

# The Day of Daheimus

By Vance Thompson

It is not strange these things happened—everything happens; what is strange is that they were not hid. They were done in open day, and even now the trail of them lies plain and discernible over the streets and avenues of the city. Murders have been done in ways so dark there was no uncovering them. Mole-murders; they crept so quietly underground there was neither heave nor ripple of the turf to mark their way. These crimes were successful because they were done in the dark. The bullet flew with none to note its flight. The poison struck, and none knew whence it came. The murderer got his vengeance, and found his safety, because he worked alone and in secret, with no witness and no accomplice. In just such a way, for instance, Père Vanille was killed in that obscure room in the Boulevard Voltaire; pulled down by a vengeance that had hunted him from Tahiti and the Southern seas; it was a crime of mystery; there was nothing but darkness and through it a flash of murder.

Now, the murder of Daheimus was mysterious because it was openly done—with public discussion and doctors and lawyer at the bedside. It was mysterious, I repeat, because it was done in a blaze of light. It was as though the murderer had hid himself in light so dazzling he could not be seen; as though his crime were based on the crowd of witnesses he drew about him.

He could not have gone more frankly about his business of revenge and murder, if he had brought Daheimus down Broadway in a gilt wagon drawn by six piebald horses, with outriders and a brass band leading the way; and a police parade following. And just because it was so public, it was mysterious as the arrow that flies by night.

Which is a strange thing.

In this account of the death of Daheimus, I shall not begin with the murder and travel back to the initial cause thereof; it is better to make a beginning the day David Rennich was carried out of the Daheimus brewery, his little leg pulped and broken. David was six years old, possibly seven. Pride was on him that day. For the first time, and also for the last, he carried a tin pail, containing his father's dinner, down to the engine room in the brewery. Being a small, alert boy, his black eyes quick with curiosity; he prowled into a danger zone, was caught in what interlocking play of steel I know not; and was rescued with a right leg hideously smashed.

Now of this small and broken David, it is probable Daheimus never heard. Fat, and blond, and huge, and happy, the Daheimus rolled through the kind of society such a man can find, seeking food and drink and laughter; and the brewery was merely the hereditary source of the money he wallowed in. Not to him would come word, or wail, of the young David, carted away to the hospital. Had he heard of it, he would have been moved to tears and violent outbursts of generosity; but of that trivial accident he never heard. And of course he was in no way responsible for it, no more than the wind that blew a colour into his fat and smiling face, as he waddled that midday to his club. Had Daheimus been a farseeing man . . .

Do you remember Holbein's Dance of Death at Basle? Cardinals and princes, merchants and beggars, women, children—and, as they dance, each is seized upon by his own Death, which is a grim and capering skeleton.

Had Daheimus been a farseeing man the day little David was caught in the interlocking play of steel in the brewery, he would have discerned a capering figure, still a long way off, that started

up and moved toward him—a lean piper blowing a tibia—his own Death; but Daheimus, as he waddled clubward, was thinking of other things.

Three months later David was taken back to his home with a shortened right leg that could not be made straight and which bent out at the knee, sideways, and was twisted in at the ankle. He was carried up four pair of stairs, for his home was in a tenement, built of shrewishly clean bricks and steel, that fronted the East River and had a view of Blackwell's Island—for modernised poverty has pre-empted one of the fairest sites in New York City. David was put in a chair, with another chair as a rest for his stiff and crooked leg; and his mother crooned over him. She was a little dark-visaged woman, who wore a wig made of brown flax, a dreadful, flagrant thing, such as the women of the Polish and Galician Jews of those parts put on with marriage. But Mrs. Rennich was not a Hebrew woman. She belonged to an obscurer and more tragic race. So far as she knew she was a gipsy. Somewhere, kindly Jews had found her—a waif-child in the streets—and given her food, home, nurture, religion; in due season they had married her to old Rennich. After ten years of married life there was no beauty in her, for she was wrinkled like an old woman and her teeth were broken and black; but there was something better than beauty in her as she crooned over her little son—she was radiant with mother love. It was only for this whelp of her tiger-breed she softened. And the whelp, stretched on the blanketed chairs, looked up at her with terror—and adoration. It was the look you have seen in the eyes of a dog, when it seeks godhead in a human face. It was evident that both his fear and his love pleased the woman. She stroked his head and kissed him and smiled. Then she went to the table and poured him out a cup of coffee. (The child had been weaned on coffee.) It was cold, for it had stood a long time; it was dark and full of dregs. She fixed her black eyes on him as he took the cup.

