

**EDWARD S.
ELLIS**

**SETH JONES
OR, THE
CAPTIVES OF
THE FRONTIER**

Seth Jones

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CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGER

The clear ring of an ax was echoing through the arches of a forest, three-quarters of a century ago; and an athletic man was swinging the instrument, burying its glittering blade deep in the heart of the mighty kings of the wood.

Alfred Haverland was an American, who, a number of years before, had emigrated from the more settled provinces in the East, to this then remote spot in western New York. Here, in the wilderness, he had reared a humble home, and, with his loving partner, and a sister, laid the foundation for a settlement. True, this "settlement" was still small, consisting only of the persons mentioned, and a beautiful blue-eyed maiden, their daughter; but Haverland saw that the tide of emigration was rolling rapidly and surely to the west, and, ere many years, the villages and cities would take the place of the wild forest, while the Indians would be driven farther on toward the setting sun.

The woodman was a splendid specimen of "nature's noblemen." His heavy coat lay upon a log a short distance away, and his swelling, ponderous chest was covered only by a close-fitting under garment, with the collar thrown open, showing the glowing neck and heaving breast. Substantial pants met the strong moccasins which encased his feet. A small raccoon-skin cap rested upon the back of his head, exposing his forehead, while his black hair swept around his shoulders. His features were regular and strongly marked. The brow was rather heavy, the nose of the Roman cast,

and the eyes of a glittering blackness. So he stood with one foot thrust forward; his muscles, moving and ridging as they were called in to play, betrayed their formidable strength.

Still the flashing ax sank deeper and deeper into the oak's red heart, until it had gone clean through and met the breach upon the opposite side. Then the grand old forest king began to totter. Haverland stepped back and ran his eye to the top, as he noticed it yielding. Slowly it leaned, increasing each second, until it rushed seemingly forward, and came down to the earth with a thundering crash and rebound. He stood a moment, his hot breath issuing like steam from his chest, and then moved forward toward its branches. At that instant his trained ear detected a suspicious sound, and dropping his ax, he caught up his rifle and stood on the defensive.

"How de do? how de do? ain't frightened I hope; it's nobody but me, Seth Jones, from New Hampshire," said the new-comer in a peculiar accent. As the woodman looked up he saw a curious specimen of the *genus homo* before him. He is what is termed a *Yankee*, being from New Hampshire; but he was such a person as is rarely met with, and yet which is too often described now-a-days. He possessed a long, thin Roman nose, a small twinkling gray eye, with a lithe muscular frame, and long dangling limbs. His feet were encased in well-fitting shoes, while the rest of his dress was such as was in vogue on the frontiers at the time of which we write. His voice was in that peculiar, uncertain state, which is sometimes seen when it is said to be "changing." When excited, it made sounds singular and unimaginable.

The woodman, with characteristic penetration, read the man before him at a glance. Changing his rifle to his left hand, he extended the other.

"Certainly not, my friend; but then, you know, these are times, in which it behooves us all to use caution and prudence; and where one is placed in

such a remote section as this it would be criminal to be careless, when more than one life is dependent upon me for support and protection.”

“Very true, very true, you’re right there, Mr. —— ah! I declare, I don’t know your name.”

“Haverland.”

“You’re right, as I said, Mr. Have-your-land, or Haverland as the case may be. I tell *you* these *are* dubious times—no disputin’ that, and I am considerably s’prised when I heard the ring of an ax down in these parts.”

“And I was equally surprised to meet your visage when I looked up. Jones, I believe you said was your name.”

“Exactly:—Seth Jones, from New Hampshire. The Jones’ are a numerous family up there—rather too many of them for comfort,—so I migrated. Mought be acquainted perhaps?”

“No; I have no acquaintances, to my knowledge, in that section.”

“Haven’t, eh? Thought the Jones’ were pretty generally known through the country. Some remarkable geniuses have sprung from the family? But what under the sun keeps you out in this heathen country? What brought you here?”

“Enterprise, sir; I was tired of the civilized portion of our country, and, when such glorious fields were offered to the emigrant, as are here spread before him, I considered it a duty to avail myself of them, and I have done so. And now, sir, be equally frank with me, and let me know what induced you to visit this perilous region when you had no reason to suppose that a settlement had yet been commenced by the whites. You look to me as if you were an Indian hunter or scout.”

“Wal, perhaps I am. At any rate I have been. I was scout among the Green Mountain Boys, under Colonel Allen, and staid with them till the Revolution was finished. After that, I went down on the farm and worked a while with the old man. Something occurred in our neighborhood that led me to think, it was best for me to leave, I won’t say what it was, but I will say it was no crime I committed. I stopped at the settlement down the river a few days, and then come to the conclusion to take a tramp in these parts.”

“I am very glad you have come, for it isn’t often you get sight of a white face. I hope you will take the welcome of a backwoodsman, and make your home with us as long a time as you can—remembering that the longer you stay, the more welcome you will be.”

