

**THE BAND PLAYED
ON**

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I'm playing trombone in a little five-piece combo at Benny's Bar and Grill when it happens. At the time we are slightly enlarged by the presence of four of Bill Gundry's boys who are working out at the park and have dropped by to sit in after they have finished, and also we have present Eddie Smith and Mart Allen, who are a clarinet and trumpet from The Pines.

Benny's is the local hangout for all the musicians in town, which is the main reason I'm playing there; one night Whiteman himself shows, when his band is working a theatre job at the Palace.

During the early part of the night we play our own arrangements off the paper, but after about one o'clock we are liable to be jamming with any of the boys who can find seats—like this night I'm telling you about.

When I first notice it we are giving out on the *Jazz Me Blues*, which is a fine ensemble number, and we are hitting it in a fast Dixieland. I'm ragging the beat and I can feel the old slush pump tremble, but I figure it's because I'm really solid at the moment and I keep on sending.

Well, we clean up the *Jazz Me's* and I'm still hot so I hit right on the B-natural for *Stardust*, with the boys jumping in, and we take it slow and mellow through one chorus together. Then I stand up for a solo on the second, and that is when it happens.

I don't know exactly what takes place, but I'm riding as I reach out for a high one that's really out of the world. I feel the pump tremble again, and then what happens is that I am really out of the world.

I mean I'm actually out of the world!

The vibrations from the trombone shoot right up my arms, and then my whole body is shaking. I can't stop it. The lights fade away and I'm trembling so I can't even hear the music ... and then I'm not shaking any more, but Benny's is not there or I'm not there, and it is daylight, which is crazy because it is only two A.M.

I am still kind of weak as I look around, and then I'm weaker still. The least thing, I figured, was that I had had a spasm or something and was in a hospital and it was the next day. But

when I look around again I know this is no hospital. I'm lying on a big flat rock and I am dressed just as I was at Benny's. I even have my slip-horn beside me.

But the thing that gives me the jumps is the grass. It is all purple. And the trees and everything around have purple leaves where they should be green. I look at my coat. It is a light blue. My pants are black and my skin is white. Then I look at the grass beside me. I reach out and pick a handful. It is plenty purple all right. And I'm thinking as I look at it there in my hand that there is no place in the world where the trees and plants are purple. No place in the world....

I know I am not asleep, but tell myself, "whenever you read about anything like this happening, the hero always thinks he is asleep at first and pinches himself to find out whether he is or not." So I reach over for my slush pump and give it a good blast. I hear it all right. Just to make sure, I do pinch myself lightly, but it is no soap. I am here and the grass is still purple. I get up off the rock and walk about.

When I stand up I find that I am in a large meadow with nothing more in sight than the rocks here and there and a few trees. The purple grass is nearly knee-high. There is no sense in staying where I am, so I pick up my trombone and begin hiking. After I have walked a couple of miles, maybe, I come to a river. I am not surprised to find that the water is a deep yellow. Nothing will surprise me now.

There must be some settlement along this river if there is anyone living around here, I figure, so I follow along the way the water is flowing. Three or four hours I tramp, and this is

something I am not used to. My feet are getting plenty beat and I take up the old bleater and try *The Stars and Stripes Forever*, the only march I can think of. This helps me stumble along in two-four time a while, but it uses up what wind I have left, and pretty soon I am forced to sit down and rest.

Well, I guess I doze off while I am resting, for when I come out of it I find myself tied up tighter than a drum, and there in front of me are four men or animals or something examining my trombone.

"Hey," I say.

At that they turn around and stare at me and I stare even harder at them. And then I bust out laughing. For they look like four grown up Donald Ducks. They have duck bills for mouths, and their feet are webbed, but they have arms instead of wings. Their bodies are covered with feathers, except for their heads which have a greenish skin and would almost be human if it weren't for those bills and the green color.

They begin to gab among themselves and I am surprised because I am expecting to hear them quack like ducks. Their voices are low-pitched and they talk way down in their throats something like German, but though I don't understand it, I know it isn't. They are talking about me, I can tell, and finally one of them comes over and unties my feet and legs. But he leaves my arms fastened. He motions for me to get up. I do and we start down the river with one of them carrying my slip-horn and walking beside me, and the others floating on the water like their barnyard relatives. This is the way we come to their town.

It is only a short distance before the river widens considerably, and I can see that it is dotted with little islands. The three men who are swimming come close to shore and they walk with the one guarding me, pointing out at one of the islands as they speak. I gather that they don't know how to take me out there. One of them gestures at the water and then at me, but I shake my head no. They gab some more.

