

## THE RETURN OF JUDEX

### *Part One: The Mysteries of a Summer Night*

#### *I. The House of Bliss*

The La Frondaie estate, located on the Seine, near Fontainebleau, was certainly one of the most beautiful and lavish residences in France. This vast Norman mansion of modern construction had three quarters of its surface decorated by a mass of wisterias and roses. Flower beds harmoniously punctuated the green lawns alongside trees as forceful and majestic as those of the neighboring forest. A network of ivy-covered walls surrounded a park of several acres whose natural vegetation remained unsullied by human hands. A stream flowing through the park was a torrent in miniature that spun an eternal song of eddies and cascades. The trilling of blackbirds, nightingales, warblers and finches enhanced the fragrant atmosphere of the countryside.

This aura of pure beauty served as a constant invitation to the blissful joys of life. Nevertheless, for many years, this area had remained deserted and ignored. This had been a solitary part of the forest until an army of laborers under the direction of a skilled architect transformed this isolated park into an Eden of delights.

The owners of this angelic realm appeared. The tall husband had an aristocratic profile conveying an energetic vision of nobility. The infinitely graceful wife had kind eyes and a gentle smile. She was accompanied by a six-year old child. This blond boy was as handsome as the angels that filled the immortal frescoes of the Italian painters of the Renaissance era.

No one in this area had known the family prior to their arrival. These new lords of the manor evoked both curiosity and sympathy from the local inhabitants. In fact, they tactfully displaced a discreet generosity that quickly disarmed any envy normally directed against those whom fortune favors. The Comte and Comtesse de Trémeuse quickly earned the respect of their neighbors and were embraced with admiration and friendship. Their intense love for each other was exempt from the materialistic worries that hold happiness hostage. When one saw them with their gently linked arms and radiant faces, their harmony represented the tranquility that every human being craves.

On a lovely mid-summer afternoon, the Comte and Comtesse de Trémeuse sat on a bench near a shadowy passage leading to the entrance of the park. Despite leaning lovingly towards her husband, the Comtesse appeared lost in deep thought, her smile gradually disappeared. A melancholy expression crept across her features. A small tear ran down her cheek. Already sensing the anxiety of his spouse, Jacques de Trémeuse seized her hand and spoke in a soothing voice.

“Jacqueline, what’s wrong?”

Raising her head, she shivered slightly as she sought consolation in the bright, clear eyes of her husband.

“Jacques, I’m afraid. “

“Afraid... My love, why?”

“I’m afraid of being too happy!”

The Comte replied with deep emotion. “Why question the bliss that unites us? Haven’t we paid for it in advance? I’m reluctant to remind you of past events which should be exiled from our memories. Since you’re overwhelmed by an inexplicable anguish, I have no choice but to evoke the tragic circumstances of our courtship.

“A terrible oath sworn to my mother bound me to conduct a vendetta against your criminal father. My destiny was to be an implacable avenger. My mission was to strike without mercy. Then suddenly my resolve weakened. Jacqueline, you entered my life with your grace in the face of misfortune, I was captivated by the allure of your exquisite soul. Your charm and beauty disrupted my commitment to vengeance. From the moment I saw you, I was in love. My heart belonged to you.”

“My lover!” murmured Comtesse de Trémeuse resting her head on her husband’s shoulder.

“It was then,” continued the Comte, “that both of us learned the true extent of human suffering. To condemn your father was to lose you eternally. How could I grant absolution? My honor was bound by my promise to my mother. Our love prevailed over this frightful dilemma. Our love instilled pity in the heart of my mother. Our love caused tears of remorse to flow from your guilty father. Our love destroyed all the misery separating us. Our love permitted us to be one in marriage by hurling into oblivion the family secrets separating us.”

The Comte lowered his voice to a whisper. “Today, the world believes that the banker Favraux rests in the cemetery of Les Sablons. Silence has descended forever on the memories of his misdeeds. You, his daughter, are consoled by the knowledge that he still lives consecrated to a life of atonement.”

“You speak the truth, my love!”

“Haven’t we earned the right to be happy! Jacqueline, our happiness wasn’t wrongfully attained! My love, look at me with your clear eyes, show me the radiance of your being. Be attentive to our joys. The bad days are finished. Judex has disappeared. There is only the man that loves you.”

