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Robert W. Lowndes, Editor

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Be Young Again!

★ FEATURE NOVEL ★

by Murray Leinster

(author of "Nobody Saw The Ship")

"Can't you picture how Yachtie will fall for this Elixir of Youth proposition?
He'll see himself young, surrounded by pretty girls. . ."





(illustration by Lawrence)

Just about every confidence gag had been tried on old Vachtii, except the Elixer of Youth. Only this was different — Professor Barr had a unique pitch on it, but Buck had the real goods!

ME AND a guy named Hermes Trismigestus take care of the situation when Jode gets in a very tight place. This guy Trismigestus is anyways a thousand years old, if he's alive anywhere, and I am sixteen, but we co-

operate. The tight place is caused by Prof Henry Barr, who urgent regrets the matter later on, and by Mr. Vachti, who is an elderly bootlegger baron in the dear dead days; he still has bodyguards hanging around him bloodthirsty. If you think an old guy like Mr. Vachti can't figure in a tight place—he's got some tough-looking goons around and a yacht and a private island estate and other trimmings—all I got to say is you never met Mr. Vachti.

Old Jode gets into it because he thinks it will top off his career. Pride. He is the party who once worked a handkerchief-switch on Ma Mandelbaum, who I understand was the biggest lady fence in the world in her day, and wasn't to be swindled by an amateur. He also once sells a gold brick to the United States Mint in Denver, Colorado. And once he persuades the police department of a certain fair city that he is a Fed man with a tip-off on a bank robbery that is gonna take place. He has every cop in town ambushed around that bank that night, while he lurks inside with a tommy-gun, waiting for the bold bad burglars that never arrive. He acts much embarrassed next morning.

But a coupla days later the liquid assets of the bank turn up in the mail addressed to him, because he has spent those long hours packing them neat in Manilla envelopes and mailing them in the mail-slot that is in the bank for the convenience of depositors. But, still, Jode feels that taking Mr. Vachti over the hurdles will crown his career. Mr. Vachti was a very big shot once, when his business staff included not only income-tax men and tommy-gun experts, but also gentlemen who specialize in putting people in barrels of concrete and dumping them in the Chicago River.

I meet old Jode when I am thumbing a ride towards the Coast. I have beat it from what you might call home after my old man works me over with a chair for spending money I earn on a gas-engine for a model aeroplane instead of giving it to him

to get drunk on. I am not making out so good at hitch-hiking, because, being sixteen and not looking any older, I hafta dodge truant officers everywhere. But I get by; I fix a car-radio for a guy at a fillin'-station while old Jode is having his gas-tank filled up, and the guy says swell and gives me a half a buck. The job I done would cost him twelve sixty at a regular repair-shop. I says, "I could do with a lift to Phoenix," but the guy isn't going that way. Then old Jode wheezes cordial that he is, so I climb in his car.

He is fat and old and has danglin' red wattles, and he looks like he is made of money and hasn't a care in the world. Outside of havin' the cops of sixteen or eighteen states passionate interested in his whereabouts, he doesn't have no worries, and lookin' like a million dollars is his business. But I don't know that then; he talks to me cordial, and we get on to science, a subject in which he is interested but don't know beans about.

With him asking questions, grunting and respectful, I tell him the theoretic perfect fuel for space-ships, and the difference between a rocket and a jet, and what the Doppler effect is, and what's the difference between Oak Ridge and Hansford, Wash. I'm not showing off, you know; I explain that I read a lot of science magazines and he'd ought to try them. Special the science-fiction ones. And I tell him I'm headed for the Coast to get a job in a radio repair shop, like I had back home after school and Saturdays, and I'm going to save up and have a private experimental laboratory. I got some ideas—science-fiction ideas—that I think I can make work out actual.

Old Jode gets thoughtful. Later on when I know him better I will know what that means. Right then, though, when he beams and says he would like to play a joke on a friend, and I seem a handy young man with tools, I just say modest that I'm pretty fair. He makes me a proposition. He'll stake me to grub and hotel expenses and a suit of clothes, and say I'm his nephew, if I'll fix

him a trick television cabinet with a movie sound projector inside so he can fool a friend into thinkin' he's got a long-distance receiver that'll pick up from anywhere. I can do that with my hands tied behind my back; I take him up quick. I improve the idea; I suggest color-film, which will look like three-color television in action.

MR. VACHTI don't have any-thing to do with this deal. Neither does the Prof, who at that time is fumbling happy with a swell idea that he don't know how good it is. This is Phoenix, Arizona. So old Jode buys the stuff I say is needed—he acts like he is made of money—and I put it together in the hotel-room he gets for me next to his. It's a swell hotel, the best in town, and I eat fancy grub that I don't know the names of, being you have to order it in French. When the job's finished I figure on thumbing my way further, but old Jode says perish the thought. He will put me on salary as his technical assistant.

He waddles around town, wheezing and busy, while I catch up on my science reading. I'm knee-deep in magazines when he comes tiptoeing into the room and says joyous that his joke worked and he's beating it before his friend gets wise. So we light out, and he chuckles happy all the way up to Sun Valley—which is considerable of a ride—where he says he would like to rest a few days. When I get to know him better I find out that he shows what was apparently three-color television to some sharp business men in Phoenix; they get together and pull a fast business deal on him, and swindle him excessive by paying him only twenty thousand bucks for all rights in a epoch-making discovery. Which when they find out they been stuck they can't say a word, because their methods are at least unethical if not illegal.

Old Jode soaks up sun and fancier grub than ever at Sun Valley, which is a very swank place indeed, but I get restless. Then one day he comes

in chucklin' and says that he will have great fun with his friend the president of Western Power if I can contrive something that looks like it is a receiver of beamed or wireless power, and can it be done? I says it will be phoney but if he wants a laugh, okay. So I make a set with a coupla thyratron tubes and this and that and it looks just like a science-fiction illustration. But the power it delivers so impressive comes from storage-batteries built in the work-bench it's built on.

I would like to see him play his joke, but he says no. I sneak a look in the window, anyhow, and I get the picture. I don't hear the actual dealing, but Western Power pays him plenty for full ownership of the gadget, with the agreement that they are going to smash it right where it sets and try not to have bad dreams about what it would do to their business.