Finally one of them hops into the water and swims to the nearest island. He is back in a flash with about ten other duck men who immediately begin gabbing excitedly as soon as they see me. The one holding my trombone says something to them and they shut up and get back into the water. They push me to the edge of the bank and then one of them takes hold of my legs and pulls me into the river on his back. He almost sinks before the others can grab me too and help him out, and even at that they are as far down as low 'E on the doghouse when they start out for the large island almost in the center of the river. This must be their main village, I figure, and it turns out that I am right. Once we get to the village they untie my arms and hand me my horn. I guess they figure I can't get off the island now.

Well, I don't know what I'm in for, but whatever it is, it is postponed for a while because they take me to a small hut and leave me. There is nothing in the hut except a pile of pale purple straw in one of the corners, but I don't need anything else. I am plenty weary and I flop on the straw and am asleep in a minute.

When I awake again, it is morning. I get up and walk to the door and there are four or five of the duck men standing

nearby. They see me come out and they smile, but when I start to move about, they point back into the hut and so I go back in and sit down. I am still sitting there when some others come in with some trays of food. These are a lot lighter green in the faces and I guess they must be the women of the race. They have a lot of stuff that looks like purple lettuce, and different vegetable-looking things on the trays, and they act as if I am to eat them. After I taste them they are not so bad. I even drink a cup of the yellow water, and it is not so bad either, only sweeter than I would want ordinarily.

Once I have finished, I go back outside. Right in front of the door is the duck man which carried my slush pump on the walk yesterday, and when he sees me he smiles and comes over and hits me on the back with his hand. I do the same to him and he smiles wider. This means we are friends, I figure, like shaking hands, so I smile too. He motions for me to come with him.

Some of the others come with us, and we walk all around the village which is not so large. My friend seems to be the head man. He walks with me, and the rest stay a little behind. I am being treated like I have the key to the city. All around are the small huts like the one I slept in, and there isn't much else to the town except for a couple of larger buildings which are made of the same purple wood that the huts are made of. I figure that if three people occupy each hut, there are maybe six hundred altogether in the town. There are some other villages on the islands I can see, but they are not so large.

After we have toured for an hour or two, the chief takes me to one of the large buildings and we go inside. City hall, I think. And sure enough we go right to the mayor's office, which is a

little room partitioned off from the rest. There are a couple of stools or something there, and the mayor hops up on one with his thin legs underneath him. I sit on the other. He smiles and I smile, and I think this is getting pretty dull and maybe it would be better if he weren't so friendly because anyway I would have some action. I think I will get away and go over and try a few numbers on the horn.

Finally after we sit there smiling for some time, he points to himself.

"Ogroo," he says. His name.

So I hit myself on the chest and tell him my name.

Then he walks around the room and points to the stools and the table and the walls. He says words at each one. He is trying to teach me their language, so I repeat each one after him. We play this little game for quite a while and then we have food brought in. While we are eating, Ogroo is telling me the name of what I am chewing on and it doesn't taste nearly as good as it did when I knew it was plain food only.

When we finish eating, Ogroo gets up and takes me back to our hut. I am supposed to stay there, I see. Anyway I think I will get out a few riffs just to keep in practice, so I go inside for my slush pump. It isn't there.

So this is why the so and so was keeping me away all the time he did, I say to myself. I am plenty burned up, but there is nothing I can do.

When Ogroo shows up the next morning, I try to tell him about it, but he pretends not to understand. Instead we go through the same routine as the day before, only we eat in another room and he shows me some new words.

Well, the horn doesn't show up and I can tell my lip is slipping out of shape. It is now three weeks since I got into this place and I have nothing different. I am able to talk to the duck men, though, and I will say for Ogroo that he is a good teacher since I am never more than a poor C in languages when I am in school.

And then one day Ogroo says to me, "Mac, I am happy to tell you that we have located the object which you call a trombone. One of the men took it and has had it hidden. He feared it was a thing of evil power. I assured him it was not, though I was not so sure myself. I hope that I was correct."

"Ogroo, old boy," I tell him, "the trombone is strictly a thing of good power as I will show you if you will produce it. It is a thing of music."

"Why, Mac," says Ogroo, "why did you not say this before. We have music too. It is our great pride."

Now during the time the mayor has been educating me, there is one of the large buildings which I have never been in. I have asked Ogroo about this and he has always said they were saving it as a surprise for me. But now he gets up and starts out the door.

"You will know of the surprise at last," he says.

And he leads me to the big barn which has always been closed.

Well you can hang me for a long-hair when we get inside, for there are about two hundred of the duck people shuffling around like a flock of jitterbugs, and ten or twelve players are giving out with some corny rhythm on a raised platform for a bandstand. They have about three-fourths percussion, mostly tom-tom-like drums, but there are a few gut buckets of some kind which they do not appear to play for nothing.

