



WINDOW TO WHAT...?

BY

CHARLES PINCH

Originally published by Alfie Dog, UK

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...*

There are few things in my life that make me proud in juxtaposition to the objective self-destruction I've wrought, enjoyed, have no shame of, and no regrets: my son, Alfie, my wife Claire, my surprisingly exceptional students (because...the other option was disappointment), being able to write for Fleas on the Dog, a spackling of other things, and Charles.

I'm proud that this man writes and is a part of my creative life.

Presence requires the present.

Charles not only writes in the moment but he defines what a moment is – he is the epitome of seeing a raindrop ripple, the timestamp of a second, the minutiae in the quagmire.

The plot unveils itself to him, as a window opens and the morning air comes in to wake you up.

I'm rarely envious of another's talent (take that as pretentiously as you may), but this is a story that makes me jealous.

"Window to What...?" is a singularity, a star that implodes upon itself and drags you back in – not because you want to be turned into spaghetti but because it's worth it, you need it, simply to see where the end takes you.

Everything about this story gives fiction the ability to call itself fiction. From the dialogue (which is my favorite part) to the plot (which is ingenious enough to make one wonder why we shouldn't all just give up the game and let the big boys play).

The luck of the draw is our lottery well won, as if time and space came together to create fate – and fate is a fickle mistress.

What else can I say?

You did well.

You did so well that it almost makes me hate writing as you've killed my heroes, turned yourself into a god, and set a bar that I don't think I can live up to.

You bastard.

Read this story, because if you write this is how you should write.

Read this story, because if you write you'll become a better writer.

Read this story because, if you want to know what's good, this is how you touch the sun.

Five Stars.

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)

Three million dollars was more than money. It was the house payments they had fallen behind on. It was the car that was driving itself into the scrap heap. It was the empty bank account with the comical name 'savings'. It was being out of work for seven months and a bit of felt pen around the rims of his shoes when he went for interviews.

WINDOW TO WHAT...?

For Frances, ever and always...

He put his jeans in. He put his socks and his T-shirt in, even his belt, everything he was wearing that day. He measured out the detergent and selected the cold-water wash. And then he just stood there, looking at the machine. All he had to do was press the Start button but he just stood there looking at it...

It was a big reach. His fingers dug into the blood-soaked pocket of his jeans and crawled all the way down to the bottom until they touched it. Then he pulled the stub out.

“I want you to have this.”

“What is it?”

“Lottery ticket.”

“I can’t take it. It’s yours.”

“Take it. I’m givin’ it to you. Won’ do me no good.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Sure. I’m gonna die.”

The stranger cradling the man with the lottery ticket bit down on his lower lip.

“You just hang on, okay? The ambulance will be here any minute.”

“You won’ go away and leave me?”

“No.”

“What’s your name?”

“Hank.”

“Mine’s Barry. Hi, Hank.”

“Hi, Barry.”

“Hi.”

“How’d you pick the numbers?”

“Eh...?”

“On the lottery ticket.”

“How’d I pick ‘em?”

“Yeah.”

“I dunno.”

Hank raised his head. He thought he could hear the sound of a siren in the distance. The sound was getting closer. Barry didn’t seem to hear it. They could hear the crackling of the radio inside the cop car, though. The cruiser door was open.

“Most people have some kind of system or formula,” he said.

“What kind of formula?”

“You know. Their birthday. When their first kid was born. Lucky stuff like that.”

“Well, I don’ have no kid.”

“That’s alright. That’s okay.”

“I got a birthday, though.” He tried to laugh. A little more blood leaked out the side of his mouth. His head lay in Hank’s lap.

And wasn’t this the kind of Jim Dandy thing Hank hoped to happen on the way home from Budget Country Food and Drug? He was two lengths behind the white Camaro

when it careened in front of him and ricocheted between the lanes. Barry was in the car ahead of it.

“And then what happened?”

He could hear himself explaining, backtracking in time for the police officer who was taking everything down.

