

JOHN TANNER

There once was a boy who was cunning and coy
he was born in the wilds of Kentucky
He was two when he sighed as his mother died
some people are just born unlucky

CHORUS

John Tanner's the name, hard living's the game,
and maybe a murderer too
July the sixth, 1846
in the town that they call "The Sault"

But the boy grew up strong and it wasn't too long
'till the year was 1790
Who could have foretold that the boy ten years old
would soon be in the hands of the Shawnee

Never one for strict rules one day John missed school
and his father caned him severely
And when it was done he wished he was gone
it was a wish he'd soon pay for dearly

One early spring day his father did say
"John don't you dare go outside
The horses are nervous and strangers are near us
stay here with your brother and hide."

But as soon as he could, John escaped to the wood
in a sly and cautious manner
but no good it would do for all too soon
came the kidnap of poor young John Tanner

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For two brutal years he shed many tears
at the hands of his vicious new father
But then things changed when a wise woman came
He was sold to and raised by Net-no-kwa

For thirty more years he hunted the deer
and never thought once of his old bed
for the man who took him, made sure he forsook them
by telling young John they were dead

At forty years old he walked the long road
that led to his kin in Kentucky
but he could not adjust so he made his way North
soon landing in Sault Ste. Marie

He found Métis and Ojibway and also Fort Brady,
with soldiers like Lieutenant Bryant Tilden
John's work was to listen to the words of the red men
interpreting what they had spoken

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Two men John did work for, two men who were at war
Henry Schoolcraft and Abel Bingham
Caught in the middle, and not one to quibble
the tongue that employed John undid him

Henry Schoolcraft was helpful but he could be hurtful
when he had a grudge in his heart
and he worked hard to make sure John Tanner would suffer
until that tough man fell apart

When Henry paid money he did it quite funny
with credit in his brother's store
It was all fair they claimed as John owed this man James
so he paid the price and then some more

Some buildings burned down and the talk in the town
was that Tanner was at it again
and when James Schoolcraft cried from a gun wound and died
John Tanner was instantly blamed

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On that very day, John went away
and never was seen again
but later 'twas said, Tilden on his deathbed
confessed that the gunman was him

A couple years on in a swamp someone found
some bones that smelled just like slander
They never could say but they did anyway
that the corpse had to be old John Tanner

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