We leave Sun Valley with old Jode on top of the world and beaming at me affectionate. I have got wise, now, and I talk to him stern. He is upset, but he tells me the story of his life—he gets proud of it as he goes along—with all about how he pulls the handkerchief-switch on Ma Mandelbaum, and the gold brick on the Denver Mint, and all the rest. It is a very adventurous career he describes, and it even has glamour. Then he promises that if I stay on as his technical assistant I can have a private experimental laboratory of my own, and he will leave me in the clear in all dealings. So I settle down to planning what I'm gonna have and how I'm going to use it. I expect to set up my laboratory in Eas Lagunas, where we are heading.

LAS LAGUNAS is another swank place, with all the bills-of-fare in French and the prices lookin' like Army-Navy estimates. I send for lab-supply catalogs and start hunting for a place to set up shop. Then Jode—who has been circulating social, wheezing happy and contagious—says apprehensive that I better not plan on a lab here, because we may

have to move. I ask why. He says he has met Mr. Vachti, and to top off his career he has got an ambition to put over a fast one on him. After that, he says, he will retire and devote the rest of his life to supervising my education.

I am not keen on having my education supervised, but Jode explains that Mr. Vachti is the one guy who has put it over on everybody, and nobody has ever put anything over on him. He is famous from prohibition days. He even beats the income-tax rap the Feds try to pin on him when they despair of linking him with missing persons they think are in barrels of concrete at the bottom of the Chicago River. Mr. Vachti is completely surrounded by lawyers and personal physicians; he is seventy and keeps his old body-guards out of sentiment, wears dark spectacles, and has a most unpleasant hobby. He owns a yacht, an island, and several million dollars, but his hobby is getting people to try to swindle him and then sending them to jail. He is very respectable now, says Jode, and a good many artistic swindlers have worked on him, but he does not appreciate their artistry. It is a challenge, says old Jode. It will be something to remember in his declining years, Jode says, if he nicks Mr. Vachti for a roll and gets away with it. If I will postpone my laboratory until he is through with Mr. Vachti, he will buy me a eighteen-foot sailboat that I can have personal, and I can loaf around in it while business goes on.

I make the deal. The price of my laboratory is climbing as I think of more things I would like to have. I figure if Jode gets rich enough, maybe I can nick him for a small-sized cyclotron and have some fun. Meanwhile a sailboat won't be bad.

I get it. I do have fun. I have never heard of Hermes Trismegistus; I have never heard of Paracelsus, or Dr. Dee, or Dr. Faustus, or Nicholas Flamel, or any of those guys. I have never heard of Prof Henry Barr. But I learn to sail my boat pretty good and I am happy planning my laboratory.

But old Jode loses his carefree look; he gets absent-minded and fretful. One day he confides his woes to me. "I am afraid," he wheezes pathetic, "that I am losing my grip, Buck. I know Mr. Vachti well. We are on confidential terms. He thinks I am a retired banker, and he has confided to me all about his hobby, and tells me with grim amusement about the various sucker-baits he has been invited to fall for. And I cannot contrive a scheme to offer him! Every type of enterprise the mind of man can invent has been tried on him! The most refined of financial shennannigans have failed! He is on to everything!"

I say, "Yeah?" I would like to be helpful; that laboratory is going to cost money. A electron-telescope ain't cheap. I need for Jode to be prosperous to keep his promise.

"He has opened his files to me," says Jode, wrinkl'n up his fat face like a baby tryin' not to cry. "All the games he has pretended to fall for, with the news clippings of the trials and sentencing of the operators! He even has the records of the parole board hearings on them, and how he has protested the freeing of such criminals. That file is most informative. There are a coupla twists that even I never heard of before. The greatest artists in the business have worked on him, Buck! It would be a artistic triumph to diddle him. Indeed, I could not rest easy in my grave without havin' a try at him!"

"I bet," I says, "that if he ever does fall, it will be for somethin' a three-year-old would laugh at."

I don't know why I say it, but Jode's mouth drops open. He blinks at me, and suddenly he begins to wheeze happy again. "Genius!" he says. "That's the trick! Now I start hunting for the oldest, stalest, most impossible trick in the world! Somethin' so old and phoney nobody would think of tryin' it. I think, Buck, that as my technical assistant you show genius!"

He struts out, a fat little guy with sporty clothes who looks like a retired banker without a worry in the world. And around this time a new

crop of science magazines appears on the newsstands; I buy the lot of 'em and loaf around in my sailboat, readin' 'em and making plans.

2

ONE WEEK passes, and two. Then Jode tells me he wants me to have dinner, formal, with a Prof Henry Barr whom he has contacted because he's got a hunch that the Prof has maybe the scheme he is looking for. The Prof had an advertisement in the paper. It reads:

I have made an unconventional scientific discovery that I do not know how to develop commercially. An entrepreneur or financial adviser with some money is sought. Address Biologist, Box 711 care this paper.

"It's crude," says Jode, helpful. "It wouldn't get a nibble from real money. All he could hope for would be a sure-thing player or a legal counsellor tryin' for a long-shot cut. I have invited him to dinner. In prosperous surroundings he will be excited and probably spill his hand. You will pass on the plausibility of his scientific discovery. It is one of the things I pay you for."

Well—I play up. I am passing for Jode's nephew in the very swank surroundings of Las Lagunas, where Jode's and my hotel-suite costs more money per day than I ever hoped to make a week. I prefer hanging around in my sailboat, reading science-fiction and planning my laboratory, but I get combed up and put on a snazzy suit Jode has bought me; we meet this Prof and Jode waddles grand into the hotel dining-room. They have cocktails and I have a coke and then the business starts.

Old Jode eats his oysters, noisy and with gusto, and wipes his mouth. "I was—hrrrm—much interested in your advertisement, Professor Barr," he wheezes. "It is a beautiful approach. However, I will bet cash money that you didn't get a single answer besides mine worth your talents."

"True," admits the Prof. He is a dignified but seedy-looking guy with long white whiskers. He strokes

them reflectively. "I had a number of replies, but few of them suggested financial responsibility."

The waiter serves the soup. Jode sniffs at it and beams. "The chef here," he says, "makes soup which is almost music—What have you got, Professor?"

The Prof begins his spiel, dignified. "Why," he says, profound, "I had better explain that I was Professor of Medieval History at Perkins College for thirty-five years. I was released because a wealthy alumnus offered to add to the endowment if a son-in-law of his was taken on the faculty and his habit of getting drunk frequently was ignored. I had to be released so the college could take advantage of the offer."

"Hrrrm," says Jode. "My sympathies, sir."