“Is it good?” she asked, “is it warm? Is it sweet for my little son?”

“It's cold and bitter,” said the child timidly.

She blew her breath on the coffee and little David, staring, saw it bubble and fume with heat; it whitened, under her breath, as though with milk; and when he tasted the hot liquid it was honey-sweet.

“Now it is sweet and hot,” he said; and drank it slowly.

His mother laughed and sat with her arm round him, crooning; so old Rennich found them when he came in.

All had not gone well with old Rennich since the accident. With East Side promptitude he had demanded compensation for David's injury. With unanswerable logic, the brewery-folk replied that David had no business in the engine-room, no justifiable interest in the interlocking play of steel; and that not a penny of compensation would be paid. Old Rennich might have been content, but the mother was of harder metal. Many and curious were the curses she laid upon Daheimus—rolling harmlessly in his social world of beer—curses multiple, awful, unprintable. She questioned the Gods of Things that Are to Come to Pass, blowing feathers and reading the scroll of the coffee-grounds; and always she found a fortune of money. At last she made the Test that Does Not Fail. She broke an egg into a plate and dashed boiling water on it and, lo! in lines and curves the yolk and albumen streamed toward her left hand—not her right—promising white silver and yellow gold. Thereupon old Rennich (having thriftily eaten the prophetic egg) went out and hired a lawyer. It was sending good money after a bad leg. The case was hopelessly lost. Thereupon the brewery, the principle of the thing being safe, made the Rennichs a present of two hundred dollars. It was not enough or it was too much; it took old Rennich on a wandering career of drink from which it was not in his destiny to return.

By this time (a year was gone by) little David was able to get about freely with that strange gait, half crawl and half hop, which was to be his way of going through life. The home was still in the high tenement overlooking the river. The mother saw to it they had fire and fuel. There was no lack of money, for now she told the weird fortunes that are in the coffee-grounds and the feathers and the egg on the plate, for those who could pay for knowledge of the Things that Are to Come to Pass. There were many of these folk. And the name of the old woman, for she looked old, was famous as far as Third Avenue. She called herself Zaquah. Moreover she promised to “heal” mysteriously the diseases of that wretched world that lay about her. She used a few drugs and herbs; but in the main she depended upon dark and uncouth mummeries that were far more effective. Often she laughed in derision as her dupes went away happy; then suddenly she would start and tremble lest she had offended the Powers; the dupester was also her own dupe. David, silent in the corner, saw and heard many strange things.

You can see him sitting there, if you will, a diminutive lad of nine, or ten, or eleven, for the years made little change. He was beautiful in an uncanny way, like some dark and deformed flower. His face was narrow and pale and almost perfect in contour; and the black eyes that looked out of it were bright with intelligence; they gleamed with it. His long, white hands were fashioned to wear rings and hold a sceptre. He should have been a king’s son on some perfumed edge of the Orient. And he crouched there in a tenement, while his old mother, withering more and more into a bag, whispered and cursed.

The curses were for Daheimus, but it was into the heart of her little son she poured them, that they might bear fruit.

Almost always David was silent. To his mother he gave only the answers she wished to hear. He would sit for hours, his dark eyes fixed on her, watching every movement of her hands, every grimace of her face, as she played her cheating games of sorcery and “healing”—herself, at last, her greatest dupe. She healed and wondered at her healing; she feared her own witchcraft, though she knew her own cunning had made it. *And* David sat there, his delicate hands folded, his pallid, pure face bent forward, like some unhappy little prince who had been caught by a hag and carried away to her garret. When the “clients” were gone, she held him to her poor old breasts, stroking his head and “laying love” on him. It was at such times she crooned murder into his ear. The name of Daheimus worked in him like a spell. At night, when she put him in bed, she kissed his warped and twisted leg and whispered that name; with it she woke him in the morning. Had not all her ills, the crooked leg of her son and the drink-harried death of her husband and her dangerous trade, with its fears and penalties, come from Daheimus?

And that foolish, harmless man?

