

# Snatch XIII

by Mathew Paust

“But bliss is an ambivalent if irresistible flirt. An opiate flash. An instant of fragile magic. Its recognition both grace and corruption. Yet, aware it only mimics redemption, is relative and can't last, carrying enough of the before to divine the after, I accept this gift with a deeper gratitude than I might have imagined, float with naked trust on its unearned buoyancy. And why? At the start, I suppose, because it distracted the pain.

“Oh, the pain. My infantile anticipation of it fell woefully short of preparing me for its arrival, its suddenness and magnitude. A jolt of such surprising intensity, so unrelenting a murderous force, my immediate sense was of collusion, that somehow this boiling intrusion into my every essence, blocking the denial patterns in my neurological coding, was in part my own doing, my reckless push beyond the existential boundary to an ambiance where the practical joke held court.

“That has to be it. A joke. Else I'd be dead, no? And the pain? Well, hell, that's a damned good question. It never did stop, mind you. Never diminished. Lit me up with celestial wattage, apparently for good. I'm still astounded how adaptable I must be to have gotten past its shock and managed to put the pain out of reach simply by paying it no heed. Like the tinnitus I've had as far back as I can recall. The constant locust whine I hear only when I turn my attention to it. The pain, this ultimate rending of nerves and the maddening whine by now I'm sure are in deep cahoots. I could laugh as well, knowing I remain in charge.”