“Jacques, I love you,” she declared with all the romantic vibrancy of her emotions. “Your words have dispersed the vague impression of anguish disturbing our bliss. We have ample reason to forget our past sufferings, but don’t force me to forget Judex. On the contrary, let me always remember that fearless and irreproachable hero, that Knight of Justice who appeared when I was near death. You were so handsome! You were so profoundly noble that immediately I loved you without knowing the truth! It was from that moment that my heart became the sanctum of your spirit. Don’t destroy my memories of the first time you enraptured me.”

“Jacqueline!” Comte de Trémeuse’s lips tenderly touched those of his wife.

She responded fervently. “You weren’t satisfied to remain the hero that I’ll always admire. You not only rescued a woman, you loved her son as if he was your own. This small child now truly has a father. Jacques, you know how much I love you, but you never realize how much I revere you!”

“How could I not love our Jean? Didn’t he melt my mother’s heart? Didn’t he inspire the forgiveness that permitted our love? He’s so full of goodness. It thrills me that he returns my affection. In a word, I want him close to me as recognition of the eternal debt that I owe him.”

Jacqueline was full of maternal pride. “Speaking of our little angel, he has just returned from visiting your mother’s.”

A luxurious automobile stopped in front of the gate of La Frondaie. Followed by a young gentleman in an elegant suit, a charming boy ran with outstretched arms towards his smiling parents.

“*Bonjour*, Mama. *Bonjour*, Papa. Grandmother de Trémeuse wanted to keep me longer. Isn’t that true, Uncle Roger?”

“It’s true,” confirmed Judex’s brother.

Jacqueline took Roger’s hand. “Thank you for driving my son. How is your mother’s doing?”

“Very well!”

Hugging and kissing his mother, Jean overwhelmed her with the account of his stay at his adopted grandmother. Inexhaustibly babbling, the lad asked for news of his pony Lutin and his two dogs, Flip and Bobby.

Under the golden light of a superb sun, they all walked towards the house. The family marched in a joyful unity that seemed capable of withstanding any assault. Shortly thereafter, the two brothers conferred in a luxurious living room whose wide bay windows allowed the clear daylight to illuminate this happy home.

Roger affectionately embraced his brother. “Jacques, you’re so happy!” Then as he was invaded by bitterness, Roger collapsed into an armchair. “But I suffer!”

Jacques looked at his brother with concern. “Why didn’t you tell me the truth earlier?”

“Forgive me for keeping secrets from you. Before I confided in anyone, I wanted to be sure my dream wasn’t impossible. I hoped that my love would be returned!”

Jacques smiled. “And if I bring you, not hope, but certainty that your dream will come true?”

“Brother!”

“You shall see! The older brother calmly talked into a telephone. “Operator, please connect me to 0-17?”

“The Chateau d’Arbois,” emphasized Roger becoming pale.

“Exactly, the Chateau d’Arbois,” repeated the Comte, absolute master of the situation.

“Jacques,” interrupted a deeply troubled Roger.

“Wait a minute. Hello, my dear Primrose. It’s Jacques de Trémeuse... As I promised this morning, I’m calling to let you know Jean and Roger are back at La Frondaie... Understood... Perfect... My regards to Monsieur Milton... See you soon.”

Turning towards a bewildered Roger, the master of La Frondaie cheerfully addressed him. “It’s my pleasure to inform you that Primrose will be here in five minutes. I hope that you are now happy.”

“I don’t understand. I’m afraid to understand! It’s as if a blindfold had been removed from his eyes. Then... Primrose?”

“Primrose has feelings for you as deep and pure as those she inspired. Do you believe that I would break your heart by fostering an illusion?”

“Did she say anything to you?”

“Nothing! It wasn’t necessary. For months, both of you betrayed your feelings for each other. Like you, she hesitated. Like you, she was blinded by uncertainty caused by your shyness and her purity. You never noticed how she reddened while talking to you. She couldn’t realize how you trembled while looking at her. She shall come. Without fear, you will be able to fulfill the divine promise already engraved in your heart. The words are just waiting to flow out of your lips. Go to her. Tell her. She will reply. “

“Jacques,” shouted Roger falling in the arms of his brother. “I no longer envy your happiness.”