“The next thing I knew the red car was upside down on the side of the road. I heard the guy inside screaming. I pulled over onto the soft shoulder. I got out of my car and ran over to him. He was hollering for me to help him. I was afraid the car was going to explode. Gasoline was leaking onto the gravel. I tried the door. Maybe that was stupid, it was jammed. The window had shattered on the driver’s side. The guy reached out for me with one hand. I took it and started pulling. ‘I’m trapped!’ he yelled. ‘I can’t move no further.’”

“Trapped...?” the officer asked.

“He was trapped by the steering wheel. He couldn’t move his legs up. I got hold of his other hand. All of a sudden the door gave. I had both of his hands in mine and I pulled for all I was worth. I got him out of the vehicle. He couldn’t walk or stand. That’s why you see all the blood on his pants. I think one of his legs is broken. Maybe both.”

“Any other witnesses?”

“The couple parked up ahead there. They stopped when it happened. You could ask them.”

“Anybody else?”

“Some cars slowed down to see what happened but they didn’t stop. Makes you proud to be a human being.”

“Don’t it, though,” the cop said and shook his head. Then he asked, “Did you see the license plate?”

Hank said, “I tried to take a picture on my phone. But I couldn’t get it. The guy was too fast.”

He took Hank’s name and address and asked a few more questions. Later, Hank watched them load Barry into the ambulance. He looked gray-blue going in, his face did. He looked like a dead man already and the vehicle might as well have been a hearse.

“He’s going to make it, isn’t he?” Hank said.

“I don’t know,” the cop said. “If he’s lucky.”

Barry had suffered a gash on the head. The back of the head that now rested in Hank’s lap. He could feel the hot ooze of the man’s blood leak into his crotch and he thought, *isn’t this a damn fine something*. But he was asking that in some other part of his brain because what he was really thinking, and he remembered this later, what he was really thinking was, *Oh dear God, don’t let him die on me. Please save this guy*.

The sirens were getting closer.

“Do you believe in fate?”

“Fate?”

“Things happen for a reason.” Barry gazed up at him. Hank didn’t know quite how to deal with those eyes. They were pleading and dire but also just eyes—like Barry couldn’t quite believe what had happened to him and where he was, least of all lying with his head in some strange guy’s lap on the side of the road somewhere. Oh, he knew what road it

was when he set out. He'd driven down that road God knows how many times. He just couldn't remember it now.

"Maybe. They happen anyway."

"I believe in ghosts," Barry said. Each word was a struggle. Hank wondered how he could think and talk. He was maybe three or four steps from Death's door and here he was talking. He didn't ask about his car, either. Well, good thing. The car, the red Toyota that had seen better days, was 'totaled'. He found himself wondering if Barry had collision coverage insurance. And then he thought, *what the hell are you thinking that for?*

The couple that had pulled over and parked up ahead were walking towards them now on the side of the road. They had just finished speaking with the cop. If they were younger Hank figured they'd be running or jogging but they were old folks. The man walked with a cane and the woman walked slowly with her arm through his. They looked like they didn't know what they would do or say when they reached him. But they had stopped and it was the right thing to do.

"Do you, Hank?"

"Do I what?"

"Believe in 'em?"

"Ghosts?"

"Yeah."

"No."

"Not ever?"

"Halloween when my daughter dresses up."

Barry struggled to laugh, and Hank, though he didn't find the remark particularly funny, regretted it nevertheless.

"That's a good one."

"You just relax, buddy. Don't try to talk."

"Okay."

Hank patted the side of Barry's face like a mom or a dad pats a baby's back when the baby falls asleep on their shoulders or sometimes falls asleep on their lap. Like Barry right now.

Barry's hand twitched against the gravel. He coughed and expelled a mouthful of blood.

Oh Jesus, Hank thought, *where are you guys? Where's the fucking ambulance?*

The couple from the other car was close enough now to speak.

"How is he?" the woman asked.

"We're waiting for the ambulance," Hank told her.

"Did you see that sucker?" the old man cried.

