

# The DOOM TRAIL

—By—  
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 PORTO BELLO GOLD, Etc.  
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 WNU Service

## STORY FROM THE START

Harry Ormerod, proscribed traitor to the British crown, as a Stuart partisan, returning from France to London without friends or prospects, rescues Alderman Robert Juggins from assassins who had waylaid him. The arrival of the watch puts an end to the affair, and Harry tells his new acquaintance of his former activities as a soldier in the service of the Stuarts and later an official at the "court" of the so-called King James the Third.

## CHAPTER I—Continued

I had forgotten my surroundings, forgotten the dingy cobbles of Mincing lane, forgotten the strange circumstances under which I had met this strange person who seemed so intimately versed in my family history. I lived over again the brave days at Foxcroft when Charles had been master and I his lieutenant. But the moment passed, the memories faded, and my eyes saw again the drab buildings of the alley and the odd figure of my deliverer—whom I had first delivered. "And you, sir," I said. "May I ask how it happens you know so much concerning the fortunes of a plain Dorset family?"

He seemed not to hear me, standing there in a brown study, and I spoke to him again sharply. "Yes, yes, I heard," he answered, almost impatiently. "I was— But this is no place for discussion. Come with me to my house."

Some trace of my feelings must have been revealed in my attitude—my face he could not have seen in the darkness—for he continued:

"You need not fear me, Master Ormerod. I mean you no harm. I could do no harm to your father's son."

"But you?" I asked. "Who are you, sir?"

He chuckled dryly. "You know my name," he answered, "and you heard the watch acknowledge my civic dignity. For the rest—if you have spent much time in Dorset you should know a Dorset voice."

"I do that," I assented heartily, "and 'tis grateful to my ears."

"Then be content with that, sir, for a few minutes. Come, let us be on our way. I have reasons for not wishing to invite a second attack upon us."

He set off at a great pace, his head buried in his cloak collar, and I walked beside him, puzzled exceedingly.

Ten minutes later we stopped before a tall, gabled house of brick and timber on the near side of Holborn. My companion produced a key from his person and unlocked a heavy door which opened upon a staircase leading to the second story. The first floor was occupied by a shop.

"Enter, Master Ormerod," said Juggins. "You are right welcome. I hope you have none of the country gentleman's scorn for the home of an honest merchant."

"A beggar must not be a chooser," I answered. "But if I were not indebted to you for my liberty I should still be glad to visit a Dorset man who knows how to fight and who remembers the woods of Foxcroft."

"Well spoken," applauded Juggins as he fastened the door behind us. "So I might have expected your father's son to speak."

"That is the second time you have called me 'my father's son,'" I said. "Prithce, Master Juggins, had you acquaintance with my father?"

"Bide, bide," he replied enigmatically. "We shall settle all that anon. After you, sir."

And he ushered me up the stairs, which were hung with the skins of many kinds of animals, some of which I did not even know. The stairs gave upon a large hall, similarly decorated, and through this we passed into a comfortable chamber which stretched across the front of the house.

Master Juggins relieved me of my cloak and hat and motioned to a deep chair in front of the fire.

"Rest yourself, Master Ormerod. Presently we shall have provender for the inner man as well. Ho, Goody! Art abed, after all?"

"Abed? Abed?" answered a thin, old voice that was inexpressibly sweet, with a Dorset burr that made Master Robert's sound like the twang of a Londoner. "Abed? says he. When did I ever feel the sheets, and not knowing he was warm and safe and his posses-cup where it belongs—which is in his stomach? Abed! Didst ever find—"

She stepped into the room, a quaint little figure in bodden-gray, a dainty cap perched on her wispy white hair, her brown eyes gleaming in the candle-light, the criss-crossed wrinkles of her cheeks shining like a network of fine lace. In her hands she held a tray supporting a steaming flagon and divers covered dishes of pewterware.

Juggins favored me with a humorous glance. "Sure, I grow more troublesome year by year, granny," he said as she paused at sight of me. "Here I am come home later than ever, bringing a guest with me. Who think you he is?"

She looked at us inquiringly. "Tis Master Ormerod."

"Ormerod? Not—"

"Aye; Master Harry."

"But he is in France!"

"Nay; he is here."

She drew closer, and studied my fea-

tures under the candles that shone from the mantel shelf.

"Is he in danger?" she asked breathlessly.

"The watch were after him when he came to my rescue," replied Juggins. "Yet he came."

She patted my cheek with her hand.

"That was a deed which you need never be ashamed of, Master Ormerod, and you shall win free to safety, whatever it may be or wherever, if Robert and I have any wits between us. Sit yourself down, Master Ormerod, and you shall have a draft of mull'd ale and a dish of deviled bones and thereafterward a bed with sheets that have lain in Dorset lavender. Hath it a welcome sound to you?"

The tears came into my eyes.

"I am happier this night than I have been any time since Charles and I left Foxcroft," I said. "But pray tell me why you two, who are strangers to me, should be so interested in an out-cast?"

"He does not know?" exclaimed the little old lady.

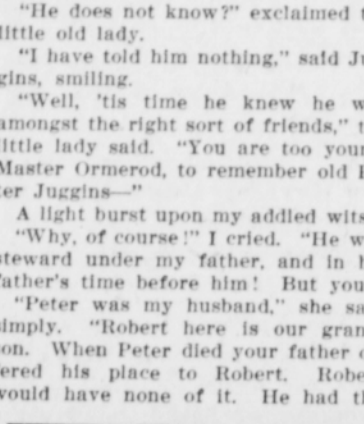
"I have told him nothing," said Juggins, smiling.

