of our friends as long as any thing could be killed. The people that remained to spend the winter with us were two lodges, our own making three; but we were at length joined by four lodges of Crees. These people are the relations of the Ojibbeways and Ottawaws, but their language is somewhat different, so as not to be readily understood. Their country borders upon that of the Assiniboin, or Stone Roasters; and though they are not relations, nor natural allies, they are sometimes at peace, and are more or less intermixed with each other.

After we had remained about three months in this place, game began to be scarce and we all suffered from hunger. The chief man of our band was called As-sin-ne-boi-naine, (the Little Assiniboin,) and he now proposed to us all to move as the country where we were was exhausted. The day on which we were to commence our removal was fixed upon, but before it arrived our necessities became extreme. The evening before the day on which we intended to move, my mother talked much of all our misfortunes and

losses, as well as of the urgent distress under which we were then labouring. At the usual hour I went to sleep, as did all the younger part of the family; but I was awakened again by the loud praying and singing of the old woman, who continued her devotions through great part of the night. Very early on the following morning she called us all to get up, and put on our moccasins and be ready to move. She then called Wa-me-gon-a-biew to her, and said to him, in rather a low voice, "My son, last night I sung and prayed to the Great Spirit, and when I slept, there came to me one like a man, and said to me, 'Net-no-kwa, to-morrow you shall eat a bear. There is, at a distance from the path you are to travel to-morrow, and in such a direction, (which she described to him,) a small round meadow, with something like a path leading from it; in that path there is a bear.' Now, my son, I wish you to go to that place, without mentioning to any one what I have said, and you will certainly find the bear, as I have described to you." But the young man, who was not particularly dutiful, or apt to regard what his mother said, going out of the lodge, spoke sneeringly to the other Indians of the dream. "The old woman," said he, "tells me we are to eat a bear to-day; but I do not know who is to kill it." The old woman, hearing him, called him in, and reproved him; but she could not prevail upon him to go to hunt. The Indians, accordingly, all moved off towards the place where they were to encamp that night. The men went first by themselves, each carrying some article of baggage; and when they arrived where the camp was to be placed, they threw down their loads and went to hunt. Some of the boys, and I among them, who accompanied the men, remained with this baggage until the women should come up. I had my gun with me, and I continued to think of the conversation I had heard between my mother and Wa-me-gon-a-biew, respecting her dream. At length, I resolved to go in search of the place she had spoken of, and without mentioning to any one my design, I loaded my gun as for a bear and set off on our back track. I soon met a woman belonging to one of the brothers of Taw-ga-we-nine, and of course my aunt. This woman had shown little friendship for us, consid-

ering us as a burthen upon her husband, who sometimes gave something for our support; she had also often ridiculed me. She asked me immediately what I was doing on the path, and whether I expected to kill Indians, that I came there with my gun. I made her no answer; and thinking I must be not far from the place where my mother had told Wa-me-gon-a-biew to leave the path, I turned off, continuing carefully to regard all the directions she had given. At length, I found what appeared at some former time to have been a pond. It was a small, round, open place in the woods, now grown up with grass and some small bushes. This I thought must be the meadow my mother had spoken of, and examining it around, I came to an open place in the bushes, where, it is probable, a small brook ran from the meadow; but the snow was now so deep that I could see nothing of it. My mother had mentioned that when she saw the bear in her dream she had, at the same time, seen a smoke rising from the ground. I was confident this was the place she had indicated, and I watched long, expecting to see the smoke; but wearied at length with waiting, I walked a few paces into the open place, resembling a path, when I unexpectedly fell up to my middle into the snow. I extricated myself without difficulty, and walked on; but remembering that I had heard the Indians speak of killing bears in their holes, it occurred to me that it might be a bear's hole into which I had fallen, and looking down into it, I saw the head of a bear lying close to the bottom of the hole. I placed the muzzle of my gun nearly between his eyes, and discharged it. As soon as the smoke cleared away, I took a piece of a stick and thrust it into the eyes and into the wound in the head of the bear, and being satisfied that he was dead, I endeavoured to lift him out of the hole; but being unable to do this, I returned home, following the track I had made in coming out. As I came near the camp, where the squaws had, by this time, set up the lodges, I met the same woman I had seen in going out, and she immediately began again to ridicule me. "Have you killed a bear, that you come back so soon, and walk so fast?" I thought to myself, "how does she know that I have killed a bear?" But I passed by her

time, and as I covered my head with my blanket, and with my hands and arms warded off the blows after the first, I was less severely injured than I had cause to apprehend. So entire was the confidence my mother-in-law reposed upon the representations of Ais-kaw-ba-wis that she did not doubt but I was in reality guilty of the death of her children, and as I well knew that this was the case, I blamed her less for her conduct than I should otherwise have done. But notwithstanding she forbore to take my life, the unfriendly feeling on her part, and that of my wife, was becoming every day more and more manifest. This might have been in some measure owing to those misfortunes which had now impaired my health, and disqualified me for making so comfortable provision for my family as I formerly had done. But notwithstanding all the discouraging and distressing circumstances attendant on my present situation, I gradually recovered health and strength, and late in the fall, when the Indians were about to move to visit a trader, I was able to accompany them.

