

# reQuiem reQuiem reQuiem

by Charles Pinch Pinch Pinch Pinch Pinch

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Guest Editor TRACEY STERNS writes... Charles Pinch almost makes me wish, or wince, I read for pleasure. (What a foolish bribe and fatuous notion?) I just found myself reading and re-reading 'Requiem.' So I kept foraging—'Link by link, yard by yard...' (And found more, each instance, like mining the same vein and finding more gold, ever replenishing, I'm sure there are nuggets I've missed.) It is beautifully scribed. Lines so precise and concisely inspired, uniquely, unequivocally quizzical and quixotically, economically fashioned. Let's get started,*

*"The snow stopped at three. That's when the temperature plunged. Even the automatic door in the ShopRite store balked against opening:" Snow stopping, store-shopping—doors balking? Aside from its fragrant assonance, it's the story woven that's in-store. Here's a bit of foreboding: "looking down at the octopus tentacles of tires tracks in the snow"... "fracturing and numbing the land beneath frigid white skies." Now we know both the reader and the characters are about to be engaged and entangled. Yet, it's all a storm of subtext so far; still, you've been invited, before you're even introduced...So Mitch "juddered out of the lot" and drives off in the receding blizzard, "It was too cold for precipitation but the wind was up and about, pitching powdery squalls..." and he offers to pick Scott up..."fracturing and numbing the land beneath frigid white skies."*

*In fact, on my initial perusal of the plot, I purposely avoided reading the ending to see if I could suss it out: ... Did Mitch kill Scott accidentally, or otherwise; or, assault him and realize he couldn't let him live? ...Did Hammett have a hand in it? He had been jilted by Scott's mother. (Did his innate buffoonery give-way to some act of precarious, avenging violence? ...forfeiting his fondly, forsaken intimacy with the deceased's mother? But there wasn't enough precipitous fore-story to weave it to be so. And I couldn't think of a way of recommending either scenario that wouldn't weaken the narrative.*

*Speaking of narrative, here are some advancing, eye-popping lines that peel the plot and savour both Pinch's conceit and genius: "Branches rattled and knocked against the iron sky. The sun was there somewhere, a devious conspirator, a hazy white presence behind an X-Ray plate giving light but no warmth;" " 'Fuck off!' the boy returned." "[He] had a pale blade-shaped*

*face with a mouth and lips that seemed too wide for it; not handsome but the kind of face that would grow up to be called ‘interesting’” On return to Mitch’s “basement apartment” whether or not he was aware of the precipitated deadly deed. As described, “He had a living room, a kitchenette, a match box bedroom and a toilet that bumped up against the side of his stained bathtub.” What more could one possibly want? But it’s these inessential descriptors that insist on Charles’ indispensable sense of satiating his readers without them realizing they are replete.*

*Who needs...okay one more...Let us describe Scott’s celebration-of-life: “The visitation was held in Peabody’s [fittingly diminutive pea-bodies?] Funeral Home in what was called the Serenity [incredible] Room, a chaste space with pastel papered walls and blonde wainscoting. [...chaste, space, pastel—walls, blond, wainscoting ... both segments are flinchingly mellifluous, basking in their lack of significance.] Modest arrangements of carnations and lilies stood on wooden pedestals. Sheila’s employer had sent a bouquet with a china angel in the center. It was a closed casket. To Mitch it looked shorter than he remembered Scott.”*

*Pinch’s story is so incidentally masterful. It appears so casually, so effortlessly written...And its denouement or absence thereof, to me, is poignantly reminiscent of Hemingway’s, ‘The End of Something’—only better...*

*Five stars*

**WHY I LIKE IT: Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...** *“Requiem” by Charles Pinch is as delicate and as hard as snowfall – he writes it delicately and it hits you like a car hitting a goddamn snow drift*

*Charles is one of the higher ups at Fleas on the Dog, one of the O.G.’s, and, while that information doesn’t and shouldn’t matter, I say that to say that I am fully disclosing that, I too, am an editor for Fleas on the Dog for this issue – many of the fiction WILI’s will have been written by me (so if you gotta problem take it elsewhere because I don’t care). To the point, Charles is one of those rare finds in the fiction world, he is one of those rare finds in the world in general, and can write every bit as well or better than the fiction he helps select at the magazine.*

*He has a gift, a talent, and this story is one of those gifts to any reader.*

*“Requiem” is perfectly paced. Combining the intimate moments of an individual experiencing their day with the windswept and harsh environment, Pinch does something most writers cannot do: turn the mundane, the smallest of the small, into the emotional consequences that we are never able to predict, into the stories that should be read.*

*I will be slightly facetious and explain the plot simply. Mitch is a maître d’hôtel, on a week-long staycation. He has stopped at a convenience store to grab nominal supplies for what is and will be a terrible snow storm happening that evening. On his way back home, he sees a neighborhood boy he knows, offers him a ride, the boy tells him heartily to, “fuck off, faggot,” and Mitch drives home. The boy dies. Mitch goes to the wake.*

*At its most base, this is the storyline of “Requiem.” There are no spoilers here because the plot of the story does not necessarily matter – it is the vehicle through which Pinch is able to craft his style. In the wrong hands, this story would be like watching old people fuck: deadly slow, uneventful, and waiting to either die or climax – because it wouldn’t matter which*

*happened first. In Charles' hands we have a portrait of questionable guilt and morality that deserves to be shaking hands with Stephen Dedalus or running through the cold with Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky-ian esteem.*