Three or four times a year Daheimus rolled up to his brewery in a purple motor car, a fresh-coloured, smiling, huge man, overfed and underhealthed. He had no regular time for coming. He came upon impulse, when the fancy touched him. But in some unclean way, warned by the feathers or the clotted egg, old Zaquah knew when he would come. Always she was in the street to see him pass. Always, at her side, stood little David, white and silent, his great eyes blazing blackly at the man who was (even then) his victim. Then home again to the tenement, and the coffee that bubbled, and the “clients” bargaining for hope or health; and the litany of curses for Daheimus.

David had no companions; he could neither run nor play. In time (later than other boys) he was unearthed by an inspector and taken to school. He found a delight in his studies. The man’s brain in his little body hungered for the food of thought. One of his teachers called him a prodigy. It was as though he were not learning and acquiring things; it was as though he were remembering,

with amazing rapidity, an old familiar store of knowledge. There was no effort; he did not study; he steadied himself and remembered, so this teacher said.

“He shall be a great man,” she predicted; she patted his curls, for she loved the sad and gentle lad.

He became a great man, but not in the way she thought.

Zaquah’s room was filled daily with disease-riddled folk. Perhaps this was the reason David became a target for disease. When fever-stricken patients came to her, he, too, burned with fever, until she conjured it away. He had many illnesses; possibly they were not real, mere phantom illnesses that played with the sensitive child. They may have been old Zaquah’s experiments. But one of them cannot be explained that way. It was a disease that fastened a fungus growth in his throat one night. That day they had seen (as often before) Daheimus roll by in the big motor car; but he was a shrunken Daheimus, with a new look of cowardice in his kindly face. Old Zaquah had stared at him with set, clairvoyant eyes, for the few minutes his car had been halted at the street-crossing. When he was borne out of sight, she caught her son’s arm and laughed. And that night the foul thing blossomed poisonously in David’s throat.

This disease was real enough; it nearly put an end to the lad’s life, and her vengeance. (For a moment, too, the lean Death, capering toward the unconscious Daheimus, checked and paused irresolute.) Old Zaquah battled for days and nights, now brewing herbs, now invoking the Powers. Once, the room half-dark with wintry day, David seemed to be dying on the bed, a little tortured, twisted figure, with gaping throat. For a long while his mother stood over him, motionless. Then without haste, calmly, she went to her incantations. She lighted some inflammable liquid, perhaps alcohol, in a tin plate on the table. She fanned the flames with her hands and with her breath, whispering hoarsely, in words older than the Sphinx, the spells of her race. Hour after hour she called upon the Gods of the Things that Must Not Be. Her voice sank to a monotone; the passion went out of it; she became steady, serene, compelling—a dark hag commanding the flames. Suddenly she laughed aloud and went over and opened the door.

A young woman in a raincoat wet with melting snow came in diffidently.

“Does little David Rennich live here?” she asked.

“He is living here,” said Zaquah, and she pointed to the dying lad in the bed.

“Oh, poor David!” the young woman cried and went quickly to the bed and knelt. She was the schoolteacher who predicted David would be a great man, perhaps because she loved him. A woman sweet without witchcraft; swiftly competent as women are in, the face of death; within an hour she had him taken to a great hospital. Zaquah neither hindered nor thanked her. It was Doctor Gage himself, the great throat specialist, who operated on the boy.

“He will do well enough for a while,” Doctor Gage told the school-teacher, who had come, after her work, for word with him, “but there is nothing can stop it—nothing we know. Another operation and another and then death will come, but not as soon as he wishes! How old is he? It’s very sad.”

Still, for the time being, David was saved from the fell disease. He came out of the hospital taller, but still very small for his years. What was strangest was that his voice had wholly changed. It had been a soft and veiled voice; now it was hard, a voice of metal, dominant and clear.

He left the hospital hobbling at the side of the young school-teacher and talking to her in that new strange voice. He was full of gratitude and spoke to her without shyness, like a man. She smiled a little sadly, for the child she had loved was gone. Then school again.

And now came the day which picked up the threads of his life and knitted them to the thing he was to do in this world.

What Doctor Gage had said came true. Homecoming one day David pushed his mother away when she would have kissed him and pointed to his throat. The foul thing had come back, savager and more vicious than before. David threw himself down on the bed and lay there, silent, his hands clenched over his head. It may be that in those school-days other ambitions than that of murder had come to him, dreams of the fair things of youth, and now he realised that death was on them and on him; so he lay there, this little prince who had been stolen away from his destiny and tempered and edged for murder.