"I do not blame them," says the Prof, resigned, "but I shall never again practice teaching as a profession... The point is that in my studies of medieval history I naturally came across many mentions of alchemy. The alchemists, you are doubtless aware, searched for the Philosopher's Stone to turn base metal into gold; for an Alkahest to dissolve all known substances; and they searched for the Elixir of Youth. I planned to write a scholarly treatise on the contributions of alchemy—gunpowder, metallic tinctures in medicine, sulphuric acid, and all the foundations of chemistry. But as I studied the source-material, I found the reports of their work singularly convincing."

Jode looks at me. I nod. Something like this hasta be the truth. Sure! Astronomy started with fortune-telling. Chemistry must have had as crazy a beginning. I nod emphatic.

"It has been pointed out," says the Prof, profound, "that if one set a million monkeys at a million typewriters and kept them pounding away at random, by the mere operation of the laws of chance one of those monkeys would ultimately rewrite the Smyth Report on Atomic Energy. And it is easy to calculate that during the Middle Ages there were enough alchemists making ex-

periments practically at random to produce outstanding discoveries by sheer happenchance. Some of these discoveries we know. I have mentioned them. But I have proof that they made others."

OLD JODE leans back in his chair. This is the oldest of all known swindles. It is worn out long before the first gold brick is made. Old Jode is astounded at his good fortune; this is perfect for Mr. Vachti, who has never been put through the wringer by any person whatsoever.

"Hrrrrrrm!" says old Jode. "Pray go on, sir!"

"Some three years back," says the Prof, "I took the money I had intended to use for my summer sustenance, and duplicated the alchemical process described by Dr. Dee for the production of the Alkahest—the Universal Solvent. It began with icelandic spar, or calcium fluoride. The intervening processes were absurd. But as a result I achieved a liquid which turned out to be hydrofluoric acid—the acid which is now used for etching glass, and which is so nearly a universal solvent that it can be retained in fleuro-carbon plastic bottles."

I perk up my ears. Old Jode sees my face. He grunts: "Interestin'. Pray continue!"

The waiter serves some *boef a Marechal Chateaubriand*. Jode drools. He begins to stoke himself steady.

"I had proved one alchemical discovery true," says the Prof. "The Philosopher's Stone."

Old Jode chokes. He says, pained: "Not a process to make gold! Please, Prof—"

"The Philosopher's Stone," says the Prof; stern, "may have been achieved. But when metals are transmuted the energy-release is tremendous; it is atomic energy. When uranium is changed into boron and such, an atomic bomb is the result. The manufacture of gold would involve highly lethal radiation in vast quantities. I did not attempt to duplicate the Philosopher's Stone!"

"That's better," says Jode, relieved.

"But," says the Prof, "I did—at great and crippling expense to myself—repeat Hermes Trismigestus' process for making the Elixir of Youth. And it worked."

Old Jode looks, blinks, and then he begins to kinda glow with happiness, inside and out. This is the oldest swindle on earth. It goes back to before history. It is so cold and so worn-out that it is undoubtedly the only one that ain't been tried on Mr. Vachti—and for a bloodthirsty old guy now gloomily hangin' on around seventy, it is the one bait that he would like to believe in if he could.

"Remarkable!" wheezes Jode. "You have experimental evidence, of course?"

"I begged myself procurin' the materials," says the Prof, apologetic. "Modern chemicals will not work. One must use the impure, the sometimes ridiculous chemicals of the ancients. It is possible that the very impurities are the essential ingredients. But at the cost of all my savings, I made ten cubic centimetres of yellow fluid. I tried a bit of it on an ancient rat from the biology department at Perkins. It worked—too well. Much too well! So I—ah—I was forced to experiment for the proper dosage. One cubic centimetre of the yellow fluid—the elixir—it developed, would restore a twenty-pound animal to early maturity. Seven to ten centimetres would be required for an adult human being. But I had to expend eight cubic centimetres to verify this fact in my experiments on small animals. I have only two centimetres left. But I do have a number of very elderly rats at my dwelling. I will let you choose any one of them; I will administer the elixir, and allow you to take the animal away and care for it. In three days it will be a young rat again."

"Such evidence would be unquestionable," beams Jode. "How much?"

"Eh?" says the Prof, startled.

"You need the Elixir yourself," says Jode, grunting amiable. "You

are broke. If somebody will finance the makin' of an adequate supply for you, you will make enough for him, too. You see, I am saving you the trouble of makin' the pitch. And I say again, how much?"

The Prof's eyes gleam. He wets his lips. Jode says confidential. "I am a customer. I can fetch in another—a very rich man. If I finance the operation myself, will you split with me what I get outa him? Your split will be in five figures. Maybe more."

"I—ah—when I am a young man again," admits the Prof, "it would be a very good idea to have some capital with which to start life anew. Er—yes, I will agree to that."

Jode asks questions, fast, and peels off century-notes like he was dealing a hand for set-back. He is hooked; he is beaming. All during the rest of dinner he wheezes and snorts happy to himself.

AFTER THE Prof has gone away, old Jode says scornful that he is strictly a small-time operator, and he doubts if he ever took over a customer for as much as a grand in all his life. But he figures Prof is ripe for plenty more than this first installment, which is what Jode wants. Up in our rooms, he is still grinning with all his chins and wattles.

"A lovely business, eh, Buck? Convincin', too! Can't you picture how Vachtu will fall for this Elixer of Youth proposition? He'll see himself young, surrounded by pretty girls..."

"I know of a coupla science-fiction writers coulda done it better," I say, detached. "But it's good enough. It would take a good man to find a hole in that theory. In fact, it would prob'ly work."

"Huh?" says Jode.

"It would prob'ly work," I repeat, firm. "That catalyst stuff is good reasonin'. I knew a fella got fired from a silverplatin' plant and he took a file and filed off some powdered bakelite into each one of the platin' baths to get even. The firm near went crazy. The bakelite don't dissolve or anything, but you can't plate when it's in the bath. It's a

antioatalyst. Some of those impurities the Prof was talking about must keep the regular chemical actions from takin' place, so you get what he said."

Old Jode sits down and howls.

"That stuff about the million monkeys is true," I point out. "I read that myself in a science magazine. I got a hunch there's more to his idea than he figures. If my laboratory was set up I'd try it myself. Maybe I better had, anyways."

"Buck!" wheezes old Jode. "You'll be the death of me!"

He near strangles, laughin'. I get mad. "Okay," I say, "but I tell you right' now you better let me do it if you sure-enough want that elixir. Icelandic spar ain't what he said. He's got good dope, but he's a phoney!"