An ecstatic Roger ran outside.

## *II. Primrose*

Some years earlier, a rich American, James Milton, had settled in Chateau d’Arbois, the estate adjacent to La Frondaie. The reclusive Milton never revealed his activities or the reasons why he left his native land. Shunning his neighbors, he devoted himself to long trips and scientific experiments conducted in secret. The only person privy to Milton’s endeavors was his devoted secretary, Wilbur Osborn.

The local inhabitants were suspicious of this wealthy foreigner. Their mistrust evolved into hostility that his haughty indifference did nothing to disperse. Absurd and contradictory rumors circulated in the neighborhood.

Some claimed Milton was a madman. Other said that he was a criminal. To the surprise of all, there arrived at the castle an extremely beautiful woman with enchanting brown hair, distinct velvet eyes and the smile of a Madonna. Her name was Primrose. She was James Milton’s daughter. After graduating from a prominent French boarding school, she moved in with her father. Gossip circulated that the eccentric American would now end his rigid isolation. That didn’t happen. His doors remained stubbornly closed. Other than some Paris professors engaged to complete Primrose’s education, no one crossed James Milton’s threshold. The young lady didn’t seem to suffer. She appeared to love her father as much as he loved her. The honest joy on both their faces made this evident.

A visit by Jacques de Trémeuse, their neighbor, on the minor matter of a joint wall, had the consequence of altering the habits of the residents of the Chateau d’Arbois.

Monsieur de Trémeuse expected to encounter an arrogant eccentric. Instead, he discovered a well-mannered gentleman and a brilliant scholar. The two men immediately developed a cordial relationship.

Possessing similar intellectual interests, they enjoyed each other company. Their relationship was discreet at first, but James Milton eventually discerned the noble character of his neighbor. Accepting Monsieur de Trémeuse as a close friend, the American related his past.

Despite being the heir to an immense fortune, he desired to make money by his own hard work. By the age of 30, his genius as an inventor had already made him famous in the United States. With a loving wife and daughter, his life couldn’t be happier. Then catastrophe struck. An extra edition of a major New York newspaper reported that his wife and child had perished in a railway accident. Hours later, he was present at the scene of the tragedy. He identified his loved ones among the charred and disfigured corpses.

In order to avoid being driven insane by the tragedy, James Milton took refuge in France. His gnawing grief might have overwhelmed him if not for a decision to take a stroll in the forest around Fontainebleau. He heard plaintive cries arising from bushes along the road. Responding immediately, he discovered an abandoned infant, no more than 15 months old, crying from fear and hunger.

James Milton's initial intent was to turn over his discovery to the police. As soon as he took the child in his arms, she stopped crying. Instinctively her hands reached out in a gesture of love. Her head pressed against her savior's chest. Her lips formed a smile that reflected a prayer from a lost soul. To this touching display of affection, words flowed from the American's mouth. "I'll keep you!" It was at that instance that he christened the child Primrose.

James Milton instantly felt an attachment to his adopted child. As she grew, he gave her all the love which his heart could bestow. Due to the child's exquisite and affectionate nature, she gave him a new goal in life. Similarly his love molded her.

Primrose viewed her foster father more as a god rather than a benefactor. When Milton insisted that she forego sharing his life of isolation to seek the natural company desired by a girl of her age, she refused.

"No! I live only for you. Just as you live only for me!"

This the story that James Milton told Monsieur de Trémeuse. This nobleman developed a deep regard for the American. Without needless sentences, both men exchanged a firm handshake that traditionally seals true friendships. The next day, James Milton and Primrose visited La Frondaie. Not only did Primrose charm Jacqueline, she conquered Jean. Within a week, the young boy went from calling her his "girlfriend" to referring her as his "big sister." Then fate intervened. Prince Charming appeared to Primrose in the person of Roger de Trémeuse. Love consumed her. It was the exquisite romance that could only bloom in the heart of a 17 year-old girl.

Near the gate separating the two properties, Roger waited in ecstasy. Jean was playing next to him. Suddenly they gave a cry of joy. Walking very softly, Primrose appeared. Who would she greet first? Roger or Jean? It was Roger whom she approached. She hesitated as her face reddened from embarrassment. With his hat in his hand, Roger cautiously moved towards her. He opened the gate.