Old Zaquah bent over him and whispered: "You will sleep, my son."

"I cannot sleep," he whispered.

She laid her hands on his temples; and he slept.

In an hour she woke him.

"Now we shall go to the hospital," she said and got him his hat. The great hospital that dominates that part of the East Side was not far and they went afoot. No one stopped them at the door. No one questioned them as they went up in the hospital lift. They went straight and unhindered to the room where Doctor Gage stood washing his hands after his day's work, his white blouse cast aside. The great man recognised David at once and pain came into his look.

"So soon!" he exclaimed, "what do you expect me to do now? You must make an appointment. This is not right."

David's tragic eyes hurt him; he hid his sympathy in brusque impatience.

"Just look at his throat, Doctor," the mother begged, "just to see if it is bad—a minute, a little minute, Doctor!"

David did not speak.

"Well, come here!"

Doctor Gage turned on a reflecting light and made a swift examination.

"You must make an appointment as soon as you can. I will speak about it myself. It is very irregular your coming here like this. There—I'll do what I can."

Doctor Gage was a tender-hearted man, and in addition David had impressed him in a singular way. The black, hopeless eyes seemed to hold him.

"Is it very bad?" the old woman asked, "is it as bad as it can be? Is it so bad it cannot be cured?"

"I will do what I can," he said.

The eagerness did not die out of Zaquah's face as she led her son homeward, through the noisy avenue; it was there when they reached their room on the fourth floor of the tenement and it remained while she helped him into his bed. David saw it and fear struck at his heart, but he dared not speak.

"Lie still," his mother said, "but do not sleep."

He watched her through half-closed eyes. He heard her call upon her gods, with all the mummery she did not believe in, but feared. And then she wakened the flames in the tin plate on the table and blackened them with incense. Soon the room was thick with fumes; and in the fumes David gasped and sickened. The old woman went to and fro, busily, always chirping and whispering to her gods. Slowly the incense clouds faded; and she fed the flames on the plate with fiery spirits and they leaped up again. David saw that she was holding in the flames a little copper pot with a handle, a sort of ladle, half filled with some reddish fluid that seethed and stank. She held it there a long time, her hand wrapped in her upgathered skirt, as a shield against

the heat. Seen in that dancing light she was gruesome and unreal. The flax wig was askew, disclosing wisps of grey hair; her eyes were rimmed with red and water dripped from them; her half-opened mouth showed the broken and discoloured teeth. At last she poured the awful decoction into a cup and carried it to the bedside. David had not moved. She crouched down by the bed and drew him to her, turning his head over on her knee and opening his mouth with her fingers, as though it were a baby's mouth; then, slowly, she let the reddish fluid drip into his throat. After a few drops had entered his throat he gasped and choked, but she held his mouth shut. Again she let the fluid drip into his mouth; and again. Only when the ladle was empty did she place his head back on the pillow. Then she went to the table and kneeled there, whispering to the dying flames; for hours she did not move.

Now the thing is absurd and impossible; but it is an exact fact that when David stood up, just as day broke, his throat was clear. It was cleaner than it had been after the surgeon's knife delved in it. There was neither rawness in it nor pain. It was the throat of a hale man who had never known blight nor disease. And the voice had come back with a new and harder ring of metal in it.

These are facts; they are set down here without emphasis or exaggeration; you may attribute that cure (which Doctor Gage himself could not make) to the old woman's wizardry or to what chance you please; the compelling fact is that David was "healed."

