

The light in the basin flared up a little, casting dark shadows on the ceiling, and at the same moment the shutter, which I had failed to fasten securely, fell open with a grinding sound, one of the curtains swayed a little in the breeze. "I have robbed my master," I said slowly.

"Of how much?"

"A hundred and twenty thousand crowns."

The bed shook until the boards creaked under it; but this time no hand grasped the curtains. Instead, a strained voice—thick and coarse, yet different from that muffled tone which we had heard before—asked, "Who are you?"

"Jules Fauchet."

I waited. The King, who understood nothing, but had listened to my answers with eager attention, and marked no less closely the agitation which they caused in the unknown, leant forward to listen. But the bed creaked no more; the curtain hung still; even the voice, which at last issued from the curtains, was no more like the ordinary accents of a man than are those which he utters in the paroxysms of epilepsy. "Are you—sorry?" the unknown muttered unvoluntarily, I think; hoping against hope; not daring to depart from a formula which had become second nature. But I could fancy him clawing, as he spoke, at his choking throat.

France, however, had suffered too long at the hands of that race of men, and I had been too lately vilified then to feel much pity; and for answer I lifted a voice that to the quailing wretch must have been the voice of doom. "Sorry?" I said grimly. "I must be—or hang! For to-morrow the King examines his books, and the next day I—hang!"