"The Camaro?"

"Is that what it was?"

"I saw it."

"We called 911." He held up his phone.

"Thanks. I called too."

"How is he?"

They both leaned in to have a closer look but they didn't step closer. They were dressed like twins; beige pants and off-white wool cardigans with wooden buttons. Hank figured the man to be in his 80's—mid or late. He had a face full of tangled lines and the sad eyes

and red haws of a Basset hound. The woman was maybe 75. After looking at Barry with the blood oozing out of his mouth and his hands twitching, they turned and looked at each other.

“What would you like us to do?” the old man asked.

“There isn’t anything we can do until the ambulance gets here,” Hank told him. “Did you get a picture of the car?”

“I was going to. But I was too slow. He got away. Did you?”

“No.”

“Is there anything we can do?” his wife asked.

“Do you have any tissue?” Hank said.

She pulled a ball of tissue out of her pocket; all scrunched up, and handed it to him. Neither she nor the old man looked like they wanted to be anywhere near here. Hank wiped the bottom of Barry’s face. Barry was gazing up at the couple with fixity but they avoided his eyes.

“Is there anything else?” the old man asked.

“Wait till the ambulance arrives.”

“Okay. That’s what the officer said.”

“We’ll go back to our car,” the wife said. “We’ll wait in the car.”

“Is that alright?” the man asked.

“Yeah, you go ahead,” Hank told them. “Thank you. Thanks for stopping.”

“You make sure you cash the ticket I gave you,” Barry said to him. He was looking up into Hank’s eyes, the way a dog sometimes looks at you.

“Cash it?”

“Maybe you’ll win something.”

“I never win anything,” Hank told him.

“You got lucky written all over you.”

“I never won anything in my life.”

“You know better than me, I s’ppose,” Barry said.

“I know I never won anything.”

The ambulance appeared around a turn in the road. The red light on top spun around in circles and the siren punched holes in their eardrums. It pulled up ten, fifteen feet from where Hank and Barry sat and three men in navy blue uniforms jumped out and joined up with the cop. Another two police cars pulled up alongside the ambulance. One of the paramedics went to the rear of the ambulance and opened the back doors. He rolled a gurney out. The other two ran over to them.

“Sometimes your luck changes.”

“You don’t try to talk now,” Hank said. “You just lay quiet.”

“I got a good feeling this is your turn.”

“You’re the one who’s going to get lucky,” Hank told him. “All the luck is yours, now.”

“My luck’s run out,” Barry said. “Just like before.”

“No. You still got some coming.”

“I give it to you, Hank.”

“You keep it, Barry. I don’t need it.”

One of the paramedics leaned in and touched Barry’s hand. He nodded at the leg.

“Looks pretty bad. Can you stand at all, sir?”

“No,” Barry said. “I tried already.”

“I think one of his legs is broken,” Hank said.

“Okay,” the paramedic said. “Do you still have feeling in your arms and legs?”

“Pain in my legs.”

They worked quickly and with an efficiency that was as clean and streamlined as mathematics. They eased him off Hank’s lap, cradling his head and sliding his body onto the gurney. The gurney lay flat against the ground after the paramedic collapsed it. Hank looked at Barry, whose eyes had started to cloud over. It looked like he was going to sleep. Blood trickled in a thin but steady stream out the side of his mouth. It trickled out of his nostrils, too. Sometimes people who’ve suffered a concussion or broken bones act like nothing special has happened. They sit up, talk, even laugh. Then later, after eating dinner or watching a TV-show, something changes in their faces. They pass out or slip into a coma or they die.

One of these three was waiting for Barry. And Hank thought, *Oh God, just take the poor guy home.*

And he heard Barry whisper, “Heaven...”

And that spooked him for two reasons. How did Barry *hear* his thought? And how did he know the home he meant was Heaven and not the place where he actually lived? And maybe, three, because Hank did mean ‘Heaven’ when he thought ‘home’.

