

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

- Jules du Plessis - a young man of noble birth. Also Huguenot.
- Francis Walsingham - Elizabeth's ambassador to Paris.
- Child, woodland.
- The Mob, Paris.
- Bravadoes, strange, various.
- Yoked Mob, various.

PARIS, 23-24 AUGUST 1572

Jules du Plessis, a young man is visiting Paris with father, the Duke of Normandy. A Huguenot, his father attends to discuss the peace and marriage of Margaret (daughter of Catherine de Medici) to Henry of Navarre for political, military and financial reasons. An unpopular match amongst Catholics in Paris, and one fraught with concerns and intrigue. While this goes on, Jules is out and about in Paris of late, doing what young noblemen do.

Out on the town, Jules is awoken from a post-coital doze, legs tangled in the sheets and the girl next to him in bed, a private room A l'étage chez Eric about them both. Quite private, and a sturdy bar upon the door, as this was a nice part of Paris, and Babette was a nice girl. On that they both agreed, given how much she charged.

It is quickly apparent a disturbance without is Jules' cause for waking. Shouts from the Tavern below, and pounding upon doors, crashes as they are kicked in, shrieks and loud demands at sword point are all too clear. The request for 'Huguenot bastards' is clear, as is the shouting of a crowd in the street outside. Young Jules recalls the tensions he has felt, the eye following and ears listening, the looks, the stares and hate. It has boiled over and he fears a mob. With a quick "Tu ne m'as pas vu, n'est-ce pas ?" And twice the sum they had agreed earlier, Jules is into his breaches and doublet in a moment, sword buckled and out of window and up onto roof tops just as someone hammered Babette's door with strident demands of entry. After all, it was hardly his first time.

From the roof tops it is easy to see fires and torch brandishing groups on the streets demanding religious allegiance of common folk at sword point. From the roofs it was clear that much noise and light comes from the Louvre castle, where his Father and many other Huguenot nobles are quartered. In fear, of his father's safety, Jules makes the roofs as far as they would take him. He gets close enough to see the smiling mob and Swiss Mercenaries standing around, of bloodied sword and pike.

With care Jules slips down to a side street at alley and locates the kitchens side gate, mercifully open and unguarded in the night's disturbances. With

the luck of the young he slips in carrying a crate as if a merchant of supply. Thence into the back stairs amongst the servants, for there are few about at this hour, and all the less for the terrible events of the night.

To his father's quarters Jules finds his way by servant stair and silent passing through the corridors of that high castle. Alas, the door smashed open, a fight of some sort, for there is overturned furniture and blood upon the floor coverings. With care Jules searches the room, until in a small box he half remembers seeing his Father handle he finds the seal ring. He takes little else than that, a travelling cloak, and warmer clothes, and the odd dagger. Of his Father there is only a bloody trail into the corridor, whence the path is lost.

Jules slips down the stairs and rejoins the main landing at an entrance hall from the courtyard. Even from his vantage point, he can see what might be bloodied heaps of rags in the growing dawn light. He knows they are not what they seem.

Wrapped up in cloak and dirty clothes he makes his way out through the courtyard and into the street. There is little chance his father escaped and no chance to search for him amongst the dead in the courtyard under the eyes of the Swiss mercenaries and the groups of strident townsfolk shouting their righteousness at the butchered bodies. Jules knows that if there is a chance his father lives still it will be wherever the loudness of the mob is focussed.

Jules walks the streets, following his ears towards the noise, although the streets are now far quieter than earlier in the night. The mob is dissipating for the day, perhaps to reform as the afternoon wears on and more wine is drunk.

All the noise and bluster, smoke and smell of slaughter centres more about a square as he approaches, but it is by chance a coach rumbles down the cobbles towards him, puked out from a side street before the square - no ordinary, this, for it is elegant with a fine team to draw it. Jules hunches in his cloak but walks on, there is no better way to not be seen than to walk as if every right to be there extends.

But the coach draws to a stop, and a voice from behind curtains hails him with his name. Cautious lest any of the mob be near he approaches, realises it is the English ambassador Francis Walsingham by name, and a woman within the coach. Walsingham is not certain but suggests all who were in the Louvre are dead in the Massacre. Of Jules father however he is sure with information whispered by others, he died in the castle courtyard, cursing the mob, the Mercenaries and praying for his son.