"*Bonjour*, Primrose!"

"*Bonjour*, Roger!"

Silence followed, but it was a charming silence which united their souls. When their eyes met, any words became unnecessary. Roger eventually spoke the song playing in their hearts.

"We love each other!"

"Yes, Roger, We love each other!"

The lips of Jacques's brother skimmed Primrose's forehead before she interrupted.

"Now, I understand the joy that I felt in your presence, and the sadness that I felt when you left. It was love."

"Yes, Primrose. As early as today, if you consent, my brother as my proxy will ask Monsieur Milton for your hand."

She paused before resuming. "You bear an illustrious name. I am a foundling."

"That isn't important in my eyes. I love you."

"A mystery surrounds my birth. Monsieur Milton was unable to discover any clues to my true origins."

"We live in an era where the only important alliance is that of the heart. When a man loves a woman, it's unimportant what her past is. I can never love you enough. I want you to be the companion of all my days --- the good angel of my life."

"I also want this with all my soul!" admitted James Milton's foster daughter. "At the same moment that I am drawn to you by an irresistible force, a fear embraces me."

"What?"

"I may be unable to make you happy."

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"I don't want to cause any worry, but I must reveal something that I have hidden from my father."

"Speak."

"Roger, I'm plagued by strange sensations. At certain times, especially during evenings when I'm alone, my soul seems suddenly to leave my body. I become nothing more than an inert mass whose spirit floats in the air. Then there is another feeling... even more painful. I feel the presence of an evil

shadow, a harmful ghost that seeks to rob me of all I love... my father... you. .. It pushes me towards an unfathomable abyss. At this moment, the most frightening thing happens. Everything freezes inside me. It's as if I was abducted by an invincible force. I'm in a state of living death. I depart... but I don't know where! It's horrible!"

"Primrose!"

"I wonder if this haunting isn't an emanation from my unknown past! Perhaps it wants to possess me to perform some vengeance of which I will both be the instrument and the victim!"

"My beloved," assured Roger, "rid your mind of these delusions. Our love will suffice to exorcise this dark spectre. You shall no longer be haunted by these visions. They were only the fleeting symbols of the anxieties surrounding our courtship. Trust in me. Nothing shall separate us. I'm here to protect you... to love you, Primrose. No one can foresee their fate. No one can predict the next day. We live in an era where human passions cause us to imagine precipices that lead to a maelstrom of catastrophe. What's important is that our hearts are united. No barrier separates us! Primrose, we are privileged to live in a time when only love matters!"

"Roger! I believe you!" shouted Primrose. "You have just reassured me completely. Yes, it was only a bad dream. I'm yours forever!"

Jacques's brother repeated those two words that Primrose had said from the depths of her soul.

"Yours forever! Yours forever!"

Suddenly the girl staggered and became pale. As if the evil spirit of her fears spread its wings over the park, she repeated the words voiced earlier by Jacqueline de Trémeuse:

"I'm afraid... Yes, I 'm afraid of being too happy!"

### *III. The Secret Raiders*

"Gentlemen," declared the Comte de Trémeuse to his guests, "I have a wonderful announcement."

Silence immediately gripped the parlor of La Frondaie. Looking at James Milton kindly, the host made his revelation

"My friend and neighbor, in honoring the betrothal of his daughter to my brother Roger, will donate to France his invention that will revolutionize naval navigation."

A smattering of applause circulated among the audience. An elegantly dressed man with snow white hair spoke.

"Monsieur Milton, is this your automatic propeller?"

"Yes, Doctor," confirmed Primrose's foster father. "After countless years, I have realized my dream. My coastal experiments have succeeded beyond my wildest hopes. In a few days, I hope to deliver my patent to the Minister of the Navy."

"This is a spectacular gift," affirmed the Comte. "I'm convinced that all France shall recognize this fact."

As the applause grew louder, the inventor interrupted humbly.

"I wish only that my modest gift illuminates the happiness of the lovely young couple who will soon marry."

"Thank you!" stated the Comte as he shook his friend's hand.

"Monsieur Milton," said the white-haired man, "you stated earlier your intention to deliver your remarkable invention to the Naval Ministry."

"Exactly, Doctor, I expect to be summoned, at any moment to the Rue Royale."