They loaded the gurney in, Barry covered with a blanket and strapped down. He looked gray-blue going in, his face did. He looked like a dead man already and the vehicle might as well have been a hearse. The paramedic closed the two back doors at the same time. The men jumped back into the ambulance and drove away. The emergency light was still pulsating and the siren was still punching holes in his ears but after maybe—well, how

much—three, four hundred yards, before it was out of sight anyway, the light stopped flashing and the siren cut. The ambulance proceeded along the road but not at high speed.

Hank stood up with his trousers heavy with the blood of a man he didn't know existed twenty-five minutes ago. His shirt was heavy with blood, too, and it had glued itself to his skin from the pressure of Barry's head.

"He's dead, isn't he?" he said to the cop.

"We don't know that, sir."

"I know it."

"How do you know that?"

"They turned the siren off. They only do that when the emergency's over."

"It looks like it's over," the cop said. "It's over for him."

"Poor guy," Hank said. "He was a nice fellow."

"I thought you said you didn't know him?" The cop's eyes were boring at him through a pair of sunglasses. It was amazing how suspicious these guys could become when you said something innocent that innocently sounded like the wrong thing.

"I *don't* know him. I can say he's a nice guy, can't I?"

"You can say it," the cop said, and he turned and looked in the direction of the ambulance. But the ambulance was out of sight now.

"He was a nice guy," Hank said.

He didn't pay much attention to lotteries because he'd never won anything. There was a time, before Taylor, before little Hank and Ashley, when he believed in luck. But after a while with nothing to show for it, he figured maybe luck didn't believe in him. What the

hell. You made your own luck, right? That's what everybody said. And besides, look at poor Barry. Bought a ticket, hoped to win. How lucky was that? Luck? No sir. You make your own. And dying on the side of the road with your head leaking into the crotch of a guy you've never seen before is no kind of luck you want to have. Amen.

He told them about it, of course, and after all the horror of the experience, of hearing Hank telling of the experience, had died down—and that took a good day or three—there was still the ticket.

“Are you going to check it?” Taylor asked.

“You think I should?”

“The draw's tonight.”

“What's the pot?” Hank junior asked.

“Three million.”

“Is that all? Most pots are ten or twenty million.”

“I don't know, babe.”

“Daddy, are you going to cash it?”

“Cash it? I haven't won it yet.”

“She means check it.”

“Are you, Dad?”

“I dunno.”

“Are you, Hank?”

“Should I?”

“Three million dollars.”

“Doesn't mean I won.”

“Didn’t you tell us the guy said it was lucky?”

“He said he had a good feeling about it.”

“When he bought it?”

“When he bought it. When he gave it to me.”

“Well, there you go,” Taylor said.

Three million dollars was more than money. It was the house payments they had fallen behind on. It was the car that was driving itself into the scrap heap. It was the empty bank account with the comical name ‘savings’. It was being out of work for seven months and a bit of felt pen around the rims of his shoes when he went for interviews. But that didn’t mean squat. It wasn’t his three million dollars. It wasn’t anybody’s right now. It was just a pot. A pot with who knows how many tickets out there. Tickets? He had a ticket. Sure. Barry had bought it and picked the numbers. He probably figured like most people when they buy a ticket it was a lucky one but he probably also didn’t figure it would end up with his blood on it and that a guy called Hank Peters would be holding it. But he was. Hank Peters was holding the ticket. It was his now. So maybe he should check it.

He had a funny feeling—weird, more than funny—that he had won before he started reading the numbers out loud along with the TV announcer. As he got closer to the end and every number was the same one he heard coming from the television, the room started to spin around him and even the guy’s voice slipped in and out of earshot, as though he was hearing it underwater. But he heard the kids scream and saw Taylor jumping up and down in their living room and one of them, one of the kids, shouting,

“We’re rich! We’re rich!” And he thought, *now would be a good time to pass out*. But he didn’t.

A whirlwind followed. Feature articles in both the local papers. An interview on a Toronto television show. The words ‘uncanny’, ‘serendipity’ and ‘remarkable odds’ became everybody’s catch-phrase of the moment. And nobody forgot ‘Samaritan’, ‘sacrifice’ and ‘tragedy’. Hank junior posted something on Facebook.

