

The Doom Trail

— By —
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 Author of PORTO BELLO GOLD, Etc.
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THE STORY

CHAPTER I—Harry Ormerod, prescribed traitor to King George as a Stuart partisan, returning from France to London, rescues Alderman Robert Juggins from a band of assassins. Juggins proves to be the grandson of a former steward of Ormerod's father, to whom Juggins feels himself indebted. Ormerod tells Juggins he has abandoned the Stuart cause.

CHAPTER II—Juggins tells Ormerod of a Jacobite plot in the American colonies to weaken England by forwarding French interests. Their aim is the return of King James to the English throne. At its head is one Andrew Murray, a Scotsman, and a Frenchman, De Veulle, deadly enemy of Ormerod. The two are in London furthering their schemes. Ormerod sees them. Anticipating the plotters' early return to America, Juggins arranges for Ormerod to go there with letters to Governor Burnet, friend of Juggins, and work to foil Murray.

"I heard what you said, and Master Harry's answer," she rebuked him. "Think shame on yourself, Robert, to hint that he would hesitate before peril—and you sending him into it, too," she added somewhat illogically. I thought, "Now, do both of you drain these. 'Twill wash the taste of the streets and taverns from your mouths."

We obeyed her. "And what luck did you have?" she demanded next. "He leaves us Saturday," said Juggins simply.

She cried out. "So soon! Must it be, Robert? Sure, the lad should have some respite from toll and fear!"

"If he is to go, he must go then," rejoined Juggins. "'Twas because I felt as you did that I said what you heard, granny."

"And 'twas because he had a sound heart in him that he answered as he did," she snapped. "If he is to go, he should go, I dare say; and the greater the peril, the greater the reward. Have you done aught toward securing Master Harry's equipment?"

He went to the cupboard, from which he procured a bundle of rolled cloths. Layer after layer was unwound, and finally he drew from the wrappings a gun such as I had never seen before. It was long in the barrel, well-stocked, yet very light and handy.

"You may exclaim over it, Master Harry," remarked Juggins as he surrendered it into my admiring hands; "but you can have no idea of its value until you have seen it tested in the great forests, where a man's life depends upon the swiftness and accuracy with which he can shoot. I learned that in my own youth, and so when I returned to London I had this gun made for me by the king's own gunsmith, after plans I drew for him. There is none other like it."

"And it is for me?" I asked, delighted as a child with a new toy.

"What better use could it have?" he replied. "Oh, yes; and these go with it."

I brought from the same cupboard a shot-pouch of beaded deer skin and a powder-horn, ornamented with dull silver that would not catch the light. Also a bit of hide from which there hung in sheaths a delicately balanced hatchet and a long, broad-bladed knife. "These you will discover no less useful than the gun," he explained, drawing the weapons from their coverings. "This which you call a hatchet is the tomahawk of the Indians, used for fighting at close quarters and for throwing. This other is the scalping knife, and a deadly blade it is, too. You will feel them strange at first, but among my friends in New York there is a Dutchman named Corlaer who will instruct you in the ways of the wilderness."

"You shall have letters to Governor Burnet himself, whom I met before he went overseas, and to Master Cadwalader Colden, the governor's surveyor general and a member of his council, a fine, loyal gentleman with whom I have had some correspondence."

CHAPTER III

The Fifth Passenger

Granny Juggins drew my face down to a level with her puckered old lips. "God preserve you, Master Harry. No, I am not weeping. 'Tis—no matter. Remember always that so long as my heart beats there is room in it for you—and forget not that your mother would be hungry for pride in you if she were but with us."

She kissed me tenderly. "I am an old woman, Master Harry," she said, "and I may not live to see if; but the day will come when you will be no longer a fugitive from justice. So be not disheartened."

"And how could I be disheartened," I demanded, as I set her down, "with two friends such as I may boast of?" There was a mist before my eyes, and I was not sorry when Juggins broke in upon our farewells.

"Aye, John Waterman will be waiting us at the Temple stairs, and we have little time to spare if we are to get aboard before the other passengers. This De Veulle would recognize you I fear, even in this disguise."