“I shall probably stay till you git tired of me, at any rate,” laughed the eccentric Seth Jones.

“As you are from the East, probably you can give information of the state of feeling among the Indians between that section and us. From your remarks, I should infer, however, that nothing very serious threatens.”

“Don’t know ’bout that,” replied Seth, shaking his head and looking to the ground.

“Why so, my friend?”

“I tell you what, you, I heerd orful stories ’long the way. They say since this war, the darned red-coats have kept the Injins at work. Leastways it’s pretty sartin they are at work, anyhow.”

“Are you sure?” asked the woodman, betraying an anxiety in his speech.

“Purty sure. There’s a little settlement down here some miles, (I have forgot the name,) sot on by the imps, and burned all up.”

“Is it possible? Reports have reached me during the past three or four months, of the deadly hostility existing between the whites and reds, but I was glad to doubt it. Although, I sometimes felt it was wrong.”

“’Twas so; and if you vally that ar wife of your bussum, and your little cherubims, (as I allow you’ve got,) you’d better be makin’ tracks for safer quarters. Why, how have you stood it so long?”

“My conduct toward the Indians has ever been characterized by honesty and good will upon my part, and they have ever evinced a friendly feeling toward me, and my helpless ones. I place great reliance upon this state of feeling, in fact, my *only reliance*.

“Just so; but I tell you, it won’t do to trust an Ingin. They’re obstropertous. Go to put your finger on them, and they ain’t thar. Jest so, by gracious.”

“I fear there is too much truth in your suspicions,” replied Haverland, in a saddened tone.

“I’m glad I’ve tumbled onto you, coz I begin to git skeerish, and I like to do a feller a good turn, and I’ll stick to you, bein’ I’ve found you.”

“Thank you, friend, and let us now proceed homeward. I intended to spend the day in work, but your words have taken away all desire.”

“Sorry to do it; but it’s best, ain’t it?”

“Certainly, it would have been wrong, had you not warned me of impending danger. Let us go home.”

So saying, Alfred drew on his coat, slung his rifle and ax over his shoulder, and struck into a path in the forest, which he himself had used, and with a thoughtful tread, made his way homeward. Close behind him, followed his new-made friend.

CHAPTER II.

THE DARK CLOUD

During the walk homeward, Haverland spoke but few words, although his loquacious friend kept up a continual, unremitting stream of talk. The woodman's heart was too heavy to join him in his humorous, pointless words. Although dark and fearful suspicions had flitted before him, he had closed his eyes upon them, until he could no longer shun them, they appeared at every turn, and now resumed a terrible certainty.

Although at the time of which we refer, the Revolutionary struggle of the colonies had closed, and their freedom was placed upon a firm basis, yet universal peace by no means reigned. Dark, sanguinary, and bloody tragedies were constantly enacted upon the frontiers for a generation afterward. The mother country, failing in her work of subjugation, continued to incite the Indians to revolting barbarities upon the unoffending inhabitants. They found them too-willing instruments, and, instigated by them, a protracted war was long maintained; and, when the moving cause was removed, the savages still continued the unequal conflict. As every one acquainted with our history must know, the war on the frontiers has been an almost interminable one. As the tide of emigration has rolled westward, it has ever met that fiery counter-surge, and only overcome it, by incessant battling and effort. And even now, as the distant shores of the Pacific are well nigh reached, that resisting wave still gives forth its lurid flashes of conflict.

In a pleasant valley, stood the humble home of Alfred Haverland. His own vigorous arm had cleared off a space on all sides, so that his residence stood at some distance from the forest, which rolled away for miles. In the clearing still remained the stumps of the fallen trees, and in some places the rich, virgin soil had been broken, and was giving signs of the exhaustless wealth it retained in its bosom, waiting only for the hand of man to bring it forth.

The house itself, was such as are generally found in new settlements. A number of heavy logs, placed compactly together, with an opening for a door, and one for a window, were all that could attract attention from the outside. Within, were two apartments, the lower and upper. The former was used for all purposes except that of sleeping, which, of course, was done in the upper. In building it, Haverland had made little preparations for defence, as he fondly hoped it would never be needed for such, and it seemed to him that the idea of danger would ever be before him, should he construct it thus. And, besides, should he use his utmost skill in the purpose mentioned, he knew it would avail him little. He had no means of withstanding a protracted siege, and a handful of assailants could bring him to any terms.

As he stepped forth into the clearing, Ina, his daughter, caught sight of him, and bounded out the cabin to meet him.

“Oh, father! I am glad you have come back so soon, but dinner isn’t ready. Did you think it was? I was just telling mother——”

She paused suddenly, as she caught sight of a stranger, and with her hand on her mouth, stood, fearing to approach, and afraid to yield to the impulse of turning, and running into the house again.

“No, I didn’t think dinner-time had come, but as I had a friend to visit me, I thought I could entertain him at home better than in the woods. But where is your kiss, dear?”