"Of course, but don't you fear a theft?" Some other attendees visibly objected to that remark. "Wait, my colleagues!" shouted the doctor. "It's always wise to take precautions."

"Doubtless," confirmed Comte de Trémeuse. "Are you alluding to the criminals, known as the Secret Raiders, who are currently committing burglaries in Paris?"

"Yes," noted the doctor. His sonorous voice contained a slight American accent. "Everyone is aware of the fantastic crimes committed by these perpetrators against the most prominent families and renowned scientists of France. Not only do they respect nothing, but they have easily plundered the most closely fortified residences."

"Hopefully," observed the Comte, "the police will soon put an end to their crimes."

"I'm skeptical," replied the doctor. "The Secret Raiders closely resembles another gang that ran rampant in the United States. None of them was ever caught. I fear that French police will fare no better than their American colleagues. That's why, Monsieur Milton, I counsel caution."

"My dear Howey," stated the inventor. "I recognize fully the wisdom of your advice, but I'm totally at ease concerning the plans of my propeller. They rest in a hiding place that my talented secretary, Wilbur Osborn, has constructed. Only the Comte, Wilbur and myself, know the secret location. I challenge the world to search for it."

"Wonderful!" concluded the doctor. "It would be tragic if the fruits of your genius fell into the wrong hands just when you're going to grant it to the French government."

Beautiful musical arrangements played on the piano could be heard in the background. "Gentlemen," proposed the Comte, "let's abandon the sinister subject of the Secret Raiders and rejoin the ladies."

"Gladly," concurred Milton placing his arm over his host's shoulder.

While the lord of La Frondaie and his friends moved into a vast hall filled with the fragrance of the rarest flowers, Dr. Howey lingered in the parlor. Seated in an armchair, he appeared lost in thought.

Dr. Howey was a man of indeterminable age. His snow white hair contrasted sharply with the freshness of his unwrinkled face. His features radiated youthful enthusiasm. The slanting corners of his mouth implied a slight disenchantment.

After being a Professor of Aesthetics for several years in Washington, he had moved to Paris. His dignified manners and charming wit had quickly made him a welcome guest in the highest echelons of society.

His renowned health regimen, which combined regular exercise with the basic principles of classical aesthetics, had quickly earned him a large and wealthy clientele. James Milton had entrusted Howey with the artistic education of his foster daughter while the Comte de Trémeuse, a man very careful in choosing friends, had hired the health specialist to supervise the physical training of his stepson, Jean. The doctor appeared to be a man of high morals who was beyond material concerns.

Dr. Howey seemed to be savoring life as a blissful smile wandered on his lips. His contentment was symbolized by the bluish vapors escaping from his nearly exhausted cigar. Suddenly he quivered upon hearing a series of long coughs. Rising from the chair, Howey slowly walked a few steps before stopping. He noticed a man of medium height buried inside a vast leather armchair. The fellow had a large forehead, an immense nose and the distraught air of someone confused by life.

"Monsieur Cocantin!" exclaimed the professor. "I didn't notice you."

"I'm here more or less," said a gloomy voice.

"Exquisite evening!" commented Howey.

"Quite," said the hollow voice.

"Mademoiselle Primrose is a charming lady."

"Truly."

"Roger is a true gentleman."

"The best."

"They make an adorable couple."

"Indisputable."

"The Trémeuse family is lovely. Have you known them long?"

Upon hearing a direct question, Cocantin regained his composure.

"Why are you asking?"

"Isn't the Comtesse the daughter of a banker named Favraux?"

"I believe so," said Cocantin in a lugubrious tone.

"Didn't Monsieur Favraux die a year ago in mysterious circumstances?"

"I don't know," vigorously replied the man with the colossal nose.

Taking a seat next to his fellow guest, Dr. Howey continued to ask cordially.

"Comte de Trémeuse told me that you're the head of an important detective bureau -- the Céléritas Agency. Don't you conduct investigations for prominent families?"

"Well... I..," mumbled Cocantin nervously. Suddenly he became angry. "Doctor, don't ask me about such matters!"

"Pardon me." Howey smiled benevolently. "You're usually so loquacious. Why are you so morose tonight?"

The private detective rolled his bulging eyes. "Because I'm depressed."

"Depressed!" replied the professor who seemed more entertained than worried.

