

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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SAM MERWIN, JR., Editor

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When Dorgan blew
his special blasts,
all girls became
ecdysiasts!



A girl started
to disrobe

by
**LARRY
CLINTON**

No DIPSY For DIX

I'M Johnny Milton—manager of "Rusty" Mason's orchestra. I started with Rusty five years ago when the band was nothing more than a third-rate ballroom outfit and worked with him until we built up the hottest dance-band attraction in America. Two weeks ago I would have given odds that

there was nothing in the entire band business that I hadn't seen, heard or had happen to me. And then . . .

It was our last day in the Chicago theater. I was checking the stage before the house opened when "Dix" Dorgan called to me from the wings. He sounded excited.

"Hey, Johnny," he yelled. "Listen to this!"

I crossed the empty stage and found Dix waiting for me with an odd look in his eyes. He brought the trumpet up to his lips, took a deep breath and squeezed his face into a tortured expression. I waited, expecting to hear some new jazz riff he had dreamed up.

A vein stood out on his forehead, forming a purple Y like a neon sign. His eyes glazed and his neck turned red as it bulged out over his collar. There was air going into the horn all right—I could see the hot vapor of his breath spill out through the bell.

But I couldn't hear a note.

Just a light *hiss* of air like a leaky hotel radiator without much steam behind it. Dix held the horn up there for several seconds. When he finally dropped his arms there were deep white ridges on his lips. He opened his eyes wide and stared at me.

"Look, kid," I said sternly, "you shouldn't warm up by trying for high notes—especially on your first day back with the band."

"Whadd'ye mean, *trying*?" Dix insisted. "Didn't you *hear* it? Listen!"

He went through the same routine—the deep breath, the pucker, that same awful expression. This time his eyes bulged too. I listened intently, hearing only that faint steamy sound. Dix dropped the horn and leered at me.

"Man, that's the highest note ever played on a trumpet!"

"Sure, kid," I agreed, feeling a sharp pounding headache coming on. The theater curtain was closing and the house was about to open. I grabbed the excuse to get away.

"I've got to change the show routine, Dix. See you later."

The taxi crash that ruined Dix's two front teeth had happened five days before. It was a good thing we were in Chicago when it happened—we found a local man to fill in for Dix and it gave him enough time to get the teeth capped.

Rusty was unhappy, though—nobody could play a jazz lead like Dix. Funny, but it's always a real dipsy character like that who is hard to replace. I was posting the new show routine on the switchboard when Rusty came in and looked over my shoulder.

"Same as opening day," I told him. "We start off with *Get Happy* and close with *Mason Drive*."

"It's nice to have old Dix back," Rusty grinned. "Where is he?"

"Out getting coffee," I lied. I wanted to say, "Look, if Dix tries to show you a high note—play along with him, will you? It will wear off."

I didn't say it naturally. One of my jobs as band manager is to keep Rusty from worrying, especially when we are on the road. We were on our way to the Coast to make a picture and settle down for a while in the Citrus Grove, Hollywood's latest play-spot for the movie crowd. Maybe then I could relax—but not now.

"First show at one-thirty," I told him. "I'll be up in the spotlight booth."

IT WAS a good, tightly paced show and the early audience loved it. When Rusty hit the big finale in *Mason Drive*—with the whole band standing up and blowing like crazy—the excited screams of the bobby-soxers below us rattled the walls of the booth. The spotlight man killed the amber flood as the curtains closed on the stage.

"Nice show," he admitted.

"Thanks, pal," I said. "Same routine for the rest of the day."

I climbed down the ladder to the balcony and found an enthusiastic mob milling around the head of the stairs. Rather than wait for the crowd to clear I took the long way around—through the boxes and across the stage to the street. I walked around the corner and came up to the theater marquee just as a police car pulled away from the curb. Nelson, the theater manager, was changing the admission signs on the box office. He looked upset.

"Have some trouble?" I asked.

"I'll say!" Nelson frowned. "Some gal started to disrobe during that last number!"

"What! In the theater?"

"Right in the balcony!" Nelson groaned. "I just hope it doesn't start a fad! You remember how dancing in the aisles got started back in nineteen thirty-eight."

stressing the possibilities if it should develop further. Marty was interested but cautious. "We'll have to get confirmation, Johnny. I'll have my local man check with the theater manager."