Ogroo looks at me.

"Is it not magnificent?" he says.

"Well," I say, "it is all right, but where I come from it is done in a slightly different manner. I shall be happy to show you if you will kindly produce my horn."

I can hardly wait to lay my lip into a solid beat the more I listen to these ickies peeling it off the cob, and when one of the men finally brings in old Susie, I kiss her lovingly. She is in fine shape.

Old Ogroo stops the noise. He makes an announcement, and everything is quiet as I step up with my slush pump. It is like Goodman at Carnegie Hall.

Everybody crowds around as I give out with the *Royal Garden Blues*. I see I have them overcome and I begin to send softly as I hear one of the boys pick up the beat in the background. He is not so awful at that. After I have taken two choruses, one of the gut buckets has picked up the melody and I dub in the harmony for him. The crowd is beginning to sway slightly when I slide into *Rose Room* and pretty soon they are on the jump until it is

worse than a bunch of the alligators at a Krupa concert. All in all it is a very successful performance indeed.

By the time I have finished, I see that I have first chair cinched, and the crowd is eating out of my hand.

This is by no means the last performance I give. I soon have the duck men in the band playing the best jive they can give out with, but it is rather sorry without any reeds and only one brass. They are entirely unable to play any wind instruments, though, so I am forced to make the best of it.

We play for three or four hours, and when old Ogroo and I finally leave the hall, I am cheered all down the line. I am really terrific.

"Mac," Ogroo tells me when we are outside, "you are wonderful. We appreciate music and in fact it is the biggest thing in our lives here. But you are lucky that we are the ones that found you on your arrival and not the animal men from the woods. They are very ignorant, and your trombone would have meant nothing to them."

Well, this is the first time I have heard about these animal men, and I figure maybe they are a little closer to civilization than Ogroo thinks. I ask him about them.

"They are our enemies," he says, "and are much stronger than we. They control all the land surrounding us, but on the water we have the best of them and they never try to attack us here. However we must venture into the forests sometimes, and then we are in constant danger. Many of us are killed or captured each year."

I think no more about this, however, and I spend my time playing for the concerts they have every day. I am very popular with one and all. But a few weeks afterwards, Ogroo asks me to join one of their expeditions into the forests.

"We have to gather our monthly food crop," he says. "And everyone in the community has to do his share. As you are now one of us, it is only fitting that you come along."

Well, of course I clap Ogroo on the back and tell him I will be very pleased to go, and, in fact, I am not worried much about their enemies because I am a good hundred pounds heavier than any of the duck men and I figured I will be plenty for these animal people to handle. As it turns out, I am right in this respect, but I hit one bad note which almost costs me my life and very possibly does so for my friends.

There are about twenty of us that start out. Each one is carrying two large baskets made out of the purple reeds which grow in the swampy lowlands of the islands. Before we begin, I tell Ogroo that I will swim over if he will carry my baskets, but he does not understand what I mean until I dive into the river and demonstrate. This exhibition is a great surprise to everyone, as they have never seen anything like it before. When I have climbed out on the other bank, the rest of the party jumps in and floats over rapidly. Then we begin walking toward the deep purple forests.

We hustle around all morning, and there is no trouble. What we are gathering is some kind of mushroom that grows around the foot of the trees, and we are looking for certain vegetables which have to have the shade to amount to anything. It is in the

afternoon shortly before we are ready to depart that one of the men who is acting as a lookout gives the alarm. There is a group of animal men hunting in the woods and they have spotted us. I am curious to see how these men appear and I hang back some while the others run as fast as they can on their webbed feet toward the river; they are luckily near the water, for they could never outdistance these land people.

Well, I know I can catch up, so, as I say, I wait a couple of seconds. But when I have a gander at our enemies, I am off faster than a sixty-fourth beat, and it is none too soon. As a matter of fact, it is a wonder that I am able to run at all, for what I see charging at me is about ten big two-headed monsters running on four legs sometimes, and sometimes on two. They are not quite as large as a man when they stand up, but they are enough to send me heading for the river. I dive in just before they get there and I am churning the water like the *Queen Mary* when I hit the island. Then I look around to see what has happened. The monsters are lined up at the edge of the river watching us, but they do not try to cross over. They are pointing at me and acting excited, and Ogroo laughs.

"They have never seen anything like you," he says. "But we are safe now for they cannot—what did you call it—swim?"

I say that is very lucky indeed, as they are remarkably tough appearing babies, but we do not bother any more with them and pretty soon they have disappeared into the forests. It is over a week later that I realize the bad note I hit and what it is going to do to us.