Old Jode thinks that's so funny I go out and take a walk to cool off. But the more I think about it, the better the Prof's stuff looks. Next day I go to the public library and hunt up alchemy. I get a bunch of books out in the reading-room. Trismigistus. Bacon. Theophrastus. Paracelsus. Count Graby. I read them, fast, taking notes when necessary. I get fascinated; the stuff sounds plenty convincing. I get excited. It's as good as some science fiction. I fill my head up with the stuff, and a note-book with memos.

I go to a drug-store and buy some test-tubes. I get a alcohol-burner and some denatured; I go to a paint store and buy some more stuff. I have to hunt high and low before I can find a hobby-shop with geological specimens. I get some stuff there. Fluor-spar. The clerk sells it to me indifferent. Plenty of guys my age mess around with experiments; I get everything I need, except some egg-skin.

I go back to the hotel, lock the door and put the stuff together. I have not got pure chemicals. A hunk of native sulphur. I catch some soot from safety matches that I burn one after another under a metal ash-tray. I've got a hunk of sal-ammoniac—lump stuff, not what they sell at a drugstore. Nobody will sell me oil

of vitriol, but I get some at a garage where they have it for storage batteries. I got some iron pyrites. I mix the stuff up careful. It makes an awful stink. I have to open the windows. I go through all the routine that a guy named Dr. Dee says would make a universal solvent. Nothing happens. Nothing at all.

I am pretty much disgusted. The Prof's stuff sounded good. If I'd read it in a science magazine I would've believed it and remembered it. But nothing happens. Next morning I am having breakfast when I remember about the skin of an egg. That is crazy. It ain't scientific; not modern scientific, anyhow. But I go upstairs with a egg-shell from breakfast. I get out that thin skin from inside and put it in the test-tube. Nothing happens.

I get disgusted all over again. I sit down with a science magazine, and I am reading it morbid, when I smell something funny. The test-tube is empty. There is a little white vapor around the bottom. There is a hole in the test-tube; there is a hole in the sink; there is a hole in the floor underneath. It stinks something awful. I don't know how far down the hole goes, but I know I got to get a laboratory and work this business out!

I TELL old Jode about it. I show him the hole in the floor and the sink. He turns funny colors. "You mighta made poison gas, Buck!" he says. "You coulda killed yourself! It coulda been poison!"

"It wasn't whipping cream," I agree. "It's what those alchemists said they got. I got my doubts the Prof ever did this experiment, even if he said he did. You better let me fix up a temporary laboratory and make that elixir for you."

But Jode looks pained. "Buck," he says, "I have sounded out Mr. Vachti. I have explained that I have been softened up on this business. I have acted dumb so he thinks I have fallen for it. He is checking up; you got to stay out of this party!"

"But the Prof ain't going to make the real stuff!" I say, grim. "I'll bet—what kinda apparatus is, he buyin'?"

Jode shows me a list. He is fat and white-haired an very impressive to look at, but when it comes to science he has to take my word for things. I say, scornful: "Phoney! I hunted up Hermes Trismigistus in the library yesterday and got the formula. That vacuum distillation apparatus ain't going to be used! It's just to dress up the lab."

"It's wrong, eh?" says Jode.

"It's crazy!" I says. "Just good apparatus wasted!"

"Fine!" says Jode, relieved. "I didn't think he believed it himself; if he wasn't a crook I'd be messed up. But he's still got me worried. How's he gonna pull that trick of makin' rats young again, Buck? Mr. Vachti wants to see that—him handling the rats. If the Prof is smart enough to put that over, Mr. Vachti is hooked!"

"If I wanted to do it," I says, scornful, "I'd put some rats on short grub an' castor oil and get 'em thin. Then I'd powder their fur to make 'em gray, and probably get a vet to give me something' to make 'em off their feed and languid. They'd look plenty old! And all they'd need to get young again would be two or three days of good eatin' an' no castor oil."

"Genius!", says Jode, beaming at me affectionate. "You take a load off my shoulders. Tomorrow Mr. Vachti and me we look over the rats and I bet you got the trick exact. The Prof is mighty cagey with his two centimetres of stuff."

"Better let me make it for you real," I say, warning.

"You stay outa this!" grunts Jode, scared again when he thinks of that hole in the sink and the floor. "And don't go mixing up any more poisons, hear me?"

He is honest worried. He ain't a bad guy; he's a crook, of course, but in his way he's all right. Right now he's paying for me to stay at a plenty swank hotel, passin' for my uncle—which keeps me outa truant-officer trouble—and he tries earnest to make me appreciate *souffle marin avec pate de fois gras* as superior to the hot dogs I eat a lot more frequent. But he is firm about me not making

any more experiments.

Well, I can handle that. I got a sailboat, ain't I? I fix up a locker with a padlock, and I start accumulatin' materials, duckin' into the library occasional to get more dope from translations of Hermes Trismigistus and Count Graby and Nicolas Flamel and so on. I get to be a expert on alchemy, which some ways is almost as interestin' as science fiction, only not so likely. It looks to me that with a good thick concrete screen and remote-control handling of materials to take care of radiation, it might be a good idea to see if the philosopher's stone formula does give nuclear fission. But right now I try something with immediate practical use. I go after the Elixir of Youth.

3

IT IS surprising how hard it is to get some things. Dragon's blood, which the formula calls for, ain't what you think and you don't buy it at a art store, either. And raw natron is not easy to get hold of. I am almost stumped by ashes of mandrake, though; there simply ain't any mandrake in the United States. But I hunt it up in the botany books, and I find a weed that's a close cousin, I spend two days off in the woods hunting it, and I find some and compare the leaves with those in the book.

Then I got to reduce it to ash, and I'm drifting around in the bay with a terrific stink and plenty of smoke coming from my apparatus in the sailboat. It don't occur to me what it looks like, but all of a sudden there's a booming noise, and a fast motor-yacht is streaking up to me, and it looms up and a couple tough-looking guys are looking me over. One of 'em says: "You on fire, kid. Want us to douse it for you?"

I say no thanks; I am cookin' lunch and it got scorched; they look me over curious and the motor-yacht goes on its way. I read the name on its stern and it's Mr. Vachti's yacht. Even the sailors on his yacht look like those guys he is keeping himself surrounded by—people who remind

him of the happy past when he was a bootlegger baron and rode around in a bullet-proof car. They are tough-looking birds, those babies!

I don't see much of old Jode. He gets up in the morning and groans, has black coffee with brandy in it; presently he totters to the bathroom, takes a long shower and dresses up sporty and goes out. But he reports to me from time to time; one day he tells me the rat business worked out perfect, and the Prof has put the bite on him for another five Cs. Then he says the Prof's equipment has arrived and is being set up. Him and Mr. Vachti go and look it over. And I know that Jode sweats some, then, but Mr. Vachti has merely told him firm that he is a sucker being swindled because Mr. Vachti's lawyer has told him so. But nobody is trying to swindle Mr. Vachti yet, so there is nothing he can do about it.

