

The Fifth Snatch

by Mathew Paust

Oh shit in neon lit up his mind an instant after he heard his voice say it, the “I’m scared of dying.” He’d meant it when he said it, he thought, but with the *oh shit* came a deeper understanding of how he really felt at that moment. Well, how he felt now, not at the moment he’d blurted it out. A more philosophical construct had winked at him soon as he’d said it, calling him first on using such a colloquialism, as if he’d lifted a lyric from “Old Man River” or regressed to something a child playing in a sandbox might say, and reminding him he’d long before conquered with sophistication his primal fear of personal *finis*.

His blurring it out had come on a whim. Nothing more, he decided, and began probing for the whim’s derivation. An instinctual breakout? Was he losing control, his cognitive authority reverting to rationalization? He suspected this is what the shrink was thinking, had been striving for, employing professional dicta to unveil. He watched her ballpoint execute swift, exuberant swirls on the legal pad, while her face, he saw with a flicked glance, yielded nothing save studied dispassion.

He knew she believed she had him. And maybe she did. Ordinarily he dreaded blushing, so much so that merely thinking about it brought it on. He felt the heat rush to his face now. A flash of panic, then the realization his blood betrayal should signal he was onto her trick. She must know he was no fool. He wanted to sigh with relief that this instinctual eruption might be saving him from the other.

Out of control yet, though, riding his hard drive. She’d found the chink, happily noting nuances. Dangerous. What the fuck, he figured, and sighed, remembering almost too late to keep his lips apart.