"Don't mention my name," I told him.

I hung up and started backstage, knowing that my bright idea would never get into print. Nelson would simply deny the whole thing. I wondered

Young Man With a Word

IT WAS way back in the early Jurassic era, we believe—about 1938—that a young jazzband sideman turned arranger decided to assemble a dance orchestra himself in order the better to plug the songs he was writing. And for the occasion he came up with a trick number on an old Dixieland lick that hit the country like the chestnut blight.

The young man in question bore the name of Larry Clinton and the number in question was entitled the DIPSY DOODLE. It was frankly derived from the sportswriters' term for Giant pitcher Carl Hubbell's screwball, then the most famous pitch in baseball—which they called his "dipsy-doo" in an effort to describe the ball's exasperating antics as it came up to the plate.

Millions of dance-addicts and tens of millions of radio listeners who didn't know a baseball from a curling stone went mildly insane to the contagious repetitions of the DIPSY DOODLE. There had been nothing like it since the MUSIC GOES ROUND AND AROUND madness of two years before. And Larry Clinton, his band and his vocalist, Bea Wain, seemed launched on an eminently lucrative career together.

It took Pearl Harbor to stop them. Clinton broke up the band to become an ATC pilot and when the war was over, so was the name-band era. Miss Wain had become a successful New York disc jockey. So the erstwhile leader went back to writing arrangements for song publishers and other orchestras.

But if the DIPSY DOODLE had failed to "get" our hero, as its lyric implied, the fiction writing bug had. He took Charley Strong's writing course in Manhasset, N. Y., his home town, and promptly began to sell stories all over the place. And NO DIPSY FOR DIX, one of his first sales, is probably the most authentic science fantasy with a jazzband background ever penned. It is an ingeniously wacky tale of a thoroughly wacky business.

—THE EDITOR.

He sounded very worried. I tried to soothe him. "I don't think this will catch on."

"I hope you're right," Nelson said. He looked at me sharply. "We're trying to hush this up. Don't talk about it to anybody, will you, Johnny?"

"Of course not," I assured him.

I didn't know the men in the local branches of the press wire services, so I called Marty Deblin at *Trans-World News* in New York. After all, publicity is an important part of my job.

"Marty," I enthused, "have I got a scoop for you!"

"Yes, Johnny," he said patiently. "Go ahead."

I told him of the stripping incident, enlarging upon it only slightly and

how deeply I would be in the Deblin dog-house when I opened the stage door and ran into Bill Merck. Bill plays lead trumpet on ballads and is a pretty solid Joe. He was looking for me.

"Can I see you for a minute, Johnny?"

"Sure, kid. How much do you want?" Giving advances on salaries is part of my job too.

"It isn't that," he whispered. "It's about Dix."

I led him out on the stage where we could talk without interruption—when the amplifiers on the back of the movie screen weren't too loud. "What's the matter?" I asked.

"I dunno," Bill said. "It's kinda queer. When we started *Mason Drive* on the last show Dix asked me to play his part

—said he wanted to try something."

"Well?"

"We came to the last chorus—where we all stand up—and I couldn't hear him at all. I twisted around to look at him—and Johnny, I got scared! He was blowing like mad, with his face all screwed up—and *nothing was coming out of the horn!*"

Something big and dramatic was happening on the screen at that moment. The sound system roared with noisy fury. I waited for a lull in the sound track, trying to think of something to say.

"Look, Bill," I said finally, "Dix probably isn't over the effects of all that gas the dentist has been using on him. He just thinks he's being funny. We'll have to humor him for a while."

Bill nodded and went away, leaving me with a mind that was spinning around in circles. I'd heard of notes that were too high to be heard by the human ear—why, they even had a dog whistle on the market that was based on that principle. But out of a trumpet! A sudden wild idea came to my mind. I ran up the stairs and found Dix alone in the dressing room.

"Hey, Dix," I panted. "Do me a favor, will you? I'd like to hear that high note again."

His face lit up and he reached for the horn. "Sure," he grinned. I went over to the open window and looked down to the sidewalk below. I could hear Dix's deep breath and could imagine his contorted expression as the light hissing sound began. I kept my eyes on the street.