Then the Prof begins his chemical work, putting together dragon's blood and mandrake ash and natron and egg-white. Old Jode goes and watches. He says the Prof puts on a good show, says Mr. Vachti is watching, and fair drooling with wanting to be in on what is a kind of party that just possible might be on the level. But he wants still more to be in on it if it's a swindle. Because just like Jode collects fond memories of having put over artistic tricks, Mr. Vachti collects records of people sent to jail for all the known swindle games. He has no record of a man sent to jail for selling the elixir of life, and he wants one to complete his collection. So ultimate he broaches the matter to Jode. If the Prof is on the level, he says, he knows of a new career surpassin' even that of bootleg baron which he could embark on if he was young again. And if it's a crooked deal, it will sort of climax his career, sending somebody to jail for trying to sell him eternal youth.

Old Jode is fair trembling with the near realization of his ambition, when he tells me this. The deal is made. Mr. Vachti will put up fifty grand in cash for a equal dose of the elixir with the Prof and Jode. If it works,

the cash is his contribution. If it don't work, he gets it back. And Jode is shaky but resolute.

"Now listen," he says, earnest. "I'm checkin' a coupla bags at the airport, and they are important. I'm putting the car in a garage where you or me can get it out fast, but nobody else knows about it. If we got to beat it, I'm goin' to be all set. But—"

I am all set to pull the last business of makin' the elixir, and I got to be undisturbed. I got to do it private. I have gone to the dogpound and looked over the dogs, and there's an old pooch there that somebody sent to have put in the gas-chamber; he is pretty decrepit, but he looks at me wistful when I speak to him. He's just old. So I have bailed him out and he's tied up in the boat now.

I'm going to tell Jode I'll be back late that night. He is a pretty good guy. I know for a fact that he never goes to bed without lookin' in to see that I am all right. Which in a way is insultin' when a guy is sixteen, but in another way ain't so bad. My old man never done nothing like that. I feel kinda fond of old Jode. But I don't want him to know I'm making the elixir until it's all done.

He says, unhappy: "Buck, my boy, anything may happen. According to the Prof's figures, the elixir is gonna be finished today. It is a really beautiful setup. If and when the elixir turns out to be phoney, he is the fall guy; I am absolute in the clear."

"Yeah?" I say.

I have got to keep a alembic—that's a funny-shaped thing which is really a very simple still that you can use as a tower-still if you want to—I have to keep this alembic boiling for twelve hours continous. I can't do it in the hotel; I have got to tie up my boat somewheres to do it. I got a place all picked out on a island off Las Lagunas where nobody is going to notice me. There is a house on the island, but it is always closed up. I have a gasoline torch, and everything is set. But I am going to be back late, and Jode might worry.

"I even figure I know what the

Professor intends," says Jode. "It is crude; the Prof is not an artist; even at that. Mr. Vachti and I take our money to his house. The Prof and Mr. Vachti and I take our doses of the elixir together. Then we are supposed to remain there, unobserved, until we are young men again; then we take leave of each other and the Prof goes off to start his life anew with our contributions."

I LOOK at him blank.

"Obviously," says Jode, in a tone suggesting that he feels kind of ashamed for the Prof, "the doses that he gives us will be knockout drops. When we wake up, the Prof will have departed with a large sum."

"Oh," I says.

"It is hopeless crude," says Jode. "My intention, Buck, is simply to switch glasses: True artistry is always simple. But—well—if anything should go wrong, on account of Mr. Vachti, I want you to have this." He hands me a roll that would choke a horse. "And—I hope you will think of me sometimes, Buck. I want you to take off in your sailboat now. Sail down the coast to Esperance. It is only twenty-five miles. I will meet you there at sundown tomorrow. If I have beat it, I will be there; if anything has gone wrong, do not try to contact me until you are completely sure it is safe. If it ain't safe—beat it! And—will you shake hands?"

I think that actual the old fella wants to hug me, but he don't. There are tears in his eyes and his wattles are all red with emotion. But we just shake hands; he isn't a bad guy, in his way. I am pretty fond of old Jode.

But he's cleared the way for what I have to do. I go down to the sailboat, and he waddles along with me; I have some grub ready, but my apparatus is under the deck forward, in the locker. Old Jode is surprised when he sees that dog wag his tail feeble at me. I explain that I just kinda picked him up.

"He will be company for you tonight, Buck," says Jode, wistful. "You have blankets? Take care of yourself, Buck!"

"I'll do it," I says. "Be seein' you."

And I haul up the sail and cast off.

Sailin' away easy from the wharf, I see him standin' there, fat and funny-lookin' in his sporty clothes, and I feel kinda sentimental about him. But I figure that when I finish up this elixir business I will have something to sure-enough pay up for everything and he will treat me with more respect hereafter, besides. So I sail away cheerful, get out the materials and cook myself a hot dog over the gasoline torch, look at the blue sky, admire the scenery and sail casual to that island I got picked out. I haul my boat in under some trees and make everything snug.

It is singular peaceful. There are little waves lapping on the shore, and birds singin' in the trees that cover the island, and now and again a little fish jumps somewhere from a big fish chasin' him. That old pooch lays down and sighs and looks at me grateful, and I get my stuff lined up.

I build a furnace for my alembic outa rocks on shore; I light the torch, and put together the stuff that Hermes Trismigestus says will make the elixir. There is natron and orpiment and dragons blood and egg-white, and ashes of mandrake—anyhow, next-door to mandrake—and the eye of a frog. I got that from a fancy restaurant where they serve frogs-legs and boast the frogs are shipped to them alive. There are other ingredients that don't make sense by modern science. But somewhere among them is a catalyst or a anti-catalyst that produces results which modern pure chemicals wouldn't give. It would be interesting, some time, to find out how to make this stuff with modern chemicals.

I start the alembic to boiling.

ABOUT noon I cook some hot dogs and eat them, and drink some pop; the alembic is boiling slow just like it oughta and making a very unusual smell. The color is a deep red, with various elements swirling around in it like tealeaves. I think of taking a swim but decide against it; I read some science magazines while the elixir of youth is simmering away, and presently I get sleepy

and doze off. Then I wake up again and refill the gasoline torch, cook some more hot dogs and eat them. Around that time—it is near sundown—I hear a booming noise. I look out through the trees, and there is that motor-yacht that belongs to Mr. Vachti that stopped to ask if I needed rescuin' the day I was turning mandrake-root to ash. It is a quarter of a mile away, maybe less; I see Mr. Vachti talking to one of his tough-looking crew, and I see the Prof sitting in a deck-chair with a sort of thick fog of gloom around him, and I see old Jode nervous taking a drink from a steward and putting it hasty to his mouth.