I am sitting on a rock near the island's edge this morning trying to work a little oil out of some plants I have found. I wish to apply some of this to my slip-horn, as the action is getting somewhat gummy and I have neglected to bring any of these necessities with me when I ride out of Benny's. While I am doing this, I see some of the animal men come out of the forest and start toward the river. This is odd since I am told they never do this. They do not see me so I stay where I am, and I see two of them talking and arguing with the others. These two seem to have some idea, and the rest are telling them no and shaking all their heads to do it. It must be a real argument, I think, with two mouths to speak with at the same time. I wonder if one of these animals could get two part harmony with a pair of trumpets, but then I recall that they are strictly ickies, as old Ogroo has explained to me.

So I watch them some more, and pretty soon the two who are talking most jump right into the river and begin to throw their legs up and down and flail their arms, and they are soon moving across the water just as if they could swim. In fact they are swimming, and this excites me greatly since Ogroo has said they could not do this. I get up quick and begin to hunt Ogroo and luckily I find him right away. I tell him what is taking place and he is also greatly excited.

"I'm afraid we have done it now, Mac," he says to me as we run back to where I saw the animal men. "Those creatures are highly imitative—it is the only way they seem to gain any new skill—and they must have been thinking over what they saw when they watched you swim away from them last week."

By the time he has told me this we are back where I have left my trombone, and are just in time to see the last of the group jump into the river. They are able to make the nearest island, which has a small village of maybe fifty people. Well, I do not like this part of my story much and I will cut it short. What happens is that the animal men wipe out that little village in ten minutes and right before our eyes. The animals are extremely happy and we see them grinning with their ugly double faces as they return to shore.

"Quick," says Ogroo, "we have only a little time. They will bring the rest of their tribe immediately and attack all the rest of our islands. We must hide."

I grab my horn and we hurry to notify our own village. But we are stopped. There is no place to go.

Then we hear the menacing roar of the animal men. As we turn, they can be seen jumping into the river one by one. There are hundreds of them.

I turn resignedly to Ogroo. I start to tell him that we must get something to defend ourselves with, but the people are so paralyzed with fear that I know we can never do it. And then before I can say anything, I see the villagers coming slowly toward Ogroo and me. They seem very angry indeed.

Ogroo speaks hurriedly. "They are after you, Mac. You're the one that showed the animal men how to swim and they are after you. In the state they are in, you will probably be killed. I'll try to reason with them, but it is almost certain to be

useless, for they might even be after me. I have been your sponsor."

He claps me on the back and then starts toward his people. I do not know what to do. I can see a detachment of the animal people not more than a hundred yards off shore, and the duck men are moving angrily toward me not much farther away. I see them push Ogroo aside as he begins to say something to them.

I move my trombone nervously. And suddenly I see my only chance. I am shaking before I start, but I fit the mouth-piece to my lip and begin to blow. I take a fast scale and I hit the B-natural for *Stardust* at least an octave higher than it was ever played before. I have got to ride high and fast.

Well, I close my eyes and I am shaking so that I hardly notice the vibrations of the horn begin, but when I reach the E in the third measure, I know I am feeling what I felt in Benny's. So I keep pushing it, and the last I remember I am trying to reach the high C closing.

That is when I pass out....

When I come to this time, I am almost afraid to open my eyes. My ears are still buzzing, and I am just beginning to realize weakly what has happened when I hear voices around me which are not part of the score. They are speaking in English. I open my eyes then, and look around.

I find that I am surrounded by a crowd of people who are saying to one another to give him air and to take it easy, and I perceive that I am on a city sidewalk, and in fact, as I look up, I

see that it is somewhere on Fifty-Second Street. A perfect landing for a tail gate artist, I think as I sit up.

When the crowd sees me do this they move in even closer, all the time telling one another to give me air, but finally one of them claims that he is a doctor and he helps me up and I go with him and another man in uniform who is probably a policeman. They tell me that they are taking me to a hospital, and I do not remember much after that. When I wake up again, I am in the hospital.

A doctor has hold of my wrist, and when he sees me open my eyes he says, "How are you feeling now?"

I tell him okay.

"Well," he says, "you seem to have had quite a shock, and perhaps you do not want to discuss it now, but your manner of dress and this instrument which you have brought with you have excited my curiosity no little."

I see that my trombone is on the table near him.

"Why no, I do not mind telling you," I say, "though you might find it hard to believe what I have gone through. But first—where am I and what month is it?"

The doctor lets go of my wrist.

"You are in New York," he says, "and it is September of the year Twenty-five O Seven."

"Just a minute," I say, "I must misunderstand you. I thought you said the year was Twenty-five O Seven."

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