"For eight days I have been dispirited," divulged Cocantin. "It's horrible."

"Was your depression caused by sorrow?"

"More by contrariness. My darling wife, Daisy, went to America to claim an inheritance. Our delightful son, nicknamed the Licorice Kid, is attending an English boarding school. I feel lonely and unhappy."

"Why don't you seek a diversion?"

"I tried in vain." Cocantin's eyes widen. "While taking the train to La Frondaie this morning, I met an ingratiating woman, Baronne d'Apremont. We talked for a long while. She's very sweet. Do you know her, Doctor?"

"Thank God, I don't."

"That's the worse for you. She's extremely beautiful. She's the Italian ideal, a combination of Mona Lisa and La Tosca. She invited me to tea at her place! I felt that my moodiness had been healed. You must have noticed that I was in a good mood when I arrived at La Frondaie."

"You sparkled during dinner!"

"Upon leaving the table, I was consumed by melancholy. Neither the smiling ladies nor the witty conversation, nor even Jean's jests, could raise my spirits. In order to avoid disrupting the jovial mood, I hid in a corner. Doctor, I'm very ill."

"No, Monsieur Cocantin, you aren't ill."

"Then what's wrong with me?"

"You're suffering from a hypersensitive hysterotomy."

"What's that?"

"A rather unusual form of inertia."

"Is it serious?"

"Not at all -- provided you take proper care of yourself."

"What must I do?"

"You must perform special exercises. For example, you must walk in wet grass preferably in the moonlight. Then there's the slithering."

"The slithering?"

"You must crawl on the ground performing rhythmic movements that I shall teach you."

"And afterwards?"

"I recommend ritual dances in leotards. Try this prescribed treatment, and in less than eight days your depression will fly away as it evolves into a beautiful butterfly."

"You're sure?" asked Cocantin skeptically.

"I guarantee it."

"Then, Doctor, I'll try it. If it works, I promise to remember you in my prayers!"

From the lobby came a young woman's voice accompanied by the melodies of Debussy.

"Come listen to Mademoiselle's Primrose's singing," advised Howey. "It should do you a lot of good."

"You're probably right."

Getting out of his chair, Cocantin went into the hall followed by the professor. Stopping at the threshold, Howey watched the director of the Célérity Agency slip behind the piano. The doctor was puzzled. *How could an intelligent man like the Comte de Trémeuse be a friend of such a simpleton?*

As the Comtesse played on the piano, Primrose seemed to sing only for Roger. Her words of love were deified by Jacqueline's musical genius. Roger's face formed an indefinable expression as he murmured between his teeth: "My sweet dear!"

That evening Primrose fell into a deep sleep. Never had she been so happy. She felt enraptured in a lovely dream. When she closed her eyes, endless joy filled her being. She no longer feared the astounding nightmares that had plagued her. She was convinced that those disturbing shadows had been permanently exorcised. Only the fulfillment of her most ardent hopes seemed to lie in the future.

Primrose rested calmly, but gradually she felt signs of unease. While her eyes stubbornly remained closed, her breathing became irregular. Long sighs followed by exclamations of fright escaped from her lips. Opening her eyes, she raised her arms upward. Seeing a vision that shook her very soul, she finally spoke.

“The evil spirit! I see him... He’s here... I’m afraid... Roger, help me!”

Feeling as if she had been ruthlessly seized by an invisible hand, she dropped her arms. Primrose became totally inert. Then slowly she arose with dazed eyes. Getting out of bed, she robotically put on her dressing gown. With a somnambulist’s gait, she left the room. A mysterious occult force had supplanted her will. Primrose walked through the dark house. Descending the large stairway, she crossed through the room without bumping into any furnishings. Her steps were as silent as a ghost. It was as if a spirit from beyond had returned to stalk the material world.

Primrose entered James Milton’s study. In the obscure moonlight, she walked to a corner of the room. Halting in front of a vast library of books, her arm touched the wall. Her fingers groped for something. Near a portrait, she found a groove hidden in the wall panel. She opened a secret compartment that contained shelves filled with folders.

Without the least hesitation, Primrose removed a bulky yellow envelope inscribed with these words: “Automatic Propeller Plans.”