I could not forbear a grimace at the reference to my get-up, a linsey-woolsey shirt, with homespun jacket and breeches and a bobbed scratch-wig, the whole designed to give me a rustic appearance, which there can be no doubt that it did.

"Never mind, Master Harry," admonished Juggins as he clapped an ugly beaver of ancient style upon my head. "In New York you will rig yourself in forest-runner's garb, and forget that you ever played the bumpkin. Give granny a last kiss, and—"

She flew at me, light as a bird; her arms clasped momentarily about my neck; I felt her kiss on my cheek; and then she was gone from the room. I may as well say here that I never saw her again, although many a night as I lay under the stars I was to remember her quaint ways, her sweet, shrill voice and loving smile.

But I had no opportunity for such thoughts as Juggins and I hurried through the streets toward the river, where a wherry was awaiting us. All the way he kept up a running fire of last-minute advice and instructions.

"Guard well the letters I have given you, the one to Corlaer no less than those to Governor Burnet and Master Colden. Corlaer, though he be only a rude, unlettered woodsman, is none the less of importance in the wilderness country. He hath the confidence of the Indians of the Six Nations, a mighty tribe, or rather confederacy of tribes, Master Harry. I have writ as strongly as a man may to Governor Burnet, but I would have you say to him all that you can think of to urge him to a vigorous course. 'Tis no hour for half-way measures. We must crush Murray once and for all."

We came presently to Greenwich reach, and steered a passage through the river traffic to the side of the New Venture. Master Abbot, her captain met us at the rail.

"The young man is not sure of him self afloat, and would seek his berth," said Master Juggins, after the preliminaries had been passed.

"As he pleases," agreed Captain Abbot indifferently. "Yare the first aboard, lad, and may choose your quarters. You may bunk with the second mate or one of the other passengers. But no," he corrected himself; "I should have said with one of two of the other passengers. The lady hath a cabin to herself."

"The lady!" I exclaimed. Master Juggins pursed his lips in a soundless whistle.

"So you carry a lady," he commented. "Aye," replied Abbot. "Who is she?" "I know not."

He turned to me. "And now, young sir, what do you say? Will it be the second mate or a passenger for companion?"

"The second mate," I said. He nodded his head, called a seaman to carry my luggage below and pointed the way, and walked off.

Master Juggins drew me back to the rail. "'Tis best I should not wait," he said. "Stay below till you be safe out of Thames mouth, Master Harry. You should be safe enough now, but care is a sure precaution."

"I will not forget," I promised. "And one thing more, lad. Do not stint your wants for money. Governor Burnet will aid you to draw whatever you may desire through the bankers in New York. Remember, you spend on my behalf. I would willingly use all I have to thwart Murray. When all is said and done, we are at war with France. 'Tis no war of generals and armies and admirals and fleets, I grant you. But war it is."

He smote the rail with his hand by way of emphasis. "What kind of war?" I asked.

"Why, a war for the right to grow and to flourish, a war for trade. At other times, mark you, nations clash over questions of honor or territory. So their statesmen say. Actually there is a question of trade or merchandise at the bottom of every war that has been fought since the world began. Today we are fighting with France for control of the trade of the Atlantic—and control of the Atlantic trade means control of the Western Plantations, America. We are fighting, Master Harry, with laws and tariffs and manufacturing skill and shipping instead of with men and deadly weapons."

"The country which wins the fur trade will win control over the greatest number of savages. And the country which is so placed, especially if it be England, will win the military struggle which some day will have to be fought for dominion in America. So I would have you feel yourself a soldier, a general of trade, sent out upon a venture of great danger and importance. It may be, Master Harry, that you carry on your shoulders the future of England and of nations yet unborn."

"All that I can, I will do!" I exclaimed. "Good. I cannot ask more."

He clasped my hand in a wringing grip. "Good luck to you, lad, and write as occasion serves."

He went over the side with his lips pursed as if to whistle and a look of doleful pleasure on his face. Him, too, as it happened, I was never to see again. In fact, I wonder whether I should not have leaped over the vessel's side at that moment had I realized how complete was to be the severance of my life from all that I had known before.