"Well, 'tis time he knew he was amongst the right sort of friends," the little lady said. "You are too young, Master Ormerod, to remember old Peter Juggins—"

A light burst upon my addled wits.

"Why, of course!" I cried. "He was steward under my father, and in his father's time before him! But you?"

"Peter was my husband," she said simply. "Robert here is our grandson. When Peter died your father offered his place to Robert. Robert would have none of it. He had the



wandering bee in his bonnet. He was young, and he must see the world. He would make his fortune, too. No life as an estate steward for him."

"And wise I was, too, granny," interjected Master Juggins. "Even you will grant that now."

"Be not too elevated by your good fortune," she retorted. "Had you followed your grandfather at Foxcroft your counsel might have restrained Master Harry and his brother from their madness—"

"I wish it might have," I said bitterly, thinking of Charles' lonely grave on a mist-draped hillside in the Scotch highlands.

"Many a gentleman would have taken in bad part such an answer to an offer made in kindness, Master Ormerod. But not your father. No, after trying all he could by fair means to dissuade Robert from his course, he asked where his fancies drifted, and then supplied him with money for the voyage to the Western Plantations and to enable him to secure a start. 'Twas that permitted Robert to go overseas and to set himself up as a fur-trader there and afterward to return and establish his business down-stairs, which hath grown so that it is more than he can handle. All of it, I say, we owe to you."

"All of it, granny," reaffirmed Master Juggins himself. "Y'have not made it one whit too strong for me. But I would find out before we sleep how I may be of aid to Master Ormerod."

"Aid?" quoth she. "All that we have in the world is his, if he wants it; aye, the clothes off our backs. Good night to you, Master Ormerod. And remember, this house, poor though it be for your father's son, is to be your home until you have a better."

I rose and bowed my acknowledgments, but I could not speak. My heart was too full. Here in this bleak, unfriendly London, which had greeted me with suspicion and persecution, I had found friendship and assistance. It was almost too good to believe.

"I have no claim upon you, Master

Ormerod, but I shall have a word to say to you on the morrow."

"You'll do, lad," he said. "My help would have been yours on any terms. But you have made it a glad privilege for me to help you. Doubt not we shall find a way."

"Now get you to bed. I shall have somewhat to say to you on the morrow."

"You were his friend, too; and who am I, an outlaw without name or fortune, to set myself above a man who has prospered like you through the diligence of his own hands and brains?"

Master Juggins drew a deep breath and wrung my hand hard.

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Juggins," I exclaimed as the door closed behind his grandmother. "Remember that. And let me not imperil for one moment two friends of my father, who revere his memory as I had not supposed any did, save myself."

He pushed me down into my chair by the fire.

"There is no question of claim, sir—"

"Tis a privilege. Do you tell me now of your present plight. Fear not to be frank with me, Master Ormerod. I do not mix in politics, I am none of your red-hot loyalists who would hang a man because he remarks that our worthy king is a Hanoverian by birth. But on the other hand I'll have naught to do with these plotters who fume over the exiled Stuarts."

"The Stuarts went, sir, because they overtaxed the forbearance of a long-suffering people. They might have returned ere this, as you know, had they possessed the good sense to appreciate what their whilom people required. But they lacked that good sense, Master Ormerod, and with all deference I say to you they will never return unless they learn that lesson very soon."

I leaned forward in my chair and interrupted him, the words bubbling from my lips.

"I could not have put nearer my own feelings, Master Juggins. When I was a lad not yet of age I risked all I had for the Stuart cause. What came of it? A life of exile that might have ruined me, as it has many a better man. My family's estate was sequestered; my outlawry was proclaimed. I have no place to lay my head, save it be by the bounty of a foreigner."

"Have I secured any moral satisfaction by these sacrifices? At first I thought I had. But when I looked closer I found that I had done nothing for my country. For the Stuarts, yes. But for my country, nothing."

"This made me think the harder, Master Juggins. At the beginning I had taken zest in the plots and plans which were aimed to bring about his restoration to power."

"But the longer I studied them the more insincere they became. I found my leader a catspaw of foreigners, used to undermine England's prestige. His aims were not the good of England, but his own aggrandizement, the furthering of France's ambitions."

"Hast learned that, lad? Why, then, there's no more loyal Englishman in London!"

"So you think," I answered. "So I think. But hear me out. I told my feelings to a certain great gentleman who handles affairs at St. Germain. He cursed me for a turncoat, would have ordered his lackeys to flog me from the palace. I left him—in disgrace. The doors of my friends were closed to me. I thought I would make my way to England and begin a new life."

"So I applied to the English ambassador for a passport. He laughed at me. Did I think he was so innocent as to be blinded by such transparent trickery? Nay, the Stuarts must seek elsewhere for means to plant a fresh spy in England. In desperation then I bought passage from a smuggler of Dieppe, who landed me three weeks since in Sussex. I made my way to Dorset, hoping to find old friends who would help me to gain a pardon; but I was recognized by one of my cousins who now hold Foxcroft house, and he raised a hue and cry after me, fearing no doubt that I sought to regain the estate."

"Since then I have been hunted like a beast. My last shilling was spent this morning. Tomorrow, had I escaped so long, I planned to sell my sword, and if all else failed to seek a press-gang."

"Let us thank God you heard my cries," said Juggins earnestly.

"I do," I said, "and with no lack of reverence, my friend, I also thank you."

He gave me a keen look.

"You call me friend. Do you mean the word?"

"Why not?"

"I was your father's servant," he said, and he said it so that the words were at once proud and humble.

I caught his hand in mine.

"You were his friend, too; and who am I, an outlaw without name or fortune, to set myself above a man who has prospered like you through the diligence of his own hands and brains?"

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