Jules accepts refuge within the coach and they return to Walsingham's residence. Walsingham and the ambassadorial entourage are preparing to leave Paris, for as Protestants there is no knowing how far the

mobs violence may spread. However Walsingham has a man who can get Jules out of Paris in a cart under goods, then perhaps a horse to La Rochelle, a Huguenot stronghold and port to the west - a better place to decide where next for Jules, for a return to Normandy seems unlikely.

25TH AUGUST 1572 ONWARDS.

Kitted out with a rough cloak, food and water Jules is hidden away beneath sacking and turnip detritus with a friendly carter, and set upon the road west. He soon relaxes, especially as the gates of Paris are passed, and beneath the warm sacking and turnips uncorks his lunch. The carter insists he stay beneath the covers however, for they are still near Paris, and rabble may yet see them.

It is a little later when the bump and creak of the cart and horses is stilled to voices demanding the business of the carter and his destination, and Jules' doze is interrupted. Discussion ensues but it is all too soon when one of the voices demands to probe the turnips and sacking with a blade, lest there be Protestants, Huguenots no less, hiding beneath. Even in the countryside a few miles from Paris, the Mob has spread it seems. Although as Jules surmises, rather a Yokel Mob.

Jules, reasoning it better to make an entrance than be skewered and discovered, flings back the sacking and scattering turnips demands to know where he is, an empty bottle in his hand. Suggesting more celebration than is wise. Claiming to have been asleep in the warmth of the cart since the night previous he knows nothing of Huguenots or mobs, or indeed where he is. The last is at least accurate, for 'west of Paris' covers a significant area.

An argument ensues with the rabble who claim to be looking for Huguenots, by name, Protestants by nature, so Jules dismounts to be ready for sword play if needed against the half dozen or more, albeit they are randomly armed with old and rusty weapons, even pikes and farm implements.

After some disagreement about an ale or wine at the local hostelry, for Jules still plays the part of the celebrant, an opportunity appears in the confused and meandering yokels and the carter whips his team away, leaving Jules and the rabble staring after him. Luckily, a persuasive Jules convinces them all to head for the nearest Inn for a beer,, wine and some earnest discussion, then slips away into the woods as they wander away, after the cart.

Alas Jules has no clear idea of where he is, and wanders through the light woodland hopefully paralleling the road for some miles, hoping to spot a farmhouse or Inn he can refresh and gain horse and supplies for his onward journey to La Rochelle. It is then he stumbles across a clearing in the woods,

there with an ancient well sits amongst low mossy walls presumably site of some long gone ruined structure, or the result of a wandering road path over the years.

Upon approach to check the water Jules is surprised to see and hear a young child sobbing, yet hiding at the base of the well. After gaining confidence the child explains he is the remains of the smouldering bodies and the coach burned nearby was where they were attacked. They were his family. He had run and hidden at his father's insistence. Alas, the doesn't know where he is, but wishes to get home.

Jules' examination of the area reveals few boot prints, but many of a hoofed animal of unfamiliar size and weight. Certainly not a horse. Jules is puzzled.

Further study or conversation with the child is interrupted by the return of the bravados who attacked the coach. They spot Jules and child and demand he hand over the child, it seems they had been searching for him.

Jules refuses and dialogue ensues but they refuse to say who they are or from where, and ask only for the child, promising they have no care or interest for Jules and he may go. Oddly, they refer to Jules as 'mortal man'. A most strange form of title or address. He still refuses to release a child to what is clearly certain death, and insists they will not have him. Swords are drawn, but as they close Jules can see hairy lower legs and hoofs, as if of goat. The prints about the smouldering remains of the carriage explained!

Defending the child a fight ensues, and luckily Jules kills or injures the bravadoes with subtle sword play and manoeuvre making use of natural cover and their own lack of tactics, relying on numbers to win their day. While decent swordsmen, they were clearly untrained in sword play and the intricacies of combat. They lost, and the final of their number limped away, mostly carrying another, while two more remained dead upon the field.

Tired, Jules sits with the child, shares what little food he had upon his person when the carter ran off, and water from the well, for it is cold clear and most refreshing in the hot sun as noon draws up. Jules comforts the lad with kind words while considering what to do.

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Some time later Jules awakes, still where he sat, but the sun having moved on some way to the afternoon. The child is gone, and his shoulder aches, presumably where he fought, and a note left tucked onto his open shirt on most fine parchment and in a flowing hand most unlike a child's script that simply says Thank You.

Slightly puzzled but refreshed Jules moves on, soon finding the road, an Inn, a steady horse, and his way further to la Rochelle in a few weeks.

Of Jules du Plessis' other adventures upon the road, we may yet return...