I can't figure it. It ain't the schedule Jode told me. I watch the yacht, and it curves around the end of the island. Then I don't feel so good; there is a house on the island, but it is always shut up. I think it over, uneasy, and make sure my alembic is boiling okay—it is kinda bluish, now, and the smell is different and still more unusual—so I sneak careful off through the woods, and presently I get to where I can see. The yacht has anchored and a boat is pulling ashore. I go back to my boat and fret awhile; then I hear the yacht heading back toward Las Lagunas. I feel relieved.

Around eight o'clock that night my flashlight shows me that the stuff in the alembic has turned green. It stinks something fierce, but this is the regular change that Hermes Trismigestus says ought to occur, so I feel pretty good. I drink some more pop and try to read by the flashlight, but it ain't so easy. So I just lay around. It's hard work keeping awake with nothing but the sound of the waves and the night-wind in the trees to listen to; I wish I'd thought to bring along a portable radio, but I didn't. So I take a swim, cook some more hot dogs and offer one to the old pooch. He eats it uninterested and lays down again.

At one o'clock in the middle of the night by my wristwatch, the stuff in the alembic is pale yellow and there ain't much of it. Maybe half a cup-full. And it's funny, but with all the junk I put in there what's left

is clear liquid. Exactly like the alchemy book says. I know that natron—which is a sodium carbonate—hadn't oughta boil away like that, nor orpiment either. And the mandrake ashes ought to stay as a sludge. But they ain't. I guess there was some gaseous metal compounds formed—like uranium hexafluoride—and they boil off. But I can't swear to that explanation. I do what the alchemists said they did, and I get what they said they got.

I am kinda excited, but I wait till the stuff cools off, then I get the skin off a frankfurter, soak up some of the elixir on the meat, and feed it to the old pooch. I put the balance careful in a bottle I have ready. I am plenty sleepy by then, because it is close to two o'clock; I go to sleep.

4

WHEN I wake up in the morning I feel pretty good. I hear something whining close by, and sit up; there is that pooch. He looks a lot spryer than he has been, but he is hungry. When I feed him, he eats until his belly bulges out, and then lays down and goes to sleep. I take another swim; I ain't in any hurry. I have till sundown to get to Esperance to meet Jode. I am divin' when I hear a boomin' sound underwater, so I come up and there is Mr. Vachti's yacht streakin' for the island again. I get on shore and watch from behind the trees; it goes around the end of the island again. About a hour later it goes back to Las Lagunas.

I get worried, put on some clothes and go careful over to where the closed-up house is. It is only one story high, but it sprawls all over and it cost plenty. But it isn't closed up any longer. The windows are open and Mr. Vachti is sitting in a deck-chair on a terrace, smoking a long black cigar. Then I blink; there is Jode, sporty clothes and all, waddling out to speak to him. I see a coupla men working around what I guessed was the kitchen; then I see Prof Henry Barr in person. He has

been a spry old goat, but he looks all drooped and unhappy now.

I tell you I get worried, then. Something has gone wrong. I hang around, hoping that Jode will get off by himself somewheres so I can speak to him without Mr. Vachti getting wise. Then that pooch comes snuffling through the woods behind me. He's waked up and trails me by smell. He is frisky, and I can't expect him to have sense enough not to run out squirming and wagging his tail if he sees somebody, or else barking at them. So I have to take him back to the boat and tie him up. I tie him to the mooring-rope, and feed him so he won't howl when I leave.

Nothin' has changed when I get back. Jode waddles around, lookin' bored, but I can tell he is nervous. He doesn't leave the house. Occasional he speaks to Mr. Vachti, like he is suggestin' somethin'. Mostly Mr. Vachti just don't pay any attention. Jode don't have much to say to the Prof. The Prof just sits slumped in a chair and looks miserable.

Noon comes, and I go back to the boat, feed the pooch and myself. I hang around near the house all afternoon. When I go back for something else to eat around supper-time the pooch near eats me up, he is that glad to see me. I take a good look at him. He isn't an old dog any more; he is a kind of gangling just-grown puppy, falling all over himself and just busting out with energy. That elixir has worked on him all right. I make sure he is tied up fast when I leave.

It is dark when I get back to the house. There are lights in the windows. I sneak up close and make sure there isn't nobody watching outside. Presently I duck up to where I can look in a window. It is open, and I could hear. Mr. Vachti says, in a voice that would curdle the Alkahest—that hydrofluoric acid that ate through the test-tube and the sink and the floor: "Since I feel no physical changes, I will give you two just twenty-four hours more!"

"Then what?" asks Jode, apprehensive.

"If by then I am not a young man again," says Mr. Vachti, spiteful, "—and I do not expect to be—my bodyguards will either put you each in a barrel of concrete and dump you overboard at sea—which I do not think they have lost the knack of— or else you go to jail."

JODE WHEEZES indignant: "But there has been no offense, Mr. Vachti!" he protests.

"You tried to swindle me," says Mr. Vachti peevish. "Both of you!"

"I deny that," says old Jode in fine anger, but I see sweat dripping from his wattles. "Not one finger was laid on you or your money! Professor Barr made an experiment, which I financed. You wished to share the results. It was agreed that you should have a dose of the elixir with us, and pay if it worked and not otherwise! But your men grabbed us and hustled us aboard your yacht and brought us here as prisoners! You have had the elixir, yes! You insisted that the experiment go on, on your estate here. But if a crime has been committed," says Jode oratorical, "it has been committed by your hirelings! How will you stand in a court of law, Mr. Vachti, when you are charged with kidnapping?"

I never hear exactly this kind of note in Jode's voice before. But I know what it is; he is scared. Mr. Vachti has not been put through the wringer. Old Jode has a swell trick for it, but it doesn't work. The prof is all set to give Mr. Vachti and Jode knockout drops, and Jode is all set to switch glasses so the Prof and Mr. Vachti will be the ones to pass out. But Mr. Vachti crosses them both up by kidnappin' them and the elixir and takin' his dose in the privacy of his own home with his bodyguards around.

Now Mr. Vachti laughs, and he has absolutely the most unpleasant laugh I ever heard on anybody. "Do you think," he says ironic, "that when I

was active in business, I never had anybody kidnapped?"