With a frightening serenity, she closed the secret panel. Still moving in a trance, Primrose returned to her room. Opening the door to her balcony, she walked into the open air. She dropped the envelope over the railing. The precious documents fell to the earth. A man had been hiding behind a clump of trees. Grabbing the envelope, he disappeared into the night.

Closing the door to the balcony, Primrose calmly returned to her bed. As she closed her eyes, she exhaled a deep breath. It was as if Primrose was expelling a sinister demon that had possessed her.

She returned to the sound slumber that had been interrupted by her sleepwalking. With a clear conscience, Primrose slept. Her angelic mouth uttered these words: “Roger... I love you.”

#### IV. The Terrible Enigma

After receiving the complimentary farewells of their guests, the Comte and Comtesse de Trémeuse joyfully retreated to the confines of their chambers.

While Jacqueline delivered a goodnight kiss on the forehead of her son Jean, Jacques entered his private study illuminated by Venetian crystal. He was examining the papers on his desk when a cry of surprise burst from his lips. A large yellow envelope had attracted his attention. Written on the surface were large characters in red ink: TO JUDEX.

Recovering from his shock, Jacques de Trémeuse opened the envelope. It contained the following message in bold handwriting:

*At a time when so many people are driven to despair, when criminals brazenly commit their atrocities, why doesn't Judex resume his mission of Justice and Redemption. Why doesn't he rescue the victimized? Is Judex too happy?*

The message was unsigned. Reclining in his armchair, Jacques reflected on the message.

*Who could have written this letter? It invites me to reassume the role of a champion of justice against these Secret Raiders whom Dr. Howey warned about. The mysterious correspondent must be someone involved in the terrible drama of last year.*

*Let's consider the possible suspects. It couldn't be one of my enemies. I have nothing to fear from Diana Monti, nor Moralès, nor Amaury de la Rochefontaine since they paid for their crimes and took my secret to their graves. Even if one of their former criminal accomplices uncovered my identity, he would hardly challenge me to combat an association of thieves and assassins. More likely, he would seek to blackmail me.*

*Could it be someone else involved in my earlier investigations? Favraux? Kerjean? Both of them live in retirement, and only want to finish their days forgotten by the world. Therefore, outside of Jacqueline, Roger and Cocantin, no one knows that the Comte de Trémeuse is Judex. Jacqueline is too desirous to preserve our happiness so dearly purchased. Roger is too enamored with Primrose. Cocantin currently seems unwilling to engage in a great adventure. This is bewildering!*

Unconsciously, but irresistibly, he recalled the past. Draped in his black cape, he had decreed a pitiless verdict against the wretch responsible for his father’s suicide and the destruction of his



mother's happiness. He relived dispatching his pack of bloodhounds against those opposed to the cause of justice. He remembered how a young woman and her child, innocent victims of his quest for retribution, had evoked the Angel of Mercy to halt the merciless execution of his righteous vengeance. His mission of implacable hate had been transformed into one of divine forgiveness.

How unforgettable had been those experiences! They had awakened in a modern gentleman of the 20th century the flame of the legendary paladins of the feudal era. These memories had made Jacques de Trémeuse feel once more a champion of limitless bravery and indomitable will. Despite his reluctance, a thought entered his brain.

*Yes, it would indeed be a glorious task to war against these elusive outlaws and frustrate their infernal designs. As my anonymous correspondent wrote, their victims demand justice. It is always righteous to assist those who suffer.*

*But why should I supersede those officially charged with punishing criminals? Do I have the right or the strength? I am now encumbered with responsibilities. Can I neglect my duties to my wife and child? They are my life as I am theirs.*

*No, Judex's mission is finished. My sole mission in life is to provide for the family that is the very core of my being!*

Jacques then realized who wrote the letter. It could only be his mother! She had trained him to become the living embodiment of justice. There were at least two servants in the household who were strongly loyal to her. One of them must have slipped the letter among his papers. His mother had romantic notions of retribution instilled during her childhood in Corsica. Those notions had dominated his early life, but no more! A year ago, Jacques had a fantastic idea of continuing his dual life as a vigilante once he returned from his honeymoon. The harmonious ecstasy of married life had rapidly driven that plan from his mind. No use in asking his mother about the letter. If she wrote it, she would still deny it.

He was about to destroy the letter when the door opened. It was his brother Roger, visibly distressed.

