

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
English 30B

## Cal

by Thomas Hunt

"That show was incredible." He said to his buddy as they walked down the rows in the parking lot, looking for their car.

"I don't know how he does it. The notes! The pitch! The tone. What a trumpeter."

"What a musician. What a jazz-man."

"You're preaching to the choir, brother," he said pausing, ". . .preaching to the choir. I gotta wonder though, how a man like that can relax after such a performance. He has such energy, such force, such beauty. He must've left a pint of blood up on that stage."

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Smack, his hand slapped the underside of his arm. His skin tensed up and then relaxed. The needle slid into the vein and Cal pulled the plunger back a bit, then slammed it home, all the way.

Slice. He was no longer a human being. Time meant nothing to him. All he could see were stars. His feet were suspended above his body. The sky was the limit and

the music playing from the record player in the corner was a heavenly choir of angels. They sang the perfect tune and every singer in the choir knew where "it" was. They knew, and they were just dancing around "it", teasing the audience, until late in the performance when the tempo combined with the shrill playing of the lead sax player and they headed straight for "it", slamming, jamming, smashing the boundaries of the real world, crashing through dimensions, finding "it", doing "it", making the world come together like a cosmic orgy, the way that only music could.

The arm hit the end of the record and started slowly scratching. Cal had fallen over backwards in his chair and was staring at the lights on the ceiling. His eyes were glazed over and he could still hear the angelic choir. They were no longer phantasmal. They were a part of him.

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The next day he came into the recording studio around nine thirty. Late as usual, and leaking fluids from the holes in his arms.

But that day was not to be remembered because of lateness or spilling plasma. That was the day they laid down the track for "My Funny Valentine". Valentine was a classic. Originally written by Rogers and Heart, it had been adopted by the jazz community and had become a

standard, as recognizable as "In the Mood" or "Girl from Impanema". Although many said you could not improve on a classic, as you cannot teach an old dog new tricks, many were about to be proven wrong.

Cal wandered to his place in the studio. He found his trumpet waiting for him on a stand, a microphone, a chair and a bottle of water waiting. He picked up the bottle, chucked it at an intern and demanded a bottle of Vodka. The intern, not really phased by the lousy treatment grabbed the projectile bottle and dashed out of the room to get the Vodka. He returned in a flash, and proved himself to be an excellent intern.

Cal took the Vodka from the intern and guzzled down a few large shots. He told the band to play "Valentine". The pianist flexed his long fingers and sat up straight. The bassist just looked cool, as usual, smoking a long cigarette in the corner, his left hand casually held the upright bass as though it were a streetlamp and he was merely leaning there, minding his own business. Cal pointed at the band and they started to play. He cut them off and began screaming "No! You stupid idiots! Slower! Slower!" He started them again and they had brought the tempo down, but it was not enough, because again Cal cut them off and screamed "SLOWER! God damn it! SLOWER!" The

band got the point. This time they had dragged the tempo down to a speed to where in a race with a snail, the snail could have a four course meal, catch a couple of flicks and still cross the finish line with enough time left over to smoke a pack of camels.

With the band properly subdued, Cal had another drink and promptly missed the first verse of the song. But he chimed in on the second verse with a slow sultry tone. There was so little emotion in his voice, it made one curious of his humanity. On the other hand, the lack of emotion brought up his lack of morals and likened him to a satanic figure, sinning, seducing women and not giving a damn if it's right or wrong.

When Cal stopped singing, he picked up his trumpet and began blowing slowly, so softly that it seemed the instrument had somehow taken on all the ambiguity of its master. Was the trumpet a demonic tool straight from hell or was it so careless that the differences between heaven and hell wouldn't interest it at all.

If the band noticed his performance, they didn't show it. They kept playing at a slow pace until Cal raised his hand in the air, and they faded out, a perfect end to a perfect song.

After they stopped, the studio was silent. The lead engineer wiped away a tear, faked a smile and signaled a hearty thumbs-up to Cal, to which Cal returned a salute that used a few less fingers. Cal had another drink of the Vodka, put the bottle down and walked out of the studio.

The pianist relaxed, and closed the tray of the piano. He turned to the bassist and said "Man, that guy can really play."

"And sing." The bassist responded, putting his cigarette out in a nearby ashtray and lighting another one.

"I wonder where he gets all that emotion." The pianist said, thinking out loud.

"I wonder how he manages to get rid of it all."

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Cal was on his knees in a bathroom stall, his head hovering over the toilet bowl. The bowl was filled with a mix of a half digested sandwich marinated in Vodka. There was a thin stream of blood mixed in with the vomit, the blood was dripping down from Cal's left arm, where the syringe was still stuck, the plunger pushed down, all the way.