I had a small canoe of my own in which I embarked myself and my children, but my wife and my mother-in-law were in the large canoe with the provisions and the baggage. During the first day of our journey, I went forward with others of the Indians, leaving the women to come up to the encamping place after we had stopped. I cut and put up the poles for my lodge, but no pukkwi, no provisions, and no women came. Next day I was ashamed to tell the Indians I had nothing to eat, though my children began to cry of hunger, and for the same reason, I would not encamp with them. I knew that my wife had deserted, and I had no reason to suppose she would immediately re-join me. I therefore kept ahead of the Indians, and went, before I stopped, beyond the place where I knew they would encamp. Here I killed a fat swan, and was able to give my children some food. The weather was now becoming very cold, and I had about this time a wide traverse to cross. The weather was somewhat rough, but as I did not wish to remain to be overtaken by the Indians, I made my children lie down in the canoe, and covered the whole as well as I

could with a buffalo skin. The wind blew more and more violently, and the waves broke over my little canoe. The water froze upon the sides, and the children getting wet, suffered severely. I, also, was so much overpowered by the cold, that I could not manage the canoe properly, and it struck and was dashed in pieces on a rocky shoal, not far from the shore where I wished to land. Fortunately the water was not deep about the rock, nor between it and the land, and though a thin ice had formed, I was able to break it, and carry my children on shore. But here we had nearly perished from cold, as my spunk wood was wet, and I had no means of kindling a fire, until I thought to split open my powder horn, when I found in the middle of the mass of powder, a little which the water had not reached. This enabled me to kindle a fire, and was the means of saving all our lives. Next day Mr. Sayre, at the trading house near by, heard of my situation or at least the Indians having come up, and reported that I was lost, he sent out some men who found me, and assisted me to reach the house. Here I took a credit for my whole family, not knowing but my wife would join me at some future time.

The chief of that country, from whom I had previously obtained permission to hunt in a little piece of ground which I had selected, and a promise that none of his people should interfere with me there, now endeavoured to dissuade me from going to spend the winter by myself. I ought, he said, either to remain near the Indians, or to take some other woman for a wife. As my children were young and unable to assist me, and my own health somewhat uncertain, he thought it would be very imprudent for me to attempt wintering alone. But I would not listen to his advice. At present, I had no inclination either to remain with the Indians, or to take another wife. I therefore began to make a road immediately to my wintering ground. First I took the goods I had purchased and carried them forward, then returned and brought up my children. My daughter Martha was then three years old, and the other children were yet small. In two or three days I reached my hunting ground,

but was soon after reduced to great distress, from which I was relieved by a medicine hunt.

I had no pukkwí, or mats, for a lodge, and therefore had to build one of poles and long grass. I dressed moose skins, made my own moccasins and leggins, and those for my children; cut wood and cooked for myself and my family, made my snow shoes, etc. etc. All the attention and labour I had to bestow about home, sometimes kept me from hunting, and I was occasionally distressed for want of provisions. I busied myself about my lodge in the night time. When it was sufficiently light, I would bring wood, and attend to other things without; at other times I was repairing my snow shoes, or my own or my children's clothes. For nearly all the winter, I slept but a very small part of each night.

I was still living in this way in the spring, when a young man called Se-bis-kuk-gu-un-na, (tough legs,) a son of Wau-zhe-gaw-naish-koon, who was now dead, came to me. He was in a starving condition, as were his friends, who were encamped at no great distance from me. My dogs were now so well trained, that they could draw half a moose. I put on a full load of meat, and told him to go with the team, meet his people, and bring them to live with me. In three days they arrived, but though their hunger had been relieved by the supply I sent them, their appearance was extremely miserable, and it is probable they must have perished if they had not found me.

As the spring was approaching, we returned to the Lake of the Woods. Ice was still in the lake when we arrived on the shore of it, and as I, with my companions, was standing on the shore, I saw an otter coming on the ice at a distance. I had often heard the Indians say that the strongest man, without arms of some kind, cannot kill an otter. Pe-shau-ba, and other strong men and good hunters, had told me this, but I still doubted it. I now, therefore, proposed to test the truth of this common opinion. I caught the otter, and for the space of an hour or more, exerted myself, to the extent of my power, to kill him. I beat him, and kicked him, and jumped upon him, but all to no purpose. I tried to strangle him with my hands, but after lying still for a

time, he would shorten his neck, and draw his head down between my hands, so that the breath would pass through, and I was at last compelled to acknowledge that I was not able to kill him without arms. There are other small, and apparently not very strong animals which an unarmed man cannot kill. Once while on a war party, in a sort of bravado, I had tried to kill a pole cat with my naked hands, but I had nearly lost my eyes by the means. The liquid which he threw upon my face caused a painful inflammation, and the skin came off. The white crane, also, is dangerous if approached too near; they can, and sometimes do, inflict mortal wounds with their sharp beaks.

After I had killed this otter, I went in pursuit of a bear. I had now three dogs, one of which was not yet fully grown. This dog, which was of a valuable breed, and had been given me by Mr. Tace, escaped from his halter at home, and came after me. When he came up, he passed me and the other dogs, and immediately assailed the bear's head, but the enraged animal almost instantly killed him, caught him up in his mouth, and carried him more than a mile, until he himself was overcome and killed.

It is usually very late in the spring before the ice is gone from the Lake of the Woods. When I arrived at our village with the son of Wau-zhe-gaw-naish-koon, the Indians who were there had been for a long time suffering from hunger, but I had my canoe loaded with provisions, which I immediately distributed for their relief. On the day after my arrival, came my wife and her mother. She laughed when she saw me, and came to live with me as heretofore. She-gwaw-koo-sink and Ais-kaw-ba-wis were both there, and both unfriendly to me, but I made it my business to seem wholly ignorant of the many attempts they made to injure me. About planting time, the traders of the North West Company sent messengers and presents to all the Indians, to call them to join in an attack on the Hudson's Bay establishment at Red River. For my own part, I thought these quarrels between relatives unnatural, and I wished to take no share in them, though I had long traded with the people of the North West Company, and considered myself as in