There are, as you have seen, three important people in this story: Daheimus, who floated like a porpoise in a certain kind of society; the old woman who laid her curse on him; and David. But there are other people, tools of destiny, who come and go in the story. Of these, witnesses of the murder or accomplices, the chief is Doctor Gage, who had been brought into it by the selfless charity of a little school-teacher in a draggled raincoat. And the story has reached Doctor Gage's house. It is a wide, tall house of brownstone in lower Fifth Avenue. What had once been a spacious *salon* was now his reception room. Behind it were his offices and a private operating-room. Doctor Gage was a youngish man of fifty, loose-jointed, rather soft, with too much fat, but quick and energetic, a nervous, talkative man, full of gestures. World-famous; he was one of the great surgeons of the day; a man of science with a dangerous, eccentric touch of genius in him; this was and is Doctor Robert Eskelin Gage. For many weeks past one of his patients had been Daheimus. A changed Daheimus; he was older, thinner, and the redness had gone out of his cheeks; in his blue, bulbous eyes was a look of pain and fear. That huge throat down which he had fed such royal food, down which he had poured a flood-tide of burning drink, had rebelled. He rooted no more in the trough of life. All that lay in a dubious past. He was fighting for mere existence. Gladly he had given the brewery as a fee, had there been one to save him. He was Daheimus—the man with a cancer in his throat. His terrors and hopes had driven him to Europe, where the experts had delved and sliced in his throat; and he had come back to Doctor Gage, whom first he had asked to save him. A terrified, flabby man, he crouched in a big chair in the doctor's private office, waiting. And though he knew it not the thing he was waiting for was coming toward him—a skeleton, piping a tibia—swiftly on dancing feet.

It was three o'clock and David was making ready to leave his dingy home that faced Blackwell's Island and the river. Note, too, that exactly eleven years had passed since he had been carried out of the Daheimus brewery, with a pulped and broken leg, exactly eleven years since his mother's gods had begun to dream fitfully of murder. And it was exactly twenty-four hours since he had stood in front of Doctor Gage in his room in the hospital, and shown to him a throat death-poisoned with cancer. Now he stood looking at his mother. The youth had gone out of his face. It was a man's face, set and steady as a mask. Old Zaquah stared into his eyes.

"David, son of my man," she said, "after all the years today is the day."

And she talked to him of the old vengeance on Daheimus, and of her will, and his will, and the will of her gods; in just such a way she was wont to talk when a new client came to question the Gods of the Things that Are to Come to Pass. She chattered and chirped instructions to him with queer excitement. One had said the very springs of life within her were dancing and bubbling. A kind of youthfulness, gay and malevolent, looked out of her eyes. Her gods had not failed her. They had ripened her vengeance. They had fastened her curse on the throat of her enemy; there it festered and flowered. Surely the eternal *Dévas* of the East had not failed her. And now, for David could not fail her, her vengeance was secure. So she kissed him and sent him on his way, watching him, as he limped down the iron stairs of the tenement.

It was a strange, white-faced little figure in his new suit of black clothes, such as are sold in his highway for a few dollars; too large a hat fell over his brows, and shaded the thin face and the wonderful eyes. Now shuffling along the sidewalk with his queer staccato gait, now carried in a street car, he made his way to Fifth Avenue and the house of Doctor Gage. (A purple motor car halted at the kerb.)

David did not enter the waiting-room. He went down the hall and opened the door of the private office. Doctor Gage looked up at him impatiently.

“What the deuce do you mean by coming in here?” he asked.

“Listen to what I have to say,” David said quickly, in that new, vibrant and compelling voice of his.

“Oh, it’s you,” Doctor Gage said, recognising the patient who had come to him the day before, “you know, my poor boy, I can do little for you.”

“No, you can do little for any one, but what I can do, you do not know. I have come here to tell you.”

All this David repeated in a pompous way that might have been ridiculous had it not been for the strength behind the words. The answer the doctor found was rather curious: “You speak as one having authority,” he said; but a moment later he laughed at himself.

“You’re a strange young man,” he added, “but I am a strange old man—so I’ll hear what you have to say, if you can say it in two minutes. You will pardon me, Mr. Daheimus?”

His apology was to the flabby figure in the armchair.

“You looked at my throat yesterday,” said David, “look at it now, and then I will speak.”

Doctor Gage smiled at the air of authority, but for some reason he consented to make the inspection. A moment later he started back and cried, “My God! man,” for the throat he had looked into was that of a hale and healed man.

“What is it?” Daheimus whispered angrily, but Doctor Gage did not even glance at him. He was staring at David Rennich, as a bystander may have stared at Lazarus. David sat on the edge of the lacquer chair; he crooked his twisted leg under it, and laid his grotesque hat carefully on the floor.

“What you could not cure in my throat another has cured,” he said in his stilted way, “and I do not ask you to believe me or to believe your own eyes. My purpose is to convince you. You have men, rich men,” David went on, but he did not glance at the crouching bulk of a man in the armchair, “who would give a fortune to be healed as I have been healed. Therefore I must convince you.”