By the cabin entrance under the

poop I found the seaman who had collected my scanty baggage. "Where do you berth?" he asked me, pausing at the foot of the ladder-stairs.

"With the second mate."

He opened the door on the right-hand, or starboard, side, revealing a space so tiny that I marvelled how two men could force themselves into it at once. Two short, shallow bunks occupied two-thirds of its area.

"Do all the passengers lodge aft here?" I asked him carelessly as he disposed of my trappings.

"All save the negro; he is to sleep in the galley behind the companion-way."

When he had gone I curled up in the lower bunk, which the second mate obviously had surrendered to me. At last I must have dozed, for I was awakened suddenly by the stranges of sounds—a woman's voice singing. It was a song I had never heard before, with a Scots accent to the words and a wonderful lilting melody that was somehow very sad and all the while it was pretending to merriment.

I rose from my bunk, and, stealing to the door, set it open so that I might hear the better. I was so interested in the song and the singer's voice that I forgot even to watch the door of the cabin next to mine where she was singing. And Judge to my surprise when the singer's door swung open and she stepped into the passage, almost at my side.

Her surprise, as was but natural was greater than mine. So we stood there a moment within a long yard of each other, gazing mutely into each other's eyes. Her face, flower-white in the dim light that came down the companionway, had a sweetness of expression that belied the proud carriage of her head and an air of hauteur such as I had seen about the great ladies of King Louis' court. Her hair was black and all blown in little wisps that curled at her forehead and neck. Her eyes were dark, too.

"I heard you singing," I said. She turned and made to re-enter her cabin. But I raised my hand involuntarily in a gesture of appeal.

"I am sorry," I went on quickly. "I did not mean to be rude. I—I could not help it."

She regarded me gravely, evidently puzzled by the incongruousness of my voice and my plowboy garments.

"You are never Scots, sir?" she answered finally.

"No, but I know Scotland."

A light dawned in her eyes with the words.

"Ah, then you will be knowing the song that I sang! 'Lochaber No More' 'tis called, and a bitter lament of exiles out of their own homeland."

"No, I never heard it before—but I have a brother buried on a hillside far north of Lochaber, in the Clan Donald country."

The sorrow that came into her face was beautiful to see. None but a person who had Gaelic blood could have sympathized so instantly and so generously with a stranger's grief.

"That will have been the great sadness upon you," she cried lit, the old way that the Highland Scots have of using English. "Oh, sir, your woe will have been deep! So far from his own home!"

"Yes," I assented; "and he an exile, too."

"An exile!" She leaned toward me, her eyes like stars.

"You will be one of the Good People?" I did not answer her, too confused in my wits to know what to say; and suddenly my confusion spread to her.

"It is wild I am talking, sir," she exclaimed. "Never heed my words."

Sure, who would be trusting his heart's blood to the stranger that stepped in his path?

"I think I would trust mine to you," I answered boldly.

She smiled faintly. "From your manner you would be no Englishman, sir, saying such pretty things without consideration."

"I have been long out of England."

"Then your sorrow will not be so great for parting with all you have held dear. Lucky is your lot."

"You have never been to America?" I asked.

"I had never been out of Scotland until I came south to take ship today. Ah, sir, there is a great sorrow at my heart for the country I love."

We said nothing while you might have counted ten, and in the silence she looked away from me.

"And you go with us to New York?" I asked fatuously.

Her eyes danced with a glint of humor. "Pray, sir, will there be any other shipping-place in the ocean?"

I laughed. "My name," I began—and then I stopped abruptly.

My name at present was William Juggins, and I had a feeling of reluctance at practicing deceit upon this girl at our first meeting. But she saved me from my quandary.

"You will not be what you seem, sir," she said gravely. "That I can see, and perhaps you will not think me indiscreet if I say so much."

"'Tis true," I assented eagerly. "Indeed—"

"But you will be meeting my—" she hesitated ever so little—"my father presently, no doubt, and he will make us known to one another. Now I must go on deck."

And she walked by me with a faint swish of skirts that sounded like an echo of far-off fairy music. Her father! Who could he be? And then realization smote me. Plainly, she could not be De Veulle's daughter—nor Captain Abbot's. She was Murray's.

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