



AN UNEXPECTED RISE.

LA DUCHESSE DE PARAPLUIE.

A FRENCH ROMANCE.

CHAP. I.

"SHE is charming—adorable. She shall be mine. I tell you, *mon ami*, that without her I shall be desolated!"

"Ah, bah!"

"Cynic! Hast thou then never loved?"

"Yes—fifty times, at least."

This conversation took place between two of the *jeunesse dorée* in the Bois de Boulogne, while watching the magnificent equipage of the Duchesse de Parapluie, the charming owner of which had smiled graciously upon them. Henri Culdesac was the heir of one of the noblest families of Normandy, whose *chateau* of Kobonconque had been erected during the reign of Henri Quatre. He had come to Paris to complete his education, and there made the acquaintance of Count Raoul Victor Marie Joseph de la Conciergerie. He had some more names, but did not often use them. Count Raoul was a man of the world. At twenty-five years of age he could make love in six languages, had fought fourteen duels, spent three fortunes at the gaming table and was tired of living.

"Ah, bah!" repeated Count Raoul.

"But I love her to distraction."

"She is fifty-three years old."

"*N'importe.*"

"And she has already murdered two husbands."

"What has that to do with it when one loves?"

"Ah, bah! You do make me *fatigué*. But I had forgotten something."

"What—to pay a debt?"

"No, I have to fight a duel. Excuse me. But I shall kill him. *Au revoir.*"

And Count Raoul lounged languidly from the scene.

CHAP. II.

Henri Culdesac sank into a seat and remained in a state of dejection for over an hour.

Then he suddenly sprang to his feet and hailed a passing *fiacre*. Taking several gold pieces from his pocket he flung them to the driver.

"Where shall I drive, monsieur?" asked the latter.

"*Au diable!*" he responded gloomily.

"*Mais oui!*" replied the driver, as he whipped up his horses.

Hardly had they started before a man habited as an *ouvrier* emerged from the shrubbery, where he had been concealed, and hailed another *fiacre*.

"Your charge is——"

"Two francs an hour," replied the *cocher*.

"*Eh bien.* I will give you ten francs an hour. Follow that *fiacre*. Do not lose sight of it for an instant. *Marche donc!*"

It was the famous Lécocq, the detective!

CHAP. III.

The salon of the Duchesse de Parapluie, in the Faubourg St. Germain, was in full blast. A highly aristocratic company had assembled, including Max O'Rell, Gen. Boulanger, Sarah Bernhardt, and a distinguished foreigner from America known as "Le Faiquer." The hostess, arrayed in a dazzling *parure* of diamonds and some other clothing hardly worth mentioning, was the focus of masculine admiration. Round her hovered, as the moths round the electric light, several warm, not to say perspiring, admirers, who endeavored to enliven the conversation by brilliant epigrams and *bon mots* carefully prepared for the occasion.

"Mons. Villeneuve is not here to-night," said Max O'Rell.

"No," replied Count Raoul, giving him the cue agreed on, "his gout detains him."

"*Eh bien. Chacun à son goût,*" promptly replied the great humorist, whereat the audience indulged in well-bred hilarity. The correspondent of the New York *Herald* rushed off and hailed a passing *fiacre*.

"To the telegraph office, quick!" he said, tossing the driver a gold piece.

Meanwhile the party had sat down to baccarat and *euchre à chemin de fer*. Upon the board was heaped a glittering pile of I.O.U.s and bonds of the Panama Canal Company. The choicest brands of wines and liquor circulated absolutely free of charge. The proud families of the Faubourg St. Germain may not always pay their debts, but they would scorn to make a sordid profit out of their guests.

"Whither do you go, *mon ami*?" said the Duchesse to Count Raoul, as he rose from the table, where he had staked his last Napoleon and won a fortune of 3,000,000 francs, and languidly lit a cigarette with a 1,000 franc bill.

"Count Raoul yawned. "This thing is monotonous. I go to—to——"

"Speak!" she said, as the working of her mobile features betrayed the intensity of her feelings.

"I go," he said deliberately, "to hail a passing *fiacre.*"

"Ah, stay," she pleaded, twining her jeweled, aristo-