Two women were passing by on the sidewalk—they continued on their way without a pause. A stray dog, investigating the base of a light pole, began to yap like mad—but that could have been just a coincidence. Across the street a girl stepped into a waiting taxi. She didn't seem to be affected either. I sighed. It had been such a fabulous idea—but then, you always look for queer angles in this business. The

steamy hissing sound died away.

I was just turning away from the window when the commotion started. The taxi driver leaped out of his cab as if stung by a hornet and dashed toward the traffic cop at the corner. I couldn't see into the car but just before the crowd gathered I watched a pink silk undergarment come floating out of the rear window!

Entirely unaware of the excitement Dix called to me from across the room, "Ain't that a helluva note?"

"It sure is!" I agreed. That sharp pounding headache had come back again.

SOMEHOW I managed to talk Rusty out of using *Mason Drive* in the show, and gave Bill Merck strict orders not to take any more of Dix's parts. This thing had enormous possibilities and I didn't want anything to leak out until I was ready for it. As near as I could figure it the new dental work in Dix's mouth had given him a trick embouchure. That didn't worry me as long as Dix was happy—and I sensed a million dollars' worth of publicity if I could handle it properly. But, oh brother, it needed a lot of explaining.

I know nothing about the mechanics of sound—darn few people in the music business do. However, I had one friend who was a recognized expert in the field—Morton Grable, director of the Fidelity Recording Laboratories in New York. I put in a call for him and wound up talking to his secretary instead.

"Sorry," she said. "He went back on active duty with the Signal Corps last week."

"Active duty!" I gasped. "Don't tell me the old buzzard was in the reserves!"

"Colonel Grable," she said icily, "is now stationed in Washington. I can give you a telephone number there."

I didn't have much luck with the Pentagon number, either. A Major Campbell finally informed me that Mort was now on the West Coast.

"Where can I reach him there?" I asked. "We're leaving for Los Angeles

tonight. I could look him up."

"Sorry, Mr. Milton," the major said. "I can't give you that information."

"But this is important!" I argued. In desperation I exaggerated a little. "I'm not sure but I may have something of military value."

"Really?" he chuckled. "Suppose you tell me about it?"

"Well," I explained, "it's about sound that you can't hear. One of our men found a way to produce—"

"Supersonics?" the major cut in harshly. "Just a moment, Mr. Milton."

There was a series of clicks and I thought I could hear a whispered conversation at the other end of the line. When the major came back on there was a light bell-like sound in the background.

"This is being recorded," Major Campbell said sternly. "Go ahead. Give me all the details."

I didn't, naturally. After all, the major could have been a Dorsey or Kenton fan and I had no desire to see Dix wooed right out of our band. I gave up just enough details to keep him interested, saying nothing about the startling results the high note produced.

"Very interesting!" he said when I'd finished. "Just what is your traveling schedule to the Coast, Mr. Milton?"

"We leave by bus after the last show tonight," I told him. "Tomorrow night we play State College in Kansas, then we catch the early morning train for Los Angeles."

"Where will you be staying there?"

"We'll be playing at the Citrus Grove," I said, "but I'll be stopping at the Hotel Alvinez."

"Hum-mm," the major mused. There was another whispered conversation. When he spoke again his voice was quite businesslike. "I think you can look forward to seeing Colonel Grable as soon as you get out there. Meanwhile, however, it may be necessary for us to take certain security measures."

"Don't worry about a thing," I assured him. "I won't talk to a soul until I see Mort Grable."

THE gymnasium at State College was festooned with miles of crepe paper. It was a pretty sight. The dance floor was crowded with crew-cut lads in dinner jackets and sweet young things in colorful evening gowns. I was on the balcony, watching Rusty charm them, when a dance committeeman told me I was wanted at the door. I went outside and found a slim, wiry man waiting for me on the steps.

"You want to see me?" I asked.

He looked at me sharply. "Your name Milton?"

I admitted it. He pulled a hand out of his pocket and shoved it toward me. I thought he wanted to shake hands—until I saw the little gold badge in his palm. "Name is Bullock," he said. "Should have been here earlier but my plane was late. Where is he?"