Daheimus was whispering anxiously: “His throat? What was the matter with his throat?” but they paid no heed to him.

“Convince me?” Doctor Gage repeated, “convince me?”

“I will give you the medicine that cured me. And when you have tested it and tried it—please do not interrupt me, let me say what I have to say—for I expect you to make every test you please, in your laboratory or in the hospital. Yes, certainly in the hospital. There are many poor men, as well as rich men, dying of that disease. Take one of those poor men, a man doomed to death, a man for whom all your science can do nothing, a man who must die. He will consent to the trial, and when he is cured—”

“What’s the game?” Daheimus put in querulously. “A game of life and death; I offer life,” David said, still looking at the doctor, “and you want to know what I will charge? To heal the poor man of cancer, nothing; to heal the rich man ten thousand dollars. Since that man has spoken, I tell you my price. I will give you, for nothing, sufficient medicine to cure one poor man, one hopeless case, in your hospital, or where you please. I will give you enough to cure two much men, if you will, or three. Then the experiments must cease and payment must begin”—and in those last three words, as David spoke them, was the ring of metal and menace; he ended by saying: “I have said what I came to say. Now it is for you to speak.”

And so the story draws close to the edge of murder.

There is no need of pausing here over the discussion that fell between Doctor Gage and Daheimus, or over the long examination, whereby Doctor Gage convinced himself of the certain fact that David, his cancerous patient, was wholly healed. Once he was convinced of the reality of the cure, the man of genius that was in the great scientist flashed into enthusiasm. There had still to appear in the transaction Dufayel, the lawyer. His business was to safeguard the man of money, and cancer, lest ten thousand dollars be taken from him. The advice of this shrewd and cynical man of law was this: “You risk nothing. Try this so-called cure on some poor devil, already condemned to death. If it saves him try another. Make sure. I understand your man is willing to supply the medicine for three experiments. When you come to try it on Daheimus I will hold the money. If the young man earns it, I will pay it over; if not, there is no one the poorer; but I hope to heaven I’ll have to pay it.”

“Write me out a paper that the rich man will pay the price when he is healed,” David had said, “and I am content.”

In this way it was settled; such a contract was signed and given to him.

Now after all this talk of poor men, it was upon a poor woman, dying horribly, the first experiment was made. What happened is a matter of public record. David brought the little phial, filled with reddish liquid, to the hospital and gave it to Doctor Gage. The only excuse Doctor Gage has given for the grim fact that the medicine was not analysed is that David Rennich would not permit it. The poor woman, who had been told of the experiment, drank it greedily, for she was drinking of her last hope, greedily as though it had been the wine of life. And it was the elixir of life. At dawn she stood erect, and her throat was clean as the mouth of a bride. For Doctor Gage it was as though the floor of the hospital rocked with miracle, for him and Dufayel, and the little cohort of medical men and surgeons. There is a full and public record of the second experiment, when a speechless, cancered man was dragged up out of the jaws of death. As before, David brought the medicine old Zaquah had brewed in the ladle, to the hospital in a corked phial; as before he had stood by and seen it administered. A third test was made. As the others succeeded, it succeeded.

And the day of Daheimus came.

That tortured man was mad with impatience; hope thrilled and chanted in him; he would have given not ten thousand but a hundred thousand, a half-million, what had he not given? Dufayel, his lawyer, had saner views of the real value of his life. Ten thousand dollars was the sum set

down in the contract; and that sum was to be paid to David, when Daheimus was pronounced, by a trinity of experts, to be healed. David had carried this paper home and old Zaquah had hidden it in her breast. How he had chirped and crooned that day! She made the draught for Daheimus, chirping and crooning over a nest of flames in the tin plate on the table! How she fed the flames with fiery fuel and brewed again the reddish liquid that had given life to a youth, to a woman, to two men, who lay in the door of death! Always she called to her gods, who were the *Dévas* of the East. David had not heeded much, until of a sudden she gave a cry of triumph, malignant and shrill; and looking quickly up he saw she was holding a paper in the fire under the ladle. The paper blackened, blazed up, and was consumed. Then David covered his face with his long, pale hands and was silent. He knew what paper it was she had burned; and if she had destroyed that promise of ten thousand dollars, then what price was Daheimus to pay? And suddenly he saw her vengeance as something formless and black, a cloud filled with venom; and he knew the murder of which she had whispered for so many years was ready to strike. How had he dreamed, or dared to dream, that he was to carry life to Daheimus as to the other three? He was death's errand-boy. The reddish brew in the phial was old Zaquah's vengeance, perfected in the years. Who drank it drank death.