A national magazine did a story.

Numbers. He kept thinking about them long after. Two months after he had erected a big headstone for Barry—who had died without a family—paid the house off, set himself up in business (same line as he worked before the downsize, just that now he was his own boss), opened a couple of saving accounts, bought a few new pairs of shoes, and no longer spent mornings Googling the local want ads or standing in line at the employment office—he was still thinking about them. The numbers. The numbers Barry had picked when he bought the ticket. Most people have a system or formula when they pick lottery numbers but he remembered Barry saying he didn’t have a formula. Just a birthday. He didn’t say he used his birthday when he picked the numbers. All he said was he had a good feeling.

When he bought it?

When he bought it. When he gave it to me.

He even started dreaming about the numbers. Sometimes after waking up, they floated in front of Hank’s eyes. He could see 9’s and 3’s and all sorts of numbers floating in the

air, sort of bobbing in the air in front of him. And this didn't happen once in a while. It happened every day. He began dreaming about the numbers every night and seeing them when he got up in the morning. When he went into his little home-office after breakfast and when he turned his computer on to check his email. The numbers just wouldn't go away.

Okay, he said to himself one day. You've got to do something here. Do the numbers have any special meaning? Were they lucky for a reason? They were lucky for you—would they be lucky for anybody else? Well, they'd be lucky for Barry too, if he was alive.

There was a pattern to the numbers. Wasn't there? He thought there was. But why did he think that?

Finally, one day, he sat down and wrote the numbers out in a line. He wrote: 1172504393. Those were the numbers Barry had picked. And those were the numbers that two months ago had changed Hank's life. But where was the pattern? If there was one. He did some arithmetic. Birth dates. Taylor? No. Hank junior? Zero four. Zero four was April. April was the fourth month. And so it would follow 04393. April 3, 1993. But Hank junior was born April 16, 1999. April 39th? There is no April 39th, stupid. Thirty days hath September, April, June and November. So much for Hank. Ashley struck out because she was born in December and there was no 12 among the numbers. But why 393? Why was that familiar? He just so happened—and isn't it always that way—to be looking at the back of his new car parked in the driveway outside his office window, looking but not really seeing because his mind was elsewhere. And then he was seeing 393. His license plate. ARYD 393. Good old Ontario blue and white license plate with

the little annual renewal sticker in the top right corner. 393. Match. Well, that's a start.

Assuming he was on the right track, of course.

"Whachya doin'?"

"Playing around. The last three numbers on the ticket match the numbers on my license plate."

"The lottery ticket?"

"Uh-huh. Three nine three."

"That's kind of spooky, isn't it?"

"Why spooky, Taylor?"

"Well, how did Barry know your license plate number if he never met you before the accident?"

"He didn't know my license plate number."

"He picked three nine three."

"So? That's just part of it."

"You don't think that's spooky?"

"No, why?"

"Think about it."

"Coincidental maybe, but not spooky."

"How would he know three nine three?"

"Even if he did the rest doesn't make sense."

"Why not?"

"Because they're not numbers, they're letters."

Hank pointed to the plate outside his window and Taylor laughed and said, “That’s a relief.”

“Go on,” he said, chuckling.

“No,” she said. “If it was all numbers and they matched, I don’t think I’d want to know.”

“They’re just numbers, honey,” Hank said. “And lucky numbers for us.”

“But wouldn’t you get a little spooked?”

“In that case, maybe. But it ain’t goin’ there, babe. What are those?”

“Calls for you. Rob Willis. Somebody B. Klinger. Somebody Gadacz.”

“Oleg Gadacz is not ‘somebody’. He’s turning out to be my best client.”

“Then he *is* somebody. Back in two hours.”

“Off to...?”

“Hair, babe. Gotta stay beautiful for you.”

She was gone all of five, maybe ten minutes when his phone rang.