"Wait a minute!" I gasped. "What is this? Rusty doesn't owe any taxes or anything!"

"Look, Milton," he said dourly, "I'm not FBI—I'm Secret Service. Where is this Dorgan fella I have to look after?"

It suddenly hit me then—what the Pentagon major had meant by "security measures." I felt a little dazed as I led Bullock up to the balcony and pointed Dix out to him. He seemed disappointed.

"Doesn't look much like an inventor," he grunted.

I was trying to figure out what he meant by that remark when the dance number ended and Rusty turned around to talk to the band. They began pulling out music and Dix seemed to be arguing with Bill Merck. Bullock put a hand on my arm.

"By the way, Milton," he said, "we don't want a big fuss over this. Since I have to live with you boys until Colonel Grable takes over, maybe you'd better introduce me as an old friend."

"Hold it!" I said tersely. Rusty had turned back to the dance floor and was making an announcement over the microphone. . . . "a special request for one of our instrumental numbers. You may

find this a little fast for dancing but maybe you'd like to gather around for a few minutes while we give out with our recording arrangement of *Mason Drive*."

Wham! Rusty gave a downbeat, the brass ripped into the opening riff and I hit the stairs at the same time. I was too late. By the time I reached the dance floor there was a huge crowd around the stand. I wasted half a chorus trying to break through and almost got sluggish by a couple of large lads that resented my shoving.

In desperation, I ran across the dance floor and headed for the hall at the end of the room. Luckily I knew where the light switches were—we had checked them for the bandstand lights and the electric guitar before the dance. Now, if I could only reach that switch box before the end of the sax chorus—

I made it with seconds to spare. The brass section was just standing up when I pulled the main switch. The gym blacked out. The music stumbled to a stop. An excited squeal arose from the dance floor and died away as Rusty began to fake Dancing in the Dark on his trombone. The rhythm section joined in with a light, sensuous beat and you could hear the satisfied sighs of the boys and gals as they fell into each other's arms. It was wonderful showmanship on Rusty's part and I would have been a lot more appreciative if a powerful arm wasn't wrapped around my neck.

"What in hell are you trying to do, fella?" Bullock rasped.

I didn't tell Bullock what would have happened if I hadn't pulled that switch. That was my secret—and it was going to stay mine until I had a talk with Mort Grable. By now I was getting pretty good at making devious explanations.

The band accepted Bullock as an old friend of mine who was just coming along with us. Luckily I didn't have to let Rusty know anything about it—he was flying out to the Coast and had left

the dance a half hour early to catch his plane. Dix, however, was a problem. I introduced him to Bullock in the lounge of our Pullman car and told him of my telephone call to Washington.

"You see, Dix," I explained, "there is just a chance that your discovery may have a military value."

"My high note?" he said in an awed voice. "Man—ain't that somethin'! Wait'll I tell Bill Merck!"

"No!" Bullock said sharply. "Not a word! Not until I turn you over to Colonel Grable."

You could almost see the wheels of glory spinning in Dix's mind. He sat up stiffly and got a military edge to his voice.

"I hear you talkin'!" Dix said.

He got along wonderfully with Bullock—at breakfast, lunch and dinner. Between meals they played an endless game of gin rummy. By the morning of our second day on the train Bullock was wearing a haunted look.

We pulled into Los Angeles only a few hours before our opening at the Citrus Grove. I had to go directly to the nightclub to supervise the band set-up and suggested that Bullock go to the hotel with Dix. The Secret Service man groaned.

"When are you supposed to meet Colonel Grable?"

"You've got me," I said. "Maybe there'll be a message from him at the Grove."

BULLOCK pondered this for a moment. "I hope so," he sighed. "Let me know the minute you hear from him, will you? I'd like to deliver Dorgan and get out of here."

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Is old Dix getting in your hair?"

"Oh, he's a good kid, I guess. But *man!*"—Bullock's voice rose sharply—"I'm not sure the chief will dig me if I swallow this jive talk much longer."

There wasn't any message from Mort Grable. I was too busy to worry about it—the bandstand in the Citrus Grove

was ideal for a dozen musicians but we carried eighteen sidemen. I fought with the management to get a carpenter, then I fought with the carpenter to get what I wanted—and we finally got an extension completed a few minutes before the dinner crowd started filtering in.