"Jacques! I have just witnessed something horrible!"

"What happened?" questioned the Comte sharply.

"Primrose has betrayed me!"

"That's impossible!"

"She betrayed me! I tell you! I saw it with my own eyes!"

Roger stumbled irrationally towards his brother.

Jacques responded with affectionate authority. "Calm down and tell me the truth."

Roger responded in a quavering voice. "About half an hour ago, I looked out the window. In this lovely summer night, I looked for my fiancée's house. In the middle of the lawn that leads to the Seine, I glimpsed the figure of a man behaving strangely. Avoiding the possibility of an unnecessary alarm, I went outside to investigate. I discovered the mysterious individual to be our friend Cocantin. He explained that his quirky movements were exercises prescribed by Dr. Howey.

"Satisfied with this explanation, I was about to return to the house. Then I heard a car motor near the side of the road. Approaching the gate, we spied a luxurious vehicle driving fast with its headlights extinguished. It parked near the fence separating the Chateau d'Arbois and La Frondaie. A man got out of the car and vanished into the night. I feared that he was trespassing on Milton's property. What I saw was horrible!"

"Continue," insisted Jacques.

"Cocantin and I followed him. We heard a noise inside our neighbor's grounds. We wondered if several burglars were trying to commit a robbery. We didn't hesitate. We climbed over the fence. There were no lights on in the house. The window of Primrose's room opened. She appeared. I moved forward, then I halted. Primrose leaned on the balcony as if she waited for someone. Then she let a letter drop to the earth. Appearing from behind a tree, an individual retrieved the letter. As Primrose left the balcony, the intruder bolted into the darkness. We pursued him, but he outran us. When we got back over the wall, the car was gone.

"Brother, we must face facts. Primrose is having an affair. She played me for a fool. She doesn't love me. She never loved me. How she must have secretly laughed at me when she lied about those hellish visions."

"What did she tell you?" asked Jacques.

“A ghost supposedly possessed her! She claimed it stole her will power. She must have been mocking me!”

“Finish your story.”

“I’m finished. Now you know how I suffer!”

Maintaining his self-control, Jacques responded gravely. “All isn’t lost. Don’t despair.”

“Brother, what are you saying?”

“Let me ask you some questions.”

“Ask.”

“Describe the man who retrieved the envelope.”

“I could barely see him, but he looked more like a criminal than a gentleman.”

“Was the letter in a large envelope?”

“It seemed rather thick. Its weight wasn’t light because it fell to earth very swiftly.”

“That’s all I need to know,” asserted Jacques. “I’m convinced this wasn’t a love affair. Listen very carefully. The plans of James Milton’s invention have just been stolen by the Secret Raiders!”

“Milton’s invention!” repeated Roger. “Then Primrose is the accomplice of notorious thieves. She betrayed her foster father -- the man to whom she owes everything! She seemed to love him with all her soul! Then she has committed a more abominable act than betraying me! No, Jacques! It’s impossible.”

“It’s the truth,” declared the Comte authoritatively.

“I know your powers of deduction,” acknowledged Roger, “but how can Primrose act like such a hypocritical monster!”

“What if she’s innocent?”

“Innocent!”

“Why not? She confided to you about her hallucinations. She claimed to be dominated by a will that annihilated her own.”

“Yes.”

“If this girl obeyed a criminal suggestion implanted in her mind, would she be responsible for her actions?”

“You’re right, Jacques! She is innocent! An angel like her can’t be a demon!”

“I hope I’m right, but I must be sure.”

“How can you prove your theory?”

“I shall act!” promised the Comte de Trémeuse full of vibrant energy. I have just received an anonymous message wondering when people are being victimized, why Judex doesn’t continue his mission of justice and redemption.

“To ensure your happiness, brother, I’m willing to sacrifice mine. I shall solve the mystery that has intruded upon this summer night. Even if I confront more fearful opponents and greater dangers than those of the past, I shall fulfill this mission imposed by brotherly love. I will restore your shattered love. Your happiness shall equal mine. I swear it!”

“Brother, I love you more than life!” replied the younger of the two siblings.

“Not a word in front of Jacqueline!”

“I promise!” Roger grasped his brother’s hands. “I shall wait.”

“As you wait, also hope.”