

SALT

By Warren J. Jones III

WHY WE LIKE IT: *The turbulent prose, syncopated syntax and colliding emotion that characterize this post-millennial word spree were welcome percussion to our jaded ear drums. Another reason we liked it is because we have no idea what the title refers to. But seriously, there's something beautiful going on here—beautiful and timely. The language of texting is the new voice of the emerging artist and the run on/incomplete sentences and absence of expected punctuation in 'Salt' is sublime 'digi-speak'. The whole thing just rocks.*

On the odd chance that someone way in the back unseen from the stage was actually listening I pulled out one last trick from the bag unloading a torrent of notes using chromatics and fourth-y patterns and climaxing with my now famous ruptured rhino squonk. The sound not to be confused with music was not a result of carefully planned and practiced etudes but due to the poor shape of my old but not ancient enough to be valuable saxophone of torture. The drummer had provided the proper accompaniment of cymbal thrashes double bass drum bashes stick disintegrating mashes and was currently standing with arms thrust skyward a copious amount of perspiration both on his person and puddled at his feet. I had hired a bassist who bailed on me an hour before the show something I should have planned for as bassists as a rule can't keep track of anything more than the cleanliness of their strings and perhaps where a free meal might be obtained. This was not supposed to be so much work. Music is a blessing to be nurtured and shared my choir director instructed as she attempted without success to provide proper pitches for the disinterested and tone-deaf dozen teenagers robed and robbed of a perfectly fine sunday afternoon to be enjoyed outdoors not sniffing bad perfume and pew polish.

The three fanboys that had shown up an hour early to suck some kind of useful knowledge out of the sound check thereby improving their limited ability to produce coherent sound from unearned high quality instruments sat staring at their mobile devices similar to how my now dead dog had gazed at the empty supper dish he shoved into the corner by the stairs. Lump #1 elbowed #2 and so on and a lame type of clapping or perhaps snapping of fingers wet with beer foam and snot was produced causing my drummer to lean over precariously and yell DUDE with the proper hand positions typical of young privileged males of a certain age and lack of social graces once considered necessary in society.

The aforementioned gentlemen seated in the audience portion of the theater reacted in a similar manner thereby securing an immediate social connection with my drummer and assuring all involved a further bonding opportunity not limited to public intoxication but including the secretive sharing of prohibited items of some hallucinogenic nature of which I may or may not have past experience with and had conceded defeat to after several attempts at relieving a chemical imbalance such as is found in irresolute members of a certain caste in modern society. Drumset abandoned the now four amigos headed out to bathrooms unknown and the unsuspecting ambivalent world at large.

Reaching behind me I snagged my can of tepid malt beverage and chugged the remaining tepid foam while looking to the side of the stage where I observed the club owner trying to smooth out a waitress' apron by passing his hairy knuckled hands over the front of her body repeatedly in a fashion not apparently to my knowledge condoned by the server or even perhaps the lawful authorities. This particular female and I had recently become more than just friends that seek the company of people of similar age and occupation even perhaps a relationship had been formed and my impression of the interaction between this man and that woman caused an odd climbing a rope in gym class feeling in my loins.

Not knowing to a certainty of the exact nature of the mutual or even distinct dependency upon each other between myself and the waitress as we had only had coffee and not had a chance to consummate in an adult fashion a physical animal and perhaps emotional bond requiring much attention to the details of interactional relationships of which I am a member of the side of the species that uses only a small percentage of available mental capacity to process information and single syllables to communicate results requests and responses I was unsure of what if any reaction I should be forthcoming with and stood near in mute paralysis as the alleged assault continued. I finally awoke from my stupor and yelled hey stop it and both parties turned suddenly in my direction as if a secret meeting in an office downtown had just been interrupted by armed insurgents or at least government agents in phalanx with handguns drawn stooped to avoid return fire from the enemy.

A look of questioning annoyance from the manager accompanied his request that I mind my business as the staff meeting currently underway was taking up all his available time and he would address my concerns during our upcoming and possibly last paycheck dispersal appointment to be held at a later time not at my convenience as the other business at hand was delayed by my interruption. The lady of my observation showed a countenance not of surprise or even the concentration of one who had been brushing or perhaps rolling lint from an article of clothing in a manner that was neither perfunctory nor indulgent yet also lacking the sophistication necessary to maintain a clear conscience during such a seemingly mundane activity. I accepted this visual and made the decision to avoid confrontation thereby perhaps maintaining my ability to collect the remuneration which was promised me after the performance

of recent musical duties mentioned in a written contract supplied by the manager and signed by me. I partitioned to the rearward portion of my previously stated small brain the now supremely obvious knowledge that I will remain alone for a major portion if not indeed the entirety of my remaining extantivity.

I breathed in slowly and turned back to the stage observing one of the more surly and shifty and smarmy looking stagehands as he ducked behind the unused bass amplifier supplied at no small cost by me carrying my soprano sax. This action was not requested by me or even implied in a manner that could be mistaken for permission and as my brain caught up with my vision I shouted out for him to stop immediately. The shady looking aforementioned miscreant spun towards me dropping my horn on the back edge of the stage causing a loud unwanted clanging sound to enter my awareness along with the realization that my next 10+ job monies would be going to fund the repair or replacement of one of my now even more worthless instruments of my and possible many other peoples torture. The previously spoken of helper who is obviously

no such thing beat a rather hasty even speedy retreat out the side door and I went to collect my ex sax and contemplate yet once again the possible reasons for taking up this punishing and futile line of work.

I meticulously packed up the broken pieces of a once promising future into their ancient and worn cases while sighing to myself allowing me even more time to contemplate a seemingly miserable but perhaps mercifully short future in the music biz. I repeated aloud the phrase I used silently in meditative mode attempting to delete the wrongful gig experiences built into a great help of clinging woeful resentment and solitude. It was not supposed to be this much work.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *'Salt' was written as I was reflecting on my 40+ years as a jazz bassist. I have experienced all the emotions expressed in the story and have had contact with the characters. The dark overtone that the story exudes was produced by concentrating on some of the exasperation I have felt from time to time when examining my bank account in relation to the man-hours necessary to become and remain somewhat successful and useful in a pursuit many consider frivolous or ignore completely.*

That being said, I love my job. I love writing. I am a voracious reader of Harrison, Gaiman and others and re-read often.

BIO: Warren L. Jones III is a jazz bassist, composer and writer working near the White Tank Mountains in Arizona. He has been published in print in *Kyso Flash 2016*, *State of the Art* and *Four Ties Lit Review*. Warren is color blind.