Yet when she gave it into his hands, he took it quietly, and made ready to do his errand. She held him for a moment.

"David, son of my man," she cried, and threw herself down and kissed and stroked his twisted leg and chirped and chuckled to herself, or to her gods, in spasms of frightful merriment; an old hag drunk with the drink of vengeance, and his mother. He looked back at her as he went out, and there was a strange smile on his white face. She should have what she had sought so long; her will and the will of her gods should be done.

It was the day of Daheimus; and David went limping swiftly through the streets, to the house in Fifth Avenue, where the hope-shaken man crouched in the great armchair. By the chair Doctor Gage stood. There were three other surgeons in the room, a doctor of medicine and a white-garbed woman, a nurse. By the window Dufayel, the lawyer, lounged in a lazy attitude, but his eyes were cynical and alert.

"Quite ready," Doctor Gage said softly; he took the bottle and held it between his eyes and the light. Indeed every eye was on that red-tinted phial, even the blue, protuberant eyes of Daheimus, as the great surgeon held it up to the light; every eye save those of Dufayel, the man of law. He was scrutinising David's pale, mask-like face. What he saw there he could never explain, not even to himself. It may be he saw nothing; and it may be he caught a fugitive glimpse of a young soul, staring into the blackness of death. For David at that moment stood face to face with his tragedy. His thought was with his old mother; he could see her twisting in frightful merriment, as she dreamed of her vengeance on Daheimus, the fruit of so many years. Even so, she should have her vengeance. That was her due. He would not thrust himself between her and her reward. What she had sown she should reap. And what was he but the sickle in her hand? What must be, must be. Only there was one thing David knew: when vengeance is taken, some one must pay. If old Zaquah won she must lose; for that is the Law of Things. She must pay for what she wanted most with what she held dearest. And thinking thus, David lifted his head, and there was a smile on his white face.

Doctor Gage was speaking to him.

"It is a larger bottle, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, there's more than is needed," David answered slowly, "for him."

Doctor Gage poured the reddish liquid into a measuring-glass, filling it to the exact line that marked the proper dose. A little more than a third of the drug was left in the phial. Still smiling in his strange way David picked up the little bottle and held it to the light.

“A wonderful medicine, Doctor Gage,” he said, “a very wonderful medicine! It has a harsh and evil taste, but you can drink it like milk. It heals and it cannot harm. Like milk,” he repeated, and set the phial to his lips; and drank. Then he straightened up, as best he could, on his crippled leg and folded his thin arms across his heart. And always he smiled, like a brave man among enemies.

Daheimus broke the silence.

“You all keep me waiting,” he croaked angrily, “for weeks and weeks—”

Doctor Gage administered the medicine.

Five minutes. Ten minutes, and the Daheimus heaved himself out of the chair and stood, gasping, but radiant, as though he had indeed quaffed a cup of life. They laid him on the chair again, the doctors in a cluster round him.

David spoke in his hard, metallic voice, again as one having authority:

“Let the experts decide. When the three experts have decided I shall come for the price. And now I shall go.”

No one answered him. The doctors were listening to Daheimus, who was clamoring that he was healed, and would not be still. Even Dufayel was leaning over the nurse’s shoulder, staring at the rich man who had been called back to life and abundant health.

David hobbled out. Once in the avenue, he hurried on at a great pace, and turned into a side street. There he went more slowly, for his crooked leg kept crumpling up under him. At last he fell and rolled over on his side; his head jerked horribly; then his mouth twisted open and, little by little, a glaze crept over his eyes; and David Rennich was dead. Almost at the same time the poor, frightened soul of the Daheimus was wrenched out of his body, in the presence of four great surgeons, a qualified medical man, a trained nurse and a leading lawyer of the New York bar. No mole-murder; Daheimus was done to death in a blaze of light.

What was it the little school-teacher said of the gentle lad she loved?

“David will be a great man some day,” she said.

He was a great man, but not in the way she thought.