It was a nice opening. All the music men and the local disc jockeys turned out to welcome Rusty, and Magnum Pictures supplied a garish floral greeting for the bandstand. Most of the movie crowd, I knew, would not be in until later. When the band went off for the hour intermission between dinner and supper sessions I decided to dash over to the hotel for a change of clothes. Bullock and Dix were standing on the sidewalk, looking for a cab.

"Any word?" Bullock asked.

"Not yet," I said. "Where are you heading?"

"Gonna dig a spade combo," Bullock groaned, "with a cat who blows a frantic piano. *Blows a piano!* Hurry up and save me, will you, pal?"

I grinned and walked down the street to the hotel. I was just getting my room key at the desk when a heavy hand fell on my shoulder. It was Mort Grable, resplendent and impressive in his military uniform.

"Johnny!" he said sternly. "What in hades have you been up to?"

"Mort!" I cried. "Am I glad to see you! Come on up while I change and I'll tell you all about it."

I gave him the whole story—Dix's new dental work, the high note, the disrobing episodes that always followed it. He listened with a disapproving frown. "Damned if I see any military value in it, Johnny."

"Well—" I said lamely, "I didn't know. Frankly I just wanted your advice. I didn't expect to start all this fuss."

Mort rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "It's not entirely your fault," he admitted. "You see, I'm in charge of a very hush-hush development in super-sonics. There was just a chance that you

had stumbled on something that would expose our work. But I'm sorry, Johnny—I can't buy that undressing routine."

"It happened!" I insisted. "*Twice!*"

"Knowing you," Mort said, "I suspect a publicity angle somewhere in this."

"My God!" I howled. "Do I have to undress half of America to prove it to you?"

"No," he grinned. "Just explain to me why only one person in that whole theater audience was affected."

"How should I know? That's *your* field. Maybe some people are more sensitive than others."

"Look, Johnny," Mort said patiently, "I'll admit we don't know too much about the effect of supersonic vibrations yet. We do know that certain frequencies will homogenize liquids, turn milk sour and cause other odd phenomena. As far as humans are concerned a combination of inaudible overtones may create a feeling of elation or depression—but the most violent effect should be nothing more than a headache."

"That's it!" I cried. "Every time Dix blows that note I get a violent headache!"

"In your business," Mort chuckled, "headaches are a normal occupational hazard. I'll make a scientific test though. Tomorrow morning we'll take your boy over to the lab and have him blow that note into a piezo-electric oscillograph. If he can really produce a supersonic vibration I'll tell you the exact frequency with all its overtones."

That was good enough for me. If Mort would supply me with proof that Dix was blowing a supersonic note I wouldn't worry about an explanation of the rest. Let the reporters tackle that—and you could lay odds they would all hear about it. The first thing I would do would be to have Rusty banned in Boston as a threat to public morals. We'd hit the front page of every newspaper with that. . . .

"Mort," I said, "you won't say anything to Dix about the disrobing stuff, will you? He doesn't know anything about it."

"I won't," Mort said idly. "Let's get over to the Citrus Grove. I imagine Bullock will want to see me."

"You don't know how right you are!" I told him.

WE WERE sitting at a table near the bandstand when the band started trickling back in. Bullock delivered Dix to his chair in the brass section and headed for us with a feverish expression. His voice was unusually high-pitched. "*Man, am I glad to—*"

He stopped abruptly and shuddered. With an obvious effort Bullock brought his voice back to a normal level. "Sorry," he groaned. "Lost my head, I guess. Glad to see you, Colonel."

They shook hands and the Secret Service man looked at his watch. Mort chuckled. "Anxious to get back? Don't worry—there's a Military Air Transport flight that leaves for Washington at one-thirty. We're holding a seat for you. Sit down and relax."

I had to make the rounds of the room to greet our old friends of the movie colony. It was quite a while before I could get back. The band had just finished a dance set and Dix was at the table, deep in conversation with Mort. Bullock looked bored.

"Man, I can hear it all right," Dix was arguing. "Hear it plain as a bell!"

"You probably feel it through bone conduction," Mort said. "What is the actual note?"