The father stooped, and touched his lips to the ruby ones of his blooming child, and taking her hand, moved forward toward the cabin.

“Whew! if that ain’t a purty flower, then kick me!” exclaimed Seth Jones, in admiration. “Was she originated in these parts? Darter, I s’pose? Perhaps not, though?”

“Yes, she is my daughter, although she was not born in these parts.”

“Dew tell. Darned if she ain’t a beauty, and that makes what I said——”

The father motioned to him that the theme was forbidden, and they walked silently toward the house.

It was no wonder that Ina Haverland drew forth such encomiums from Seth Jones. She was, indeed, a beautiful creature. She had seen some fifteen or sixteen summers, several of which had been spent in the wilderness, which was now her home. She was rather small in stature, but graceful as a gazelle, free from the restraints which the conventionalities of life impose upon those of her age. She had dark hair, gathered in a roll behind, fine expressive blue eyes, a perfect Grecian nose, thin lips, and full chin, rendering the profile perfectly straight from the forehead downward. Her face was oval, and her complexion almost too light for a full enjoyment of health. Her dress was a semi-civilized one, consisting of a short skirt, with leggins beautifully wrought, and a loose sack, similar to the ones worn at the present day. Her small feet were encased in tiny mocassins, elaborately wrought with beads and Indian ornaments, and a string of wampum hung around the neck.

She led the way toward the house, and the three entered.

Haverland introduced his friend to his sister and wife, as a man who had chanced down in this direction, and who would probably tarry a few days. But the quick eye of his wife caught the thoughtful expression upon her husband's face, and she felt there was something yet unrevealed—something deeper and more important, that was to be disclosed. She, however, forbore questioning or hinting, knowing that he would communicate what was necessary, when he deemed the proper time had come.

A common-place conversation was maintained until the meal was prepared by the busy housewife, when they all gathered around the board. An earnest blessing was invoked upon the humble food, and it was partaken of in silence.

“Wife,” said Haverland tenderly, “I will depart awhile with this friend here, and you and Mary may busy yourselves as you think best till I return. Probably I will not be back until toward night. Take no anxiety upon my account.”

“I will endeavor not to, but, dear husband, go not far from home, for strange fears have come over me since morning.”

Even the usually staid and calm face of Mary, betrayed an unusual expression of anxiety.

“Fear not, wife, I will not go far.”

Haverland now stepped outside, where he saw Seth, all agape, gazing at Ina, as she passed to and fro in the house.

“By gracious, you, I’m goin’ to fall in love with that gal. No ’bjections, hope?”

“No,” answered Haverland, with a faint smile, “her heart is unfettered, and I hope it will remain so for a long time.”

“Oh! I don’t mean to love her as you dew yer old woman—yer wife. I mean jest as I would my darter, yer know. She’s too small to think about lovyers *yit*. Don’t you let *sich* a thing git inter her head for five years or more.”

“I’ll try not to; but let us take a walk. I have something to say, which I would that they should not know for the present.”

“All right—but jest hold on a minute.”

At this juncture, Ina appeared with a small vessel, as if she intended bringing some water from some spring nigh at hand.

“Hold on a minute, gal, my beauty,” said Seth, stepping forward, and reaching for the pail. “That’s too big a load for you to carry.”

“No, I have done it often, thank you, but it is no work for me.”

“But jest let me fetch it *this* time, if only to show my good will, and my activity.”

Ina laughingly yielded the vessel, and watched him as he took long, awkward strides toward the point where the path led into the forest.

“How far is it off?” he asked, turning round, as he reached the point mentioned.

“A short distance,” answered Haverland, “the path leads to it.”

Seth made some unintelligible answer, as he jerked his head back and disappeared.

This simple occurrence that we have just narrated, although trivial in itself, was one of the circumstances which often controls important acts, and which seem to show that an all-wise Ruler, orders them to suit His purpose, and to bring about good in the end. Seth Jones had no object other than a little amusement in his course, yet before he returned, he saw how fortunate it was.

He strode rapidly forward, and after passing a short distance, reached the spring. As he stooped, he was sure he heard a movement in the bushes beyond; and, as he was about to dip the vessel, he saw in the smooth face of the water, a movement in the shrubbery. He had too much cunning and prudence to affect knowledge of it, and he filled the vessel without betraying any signs of suspicion. As he rose to the upright position, he gave an apparently careless sweep of his vision, and not twenty feet distant he saw the crouching forms of two Indians! As he turned his back, there was a peculiar, uncomfortable feeling, as he knew that it was the easiest matter in the world to receive one or two cold bullets. He, however, quickened his step not in the least, and manifested no uneasiness, as he came to view in the clearing; and laughingly handed the water to Ina.

“Come, let us go,” said Haverland, moving toward the spring.

“Not that ar way, by a long shot!” said Seth, with a meaning shake of his head.

“Why not?”

“I’ll tell you purty soon.”