“Peters Consulting Services.”

“Is this Henry Peters?”

“Hank Peters.”

“This is Brenda Klinger.”

“Oh yes, Ms. Klinger. You called earlier.”

“That’s right.”

“What can I do for you?”

“This isn’t about business, exactly.”

“Oh?”

“Are you free to talk?”

He thought that an odd question. But he said, “Yes.”

“It happened to me, too.”

“What happened?”

“The accident, the lottery ticket, the three million dollars.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I won. Like you did. Have you figured out the formula he used yet?”

“I’m sorry but I don’t understand.”

“The lottery numbers on your ticket should match the letters and numbers on your license plate. Do they? They did mine. FNY GRL 89.”

Hank swallowed hard.

“Who is this?” he demanded.

“Brenda Klinger. I live outside of Winnipeg.”

“Well, Ms. Klinger, I’m very busy at the moment. Goodb—”

“No, wait! Please don’t hang up on me! *Please.*”

“Look, if this is some kind of sick joke—“

“It’s a joke. But it’s not mine, Mr. Peters. Or yours. It’s his.”

“Whose?”

“Barry’s. Barry David Dillon’s.”

“Barry David Dillon is dead. I buried him myself. I paid for his funeral out of my winnings and I raised a headstone above his grave. It’s all in the articles.”

“So did I.”

“Excuse me?”

“You published a picture of Barry Dillon in the full-page memorial you took out in your local paper. I have a copy here beside me. The man in the picture is the Barry Dillon I buried a year ago in Manitoba.”

“Ms. Klinger...I think you have me or Barry Dillon confused with someone else.” And he thought: *nutcase!* “Goodbye.”

She’s right, you know, a voice said inside him.

What?

Letters have numbers, too, Hank.

Huh?

Sure. Take the alphabet. A is 1. B is 2. C is 3. How does ARYD work out?

Go on, this is stupid.

Okay. Stupid. But you were the one who started checking them because you figured there was a pattern there.

That’s assuming Barry knew my license plate number. How could he? And if it wasn’t me who stopped for him and he gave the ticket to some other guy who had a different license plate, how lucky would that be for him?

But you did stop, Hank. You stopped and Barry gave you the ticket. He said—

“—Maybe your luck will change. I got a good feeling it’s your turn.”

A is 1. Check. R? R is letter seventeen of the alphabet. Seventeen. We got 1, 17. Y? Y is number twenty-five. 11725. Hank felt a knot tighten in his throat. *It was a crank call,*

bud. Do you really want to go ahead with this? But at this point he couldn't stop himself. He was this far and he had to go on, had to find out. *You don't want to go on, Hank. Trust me on this.* No. No, I do. D is 4. So you've got 117254. But where's the zero? Little bit of relief pouring over you, Hank ole man. My God, you're sweating, you dumb lout. You're actually sweating. He wiped his brow with the back of his hand. 1172504. Well, if four is meant to represent April sometimes you put a zero in front of it. Like 04/10/22. Yeah, okay. But how do you know it represents a month? Maybe the zero is there to make the four stand out. What? So you read it as four instead of fifty-four if it were written 117254. Right. Okay. 1172504 and that only left...

393.

...ARYD 393

The phone rang again. It was an out of province number. Manitoba. Hank let it ring this time. Then the voice mail clicked on:

“...I'm not trying to be a pest. I'm trying to make sense out of what happened with me. After I read your story—and the interview, I knew I wasn't alone. I know you will delete this but I ask that you listen first. Just listen. I'll try to keep it short. A year ago, I stopped on the way home from a discount food and drug mart because I witnessed an accident. A white Camaro—the article didn't mention the name or color of the car responsible, Mr. Peters—but it was a white Camaro. The guy driving it was drunk or he lost control. Barry Dillon was in the car ahead of it. A red Toyota, a beat-up Toyota. It was upside down when I stopped. He was screaming and I rushed over to him. Long story short I got him