Dix's eyes clouded. "That's the weird part," he admitted. "Sometimes it sounds like a C, sometimes it sounds like an augmented fourth above. Does that sound screwy?"

"Harmonic overtones," Mort mused. "The oscillograph will show them."

"Is that like a record?" Dix asked. "Can you play it back?"

Mort shook his head. "No—the oscillograph gives us a visual analysis. If

that note is as high as you think it is there's no way of reproducing it on a record. Even vinylite won't reproduce much more than sixteen thousand cycles per second. Is *Mason Drive* the only number you can use it on?"

"Well," Dix explained, "I can't run up to it, see? I gotta set my chops for a high C, slide my tongue forward and squeeze like crazy. It takes a couple of bars to get set before I can pop it out. There aren't many arrangements I could fit it into—except maybe *Stardust*. I never tried that."

I leaned over the table and interrupted them. "Hey, did you see what Sally DeMar just brought in?"

They were just taking a ringside table—Sally with her bright red hair tumbling over her highly exposed shoulders, and a dark, swarthy character with a pointed black goatee. He made sure of getting attention by wearing a gray silk turban that towered over his petulant face. Sally looked positively entranced.

She was like that. With only an occasional appearance in pictures Sally remained in the public eye by collecting odd things—Russian wrestlers, nature boys and fake yogis. Dix snorted. "That cat's been listening to too much Bop!" he said.

Bullock groaned and looked at his watch again. I said, "Shh, Dix. Don't spoil Sally's act. I'm going over to meet him. I'll give you a full report later."

Sally was glad to see me—in an alcoholic sort of way. The Khedive, as the goateed guy called himself, managed to convey a total lack of interest in my company. He found a way to remove Sally from my tainted touch by taking her out on the crowded dance floor. The band was playing *Stardust*. I grinned and relaxed.

They were in the middle of the second chorus when it suddenly hit me—I remembered what Dix was saying when I interrupted. I scooted around the edge of the room just as Dix came down to the front of the bandstand for his

solo. Mort was watching him intently. I stopped and grabbed the table.

"Mort!" I yelled. "Dix isn't going to try it, is he?"

"Sit down," Mort said gently without looking at me. "Nothing is going to happen."

"Like heck!" I howled. "You two have it all cooked up! I've got to stop it!"

I tried to get away but Bullock had me firmly by the arm. "You heard the colonel," he growled. "Siddown!"

"Mort!" I wailed. He ignored me. I sagged into a chair and squeezed my temples, almost afraid to look up. If I'd only been able to convince Mort that it wasn't a publicity gag.

I knew where it would happen. At the end of Dix's chorus there is a four-bar interlude that builds up to a cut-off—leaving a nice open spot for Dix to hit the last note. Like a man who has to watch his own execution I stared up at him.

Dix had plenty of time to get set during the four-bar interlude. He winked at Mort, closed his eyes and forced his face into that horrible grimace. The band cut out and Rusty looked around in surprise as he waited for Dix to hit the last note.

I felt it all right—harsh and pounding in the back of my head. Mort had a puzzled frown on his face and his fingers drummed nervously on the table. Bullock wore a blank look. Then we heard the scream.

IT SEEMED to come from the middle of the dance floor, loud enough to be heard over the band as they hit the final chord. Dix, still blowing with his eyes closed, was oblivious to everything. I jumped to my feet and looked wildly around, trying to think of something to do as Sally DeMar broke through the crowd and dashed toward the bandstand. The Khedive was right behind her.

It was almost a shock to find that Sally was fully dressed—at least, as fully dressed as she was when she came in. With an amazing intensity of pur-

pose she eluded the goateed character's grasp and scrambled up on the bandstand. Dix opened his eyes and dropped his horn just as she threw her arms around his neck. The Khedive, still in pursuit, tripped and toppled toward them.

The next few seconds were rather hectic. Bullock got to the bandstand first—there was a wild flurry of arms and the gray silk turban flew out into space as the microphone crashed to the floor. By the time Mort and I broke in the Khedive was sitting on the floor with a hand over one eye. Bullock was holding Sally, who seemed quietly dazed, and Dix had a handkerchief up to his bruised lip. In ten seconds it was over. The Khedive and Sally hurriedly departed and we got Dix into the dressing room.