There is a silence that you could cut in chunks. Mr. Vachti laughs again. "I have a hobby," he says, "of putting people in jail when they try to swindle me. You two tried it. I admit," he says, vexed, "that you fixed it so I can't put you in jail for this actual job. Putting you in jail won't be the perfect example I would wish for my files. But you go to jail or into a barrel of concrete!"

"How can you send us to jail?" demands Jode, rather shrill.

"I count on your assistance," says Mr. Vachti, venomous. "My men have been with me for a long time. It has been years since they rodged anybody except a stray burglar or two, and they miss their old-time pursuits. They took a pathetic pleasure in kidnappin' you. It will seem like old times come back again, for them, to put you two into separate barrels of concrete and dump you overboard, even if it is the Pacific Ocean instead of the Chicago River they are dumping you in. They will regard the event with sentiment. They will bump you off with all possible artistic touches, for old times' sake."

Somehow, this statement is absolute convincing. I believe it. So does Jode. "But—jail—" pants Jode.

"In your career," says Mr. Vachti, grim, "you have doubtless performed some feats that interested the police. If you do not want to be encased in concrete, you will tell me of such matters. I will have my lawyers check up. If you can confess to enough actual crimes of which you are actual guilty to tuck you away for what I consider a suitable number of years, I will turn you and your signed confessions over to the cops. Otherwise—"

HE CAN SEE Jode's face. He looks at Mr. Vachti incredulous. His expression is filled with a fine disgust, like somebody would feel for somebody who has cheated in a friendly game of pinochle for beers.

Jode's ideals are outraged. To him, tryin' to swindle Mr. Vachti has been a pure matter of professional pride. If Mr. Vachti plays it like it lies, old Jode wins. Mr. Vachti is outsmarted complete, on the artistic level. But instead of conceding graceful that Jode is a master artist, Mr. Vachti plays it dirty.

"That," says old Jode in bitter contempt, "is the lowest trick I have ever seen any man sink to! It is not playing fair! It is welching on a bet! It is—"

"It is my bed-time," says Mr. Vachti, in a voice several degrees harder than granite. "I am going to bed. You two—swindlers can confer and decide whether you go to jail or to the bottom of the Pacific!"

And he means it. Neither the Prof nor Jode nor me has any doubt that he means it. He tries to play a swindle through straight, and he can't touch either the Prof nor Jode, legal, so he plays dirty to get even. I lose the respect I used to have for boot-leg barons from what I heard before I got interested in science. Old Jode puffs and grunts in the room Mr. Vachti has left. "Well, Prof," he says disdainful, "What are you going to do?"

The Prof speaks for the first time that I hear. His voice is a shaky, wabbly, despairing moan. "I—ah—there are a coupla cases of forgery I could help the cops to solve," he says feeble; "and once I got out a back window when some post-office inspectors come to the front door. That was usin' the mails to defraud. And—and there are a couple of obtainin' money under false pretenses raps I could take," he says, and sobs, "If Mr. Vachti will be satisfied with them..."

Old Jode squares his shoulders and throws out his stomach. "I," he wheezes scornful, "I sold a gold brick to the United States Mint at Denver! That will get me respect in any court," he says, "and I shall go upon the witness stand and expose the despicable, the contemptible conduct of Mr. Vachti in this in-

stance! And no artist," says Jode, proud, "will have any further use for him! He will be disgraced in the eyes of any worthwhile citizen!"

And Jode waddles splendid from the room, leaving the Prof dissolved in tears behind him.

WELL... It ain't so tough a job. This island all belongs to Mr. Vachti. There ain't any possible hope of escapin' from it unless the yacht comes to take you back to shore. So there ain't even locks on the windows of the room Jode sleeps in. What good would they do? I find out his room by just watchin' shadows on the window-curtain. The light goes out. He comes to open up the window for fresh air, and I whisper to him.

The breath goes outa him until I think he's gonna strangle. I say quick that I got my boat tied up and waiting for him. And old Jode is scared, all right. He eels outa that window waiting only to grab his pants. And we beat it for the boat, only I remember to make him go quiet. On the way I say to him, severe: "You'd ought to have let me make that elixir like I said. Then you wouldn't'a been in this trouble. I told you the Prof would mess it up. He had a good scientific theory, but he is a phoney!"

"You're quite right, Buck," pants Jode. "But let's go faster!"

"It was good, sound, scientific reasoning," I tell him, "only because I ain't but sixteen you hadda decide that I couldn't make that elixir as good as the Prof. All he's got that I ain't is long gray whiskers."

"Yes—yes," Jode gasps. "You are a genius, Buck! How much farther?"

Then we reach the place where I can see the water again. The pooch comes bouncin' joyful to me and puts his paws all over me and licks me enthusiastic. He has got loose from where I tied him. I am peeved, but it is lucky he doesn't trail me to the house. I tell him to come on and keep goin' for where my boat is.

Only it ain't there. I have tied the

pooch to the moorin'-line; bein' a young dog with nothing in particular on his mind, he has chewed reflective on the rope like he woulda chewed on anything else. He has chewed it in two. The boat has drifted off. I see it, a good mile and a half away, bobbing prettily in the streak of light the moon makes on the water. I can't swim that far. Jode and me and the pooch are marooned on Mr. Vachti's private island, and come morning that island is going to be intensive searched.

5

WHEN HE realizes it, Jode cries. He has put up a bold front in front of Mr. Vachti and the Prof, but he has been scared all the way down in his innards. Now he figures he's gonna be caught and either dumped overboard in concrete or else put away for all his declining years, and the grub in penitentiaries is terrible. Also—I got to give him credit for it—he is scared for me. I am on the island; I can't get off neither. And it is anybody's guess what Mr. Vachti will think is appropriate for me. A reform school is the least unpleasing idea that turns up. But Jode looks for worse than that. I believe the old son-of-a-gun is honest fond of me!

But at that it takes plenty of argument to make him take the only possible reasonable course. I suspect he thinks he will die, and that gives him his only argument back. He makes me promise that if he does die I will carry out the plan I had told him for the two of us. I promise, impatient, and give him part of a bottle of pop that was left on shore, with some clear yellow liquid mixed with it. He gulps it down, gagging, while I heave overboard my empty bottles and hasty pack up the hot dogs I got left. I make a muzzle for the pooch so he can't bark, and I use the line he's chewed off for a leash. We go hunting for a good hideout.

We find one; I cover Jode up with leaves and he's moderate comfortable.