out. I had his head against my shoulder and there was blood everywhere. While we waited for the ambulance, he gave me the ticket. I said I didn't want it but he insisted. He told me my luck was about to change. No, *I had luck written all over me*. You know what's funny? I've never been lucky before. We had to wait awhile before the ambulance showed up. No one else stopped. Not a soul. No one like the old couple you mentioned in the interview. I knew he was going to die before they got him to the hospital. He knew it, too. He died while it was driving away. I knew it because they turned the siren off. Then I won the three million. I wasn't even going to check. But a friend said I should. The rest is history. The thing I remember is he asked if I believed in fate. I recall thinking at the time that was a funny thing to ask, especially from a guy whose minutes were clearly numbered. I don't. I didn't then. Not sure now. The letters and numbers on your plate will match the numbers on your winning ticket, Mr. Peters—*damn!*

Second voice mail.

“...The thing is I bury Barry Dillon in Manitoba and a year later I learn you bury him in Ontario. When I searched him after he died all I got from the city was that he lived in a series of rooming houses. A man with no fixed address. What does that say, Mr. Peters? I never met the man before the accident and you said you'd never met him before, either. He lived here and he lived there. I don't understand it. What are we looking at? What are we in the middle of? It scares me, a little. I'm not leaving this message to scare you, and I hope I don't, but it scares me. After I read your story I asked myself if he was going to show up somewhere else. Like a man who can't stay dead. I watch the news but it worries me now to watch it. You said in your interview they never caught the guy responsible, the white Camaro guy. They didn't catch him here, either. Is he somehow

part of the story? I don't know how many times I've asked myself that. I did a Facebook page dedicated to Barry's memory. I can share it if you like. You can see the picture of him, which is a different picture from yours but the same man. You can see the headstone I put up. His birth date is the same as the one on yours—November 30, 1978—but in Manitoba he died a year earlier. I won't call again. ...Oh, and about the blood. Did you keep the clothes you wore that day? His blood. Maybe you threw them away. It washes out, Mr. Peters. Bloodstains never wash out, even in cold water, but his wash clean. If you don't believe anything else I've said, you'll believe that. Goodbye. I hope I haven't upset you. If you ever want to talk about this you can call me.”

When Hank junior came into the office he found Hank sitting at his desk like a carving of Hank, staring at his phone.

“What's the matter, Dad?”

Hank turned.

“Nothing.” A drop of sweat landed on his lap.

“Can I have ten bucks?”

Hank's wallet was on the desk next to his Rolodex. He reached for it and took out two fives without looking at them and handed them to his son.

Hank junior said, “Aren't you going to ask me what I want it for?”

Taylor had said, “You should pitch them.” And maybe he should have. But he didn’t. He bagged them. He put them in a green plastic garbage bag and used a twist tie and chucked them into the back of their bedroom closet. It was a superstition sort of thing. He’d made a little jingle out of it. He’d said, ‘The clothes are yucky but also lucky.’ After that, he just forgot about them.

He put his jeans in first, then his socks and his T-shirt, even his belt. Everything he wore that day except his shoes and his watch. He measured out the detergent and selected the cold-water wash. All he had to do now was press Start.

Sure.

It was the easiest thing in the world. Just raise his hand, extend his finger and press the button.

But it was also hard.

Oh God, thought Hank.

“...if you don’t believe anything else, I’ve said, you’ll believe this.”

So terribly, terribly hard.

AUTHOR’S NOTE: *I never know exactly where my stories are going to take me. They seem to come out of nowhere with a life of their own. I’m not the kind of writer who ‘picks’ a subject then writes about it. I don’t plan or plot out my stories. I don’t buy lottery tickets, either. But the license plate ARYD 393 is my own and I had fun playing with the letters and numbers. What I do like about Window to What...? Is that the first and last paragraph are like bookends, same but not so same.*

AUTHOR BIO: Charles Pinch co-founded FOTD with Tom Ball in December 2019. He has Master degrees in fine art and philosophy from McMaster University and the University of Toronto. He speaks English and Italian.

