

Jules du Plessis - Arrives.

Thanet.

Driven onto the coast by a sudden northerly squall, the ship broached, wallowed momentarily, and then its back was broken on a single, protruding rock, sending its occupants pell mell into the seething water. One by one, survivors crawled, dragged and heaved themselves out of the sea, and onto a sandy stretch of beach bordered by thick undergrowth and tall plane trees.

We see the drowned rats, as if from above, as they worry at their remaining possessions and try to make sense of the sudden cataclysm they have so narrowly escaped. They are all, it appears, of a similar mien, dressed to a man in plain, un-dyed cloth. One stands out, his hair a little too long; his codpiece a little too manful, his ruff a shade more jaunty than might be considered decent. He also makes no attempt to gather together with the others, as they fret and mourn the day, and try to make sure they are all accounted for. He simply sits, surveys the scene of devastation, and draws out a telescope from his salvaged pack, training it, no, we are not mistaken, on the sea-moist frock of one of the younger survivors.

A leader emerges from the hubbub – some chirurgeon, by his acts. He goes from one to the next, tending, checking, bandaging. Wives hug husbands to them; children either weep or explore – some clearly more resilient than others.

The long-haired man claps closed his telescope, and rises to saunter through the group. He taps the thigh of the chirurgeon, knelt and ministering, with his boot.

“Our distress may not be so long in resolution, friend”, he offers, pointing out to sea where a close-reefed frigate can be seen.

The chirurgeon looks on, squinting as the day is suddenly sunny once more. “They’ll never spy us -see, our mast sheared off at the deck. There’s no flag of shipwreck here for them to visit. We need to find a way to signal.”

“Well, we could burn those trees” says long hair, scratching his face, “or maybe make a pair of yellow flags from that Madame’s poorly concealed and

shameless petticoat." He indicates the woman recently examined by telescope. "I can signal the frigate with semaphore."

"Oh, is that so, friend? You told me you were a humble shopkeeper, Mister Plessey. Are you now a naval man, now your ruse of passage is all spent out?"

"Never naval, no. But I have had other jobs. During the last war, for example."

"Oh, really, and what did you do then?"

"I was in the Cardinal's Guard."

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Oh how Jules adored London! The sights, the smells, the people, the food. It was said that the finest chefs in all of Europe were to be found within the walls of that, greatest of cities, or if not, along the sparkling, clear Thames, to the most splendid court of the Queen at Hampton.

Jules du Plessis sat, glorying in the sun, a wide-brimmed hat shading bright, intrigued eyes. The fields of Soho were cooled by a light zephyr off the river; the mead at his side was warm and sickly sweet, and the strumpet at his other snored only a little, and only too a little less the sweet. Kit Marlowe had it right, he thought - a sceptred isle, set in a silver sea. So far from Madame Mope and her ridiculous chateau, a half a thousand miles and as many years it seemed as well. Here was where things could be done, away from the sterility of the anciens, free of feudal fealty, church and bankers. Light in purse and heart the both.

This was his time!