He talks kinda feverish and panicky about what a shame for a fine young lad like me to be in such a fix as this. But he's run a long ways gettin' to where the boat should be, and he's walked plenty afterward. He ain't used to it. He goes to sleep, all worn out; I doze off myself.

Come morning, Jode is starving. I take a good look at him, and I feel sort of funny. Things ain't working out the way I expect, but I don't say anything. I pass over hot dogs, and Jode wolfs 'em. Nothing else happens for a while. Then the yacht comes past the place where we're hiding, and later I see a coupla guys with guns roaming around. I cover up the pooch's nose with my hand; I don't want no whining. I have looked the pooch over more careful and I am what you might call appalled. But those guys hunting for signs of Jode ain't fooling; they carry their guns very handy. We stay still. Presently I see more guys, also with guns. They are hard-looking fellows. Sailors from the yacht; They hunt systematic.

About the middle of the morning, Jode realizes what is happening. The scene is terrific. There is practically hysterics. I figure that it must be that I don't have real mandrake ash but something else, and it is pretty awful. In fact, Jode is so upset that once I figure I better take my chances with Mr. Vachti. But I don't; after all, no matter how deplorable it is, Jode is still better off than in a barrel of concrete. I argue that way. I don't know that Jode agrees—I doubt it very much, actually—but there ain't any choice now. It's happened.

Come sundown, we fix some emergency clothes out of a blanket because the pajamas Jode is wearing belong to Mr. Vachti and would be recognized. The two of us and the pooch go barging over to Mr. Vachti's house.

It is just about twilight when we get there. The yacht has been back to the mainland again and has brought

out some dogs to track Jode down by smell. My pooch goes over amiable to make friends. There is a clamorous welcome from the other dogs. Very clamorous. Jode steams. Then I explain to a guy that we two was out sailing; we landed, and somebody stole our boat and can they send word so our folks can come for us. It sounds like very respectable family stuff.

There is a strange, profane silence. Nobody suspects it is Jode with me, of course. Mr. Vachti looks us over, suppressing all the cusswords ever known to man. He says to Jode, "Do you usual wear a blanket?" Jode says indignant, "I was sunbathing." Mr. Vachti says bitter. "I can probly find some sailor clothes. I will send you back to the mainland."

He would like to strangle both of us. He figures that the Jode he is after stole the boat and beat it to the mainland. He can't do anything to us because, he figures again, Jode will be working out a list including kidnapping, coercion, threats, and other illegal acts, and a police launch may arrive at any moment. He can't even dump the Prof overboard because of his belief that Jode is on shore preparing a lawsuit. Actual, Jode is right there beside me, boiling mad and wanting enthusiastic to murder me, only not daring to show it.

IT IS A BEAUTIFUL mess. Mr. Vachti has not got a scientific mind, so he can't make even a wild guess at what has happened. He don't believe in the elixir anyhow, and of course he wouldn't know that I had set out to make it. So never in a million years will he hit on the facts.

Jode goes inside the house and puts on the sailor pants and a sweater, and leaves the blanket as a memento. They put us on the yacht and take us back to the mainland, Jode holding aloof because of the likelihood of committing mayhem if I come in arm's reach. I go look at the yacht's engines. I observe that the Prof is on board, white as a sheet

and trembling. He does not really believe he is relieved. But he is.

We get to the dock and go ashore. Jode ain't even polite enough to say "Thanks" for our ride. We march away from the dock. A dog comes up, looking cordial; our pooch hasty gets on friendly terms and the two of them disappear up a side street. I don't care. I have Jode wait for me in a dark place, and I get some of my clothes outa the hotel; then I get the car, and we go get the suitcase outa the airport terminal. We salvage the baggage-check outa Jode's pants-pocket, and beat it the hell away from there.

Jode's mad is one of those steaming ones which one word let out will result in an explosion. There is hardly a word exchanged until we get to the next town and I have pulled up at its swankiest hotel. Then I get out of the car and I say: "Well, so-long, Jode!"

"No, you don't!" pants Jode, grabbing me. "We got to settle this! You got to do something about it! You come along!"

We register, getting rooms next to each other. Jode comes in my room, boiling, and sits down grim. The seat ain't comfortable. Then I blink. Jode is removing large, thick packages of banknotes—folding money—from the hip pockets of the sailor pants. They go on the table. They are impressive.

"Where'd that come from?" I ask, trying to postpone things.

"Mr. Vachti," says Jode, grim, "was all set to pay fifty grand just to see proof that the elixir of youth worked. He told the Prof that. He taunted him with it. He waved the cash in front of his face and repeated, sneering, that he was ready to pay it just to see proof. Well—I'm proof, of a sort. He saw me. So when I went in the house to put on these clothes I stopped by where he'd locked it up. I'm entitled to it. But—you Buck! How did this happen to me?"

I FEEL very much embarrassed but I have got it figured out

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more or less. I say, uncomfortable: "Well-l-l, Jode," I says, "I guess it was because there ain't any real mandrake in America. Ashes of mandrake was called for, and I couldn't get any, so I hunted up a weed that is right much like mandrake. May-apple is what they call it. I used that. It's a close cousin, but it musta lacked one of those catalyts or anticatalyts real mandrake woulda had—"

Jode grabs me and shakes hard. "What happened! And how is it gonna be fixed?"

Reluctant, I haul a notebook outa my pocket. I open up to where I copied old Hermes Trismigestus' formula for making the elixir of youth.

"Look," I say. "The formula is headed, *To Make an Olde Manne a Youthe Againe*. It gives the directions I tried to follow. I—uh—I guess the answer is in this here last paragraph I come close to not copying at all. Uh—it says at the end, *To Make an Aged Crone into a Younge Damsel: the formula is ye same, excepte ye ashe of mandrake is to bee lefte oute*.

Jode whacks me. Hard. Wow! To be fair, I guess, I'd ha' done the same. But—anyway, Jode and me have a right nice cottage, now, and I got a pretty good private experimental laboratory in it, and I'm working on the problem of adjusting matters in a more nearly normal way. Jode ain't been after me so much lately, though. It looks what you might call a sort of change of viewpoint is developing. Jode always did go in for fancy clothes, and the opportunity and cash for fancy clothes are on the job. Jode dresses magnificent, and is kind of looking the world over from a new viewpoint. The new viewpoint gets more tolerable as time goes on. I am treated with a certain amount of respect and—like I said—I got a swell laboratory. I pass for Jode's brother. Jode seems to treat me like a kid brother, too. She gets mad as hell when I tell her she uses too much make-up.