"What did that guy want to slug me for?" Dix demanded.

"He didn't mean to," I tried to explain. Mort cut me off.

"That's not important now!" he barked. He turned to Bullock. "Take Dix back to the hotel and get some ice for his lip."

"But—my plane!" Bullock groaned.

"Sorry!" Mort snapped. "You're staying over! Don't let Dix off of your sight. I want him safe and sound at the laboratory at nine o'clock tomorrow morning!"

"Nine o'clock?" Dix complained. "Man, that's practically the middle of the night!"

* * * * *

We were three unhappy people on the way to the lab the next morning. Dix was half asleep, Bullock was sullen and I had the damndest feeling of impending disaster. I was sorry I ever heard of the whole thing. I asked Dix about his lip. "The lip's okay," Dix said. "My teeth feel funny, though—like they were pressing together."

"That'll go away," I told him.

Mort met us at the door to the lab and took us up to a small recording studio with a large plate glass window.

We left Dix in the studio to warm up and went down the hall to the control room on the other side of the glass. Two engineers were sitting at the control panel, twisting dials and muttering to each other. We sat down and watched Dix unpack his horn in the other room.

"You won't be able to hear anything," Mort explained. "All we are after is a graph of the frequencies involved."

Dix was blowing away in the studio but the only effect in our room was on the dials before the two engineers. I kept my eyes on Dix. He seemed to be puzzled about something. Mort pressed a button that opened the intercom. "Ready?" he asked.

"I dunno," Dix muttered.

He took a deep breath and went into the contortion. Mort leaned intently over the two engineers and watched the dials. Dix dropped the horn and looked disgusted. Mort hit the intercom again.

"What's the matter?"

"I can't make it!" Dix wailed. "I don't even get a buzz!"

"Try it again," Mort demanded.

HE TRIED. We could see the purple Y on his forehead and the sweat pouring down his cheeks. But after each attempt Dix looked more and more defeated. Mort was tense. "What's wrong, Johnny?" he asked. "Is it too early in the morning for him?"

"No," I said slowly, "we've made records earlier than this. Could it possibly be his teeth?"

"Teeth?" Mort said sharply. "Has he complained about them?"

"He says they feel jammed together," I explained. "That accident last night must have jarred them out of line."

"That's it!" Mort sighed. "The passage of air was controlled by the exact position of those two front teeth. The slightest shift would destroy the effect!"

"You mean he can't—"

"It's gone," Mort said. "It was a freak—something that wouldn't happen again in a hundred years. By pure accident that Chicago dentist created an

odd resonance chamber. Now it's gone. Frankly I'm not sorry."

"What?"

"It was much too close to our experiments," Mort explained. "Of course we are working under rigid control with a definite purpose in mind. Dix's note was too erratic to be useful. It didn't mean anything, Johnny."

I groaned as my great publicity scheme collapsed. Mort looked at me with sympathy. "I hope Dix doesn't feel too bad about it," he said. "Believe me, though, it didn't mean a thing."

"Wait'll I try to tell Dix that," I frowned. "You know Dix."

I went down the hall and let myself into the studio. Dix was looking at his horn with thoughtful eyes. He hardly noticed me. "Look, kid," I said, "I've got bad news for you."

"Huh?" he grunted absently.

I told him what Mort had said. I couldn't explain the dental resonance-chamber idea too well but I did get over the point that he would no longer be able to blow the supersonic note.

"It's tough," I said, "but that's it. Of course we could go back to that dentist in Chicago—"

"Nah!" Dix said firmly. "You heard what the colonel said. We couldn't put it on a record anyway. What good is a dippy like that? Nowhere, man!"

I smiled sadly. "That's a good way to look at it, Dix."

"Sure," he said. "But you know what? When that screwball slugged me he did something to my embouchure."

"What happened?"

"I dunno—but it's given me a whole new low register. Listen to this."

He picked up the horn and brought it to his lips, letting his face muscles sag. His lips seemed to spread out over the mouthpiece. The air in the room suddenly felt very stuffy, like it gets sometimes just before a thunderstorm. There was a sharp *click* and a diagonal crack appeared across the plate glass window. I felt a dull, throbbing headache in the back of my head.

"Oh, no, Dix!" I moaned.