*This is Crime and Punishment in 10 pages (single-spaced).*

*This is the essence of the long sentence evolved into a great story.*

*This is how you turn the setting into an emotion.*

*This is how you write subtlety.*

*This is a masterclass on subtext.*

*This is what you want to read to know that the word, the line, the way still exists.*

*This is how you write.*

*Like the best of English majors, I'll give you examples:*

*The widow arrived with a commercial bar cake, with raisins and spices and a white frosting. She had put it on a plate.*

*'I made it myself.'*

*'That's very kind of you,' Mrs. Parks said. 'I'll put it with the other food in the dining room.'*

*Look at the way in which the protagonist only observes the conversation for the reader, and the layers that follow. Mitch is there, a woman playing host is taking off coats. Mitch's landlady walks in with a cake that was clearly not baked by herself and can only manage to claim that she did. Not missing a beat, not having an ounce of judgement, the woman disregards the knowledge that we all know. There is too much grief in the room to care about small lies.*

*But what about larger ones?*

*"He took both her hands in his and clasped them. They were hot and sweaty, like his own."*

*A moment of pure imagery. In one sentence, Pinch has managed to describe the guilt that Mitch feels (his hands are hot and sweaty) and the grief that the mother who has lost a son feels as they share the same hands of responsibility. To be able to write with such control, nuance, and purpose is a skill that we should all be jealous of.*

*It's odd to say that I could have such a strong connection with another human that I have never met, because we do this all online, have only "known" for about a year and half, or that lives in an entirely different country than me (U.S./Canada), but Charles is a writer that not only writes for himself but will go above and beyond to make good writing known everywhere. If you've got it, he wants to read it. If you do it well, he sees it. If it's in another language, he'll translate that shit. If you think you've got passion, then I am here to tell you that he has a fuckload more than you or I or all of us – everyone at Fleas on the Dog does and that is why I love them.*

*I will end this here because you should be reading "Requiem" as opposed to me telling you to do so – which, again, you should.*

*It is with the greatest pleasure and respect that I tell you to read this fucking story. I don't want to call you names, but I promise I will if you don't.*

*Five Stars.*

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

The man was round and pink. He had a red face and an angry complexion. But he was well dressed in a good dark navy blue suit. He shook his head.

‘You think you’ve got things figured out and then something like this happens.’

Mitch nodded.

‘What kind of god is going to allow a young boy like Scott to die before his time? Accident or no accident.’

‘Yes,’ Mitch agreed.

The man extended his hand—a pink star.

‘Bill Hammett.’

## REQUIEM

*For Frances, again and again*

The snow stopped at three. That’s when the temperature plunged. Even the automatic door in the ShopRite store balked against opening. A store mechanic was summoned and wrestled and huffed and jiggled with the large sliding glass fixture. When it was operational again, he cautioned the man about to take his leave.

It's cold enough out there to freeze your *cojones*, he said.

I'll be careful,' the man said.

He was carrying three plastic bags. He left the store and walked steadily against the cold to his car, looking down at the octopus tentacles of tire tracks in the snow and the abandoned red shopping carts that looked stark in the white lot. He was just unlocking his old blue Toyota when—

'Mitch! Is that you?'

He turned in the direction of the voice.

Hey! Hello!

'Enjoying your holiday...?' The woman was laughing. She wore a duffle coat and a toque pulled down over her eyebrows.

'What holiday? This isn't exactly the Bahamas.'

'And they say the earth is getting warmer.'

'Not today.'

'Well, are you?'

The man looked down at the bags he was about to shove onto the passenger seat.

'I guess if shopping counts, I am. Believe it or not, I actually can't wait to get back.'

'Everybody misses you. It's been dead.'

She got half way into her car and shouted back at him. 'There's a severe weather warning in effect. They're advising people to stay indoors.'

'Exactly where I'm going,' Mitch hollered back. 'Nice seeing you.'

She waved a red woolen mitten, closed the door and drove off with a honk.

Mitch was shivering now. He arranged the stiffened plastic bags against the seat, got in behind the wheel, turned on the ignition and let the car run three or four minutes. While he waited, he switched on the radio. All the stations were issuing weather bulletins. An arctic front had moved south, fracturing and numbing the land beneath frigid white skies. An elderly couple had been found frozen to death in a farmhouse on the outskirts of the city. Mitch cranked the heater up. Fumes of dry air blasted against his face. He coughed and scraped his throat, then put the car in drive and juddered out of the lot.

There was little traffic. Offices and schools had closed and factories had shut down to enable employees to get home before it got any colder. Mitch felt an unexpected stab of dread as the engine rattled. What if it suddenly stopped on him or the transmission gave out? Good God, he would be helpless in that case: he knew nothing about cars. And then he pictured himself freezing, frozen to death: an alabaster corpse, his face covered with frost and his arms as stiff as marble while they still gripped the steering wheel. He could even see the black veins beneath the pale skin at his temples. In the last frame a cop was knocking on the window.

'Stop it!' he shouted. 'Christ!'

He turned onto the double lane thoroughfare. An eighth of a mile, as the crow flies, from where he lived. He saw only one car in the distance and another much farther away—that was all. It was too cold for precipitation but the wind was up and about, pitching powdery squalls of snow across the road. Snow swirled in front of his windshield. Mitch squinted to keep his focus.

It was a long, straight road that bisected one of the city's largest parks. A soccer field ran along one side. In the summer months he would go for prowls along its green sun-drenched length and sometimes

stop and look at the white markings and goal lines that had been painted on the grass. Across from the bleachers stood a copse of trees, mostly deciduous and naked now. Branches rattled and knocked against the iron sky. The sun was there somewhere, a devious conspirator, a hazy white presence behind an X-Ray plate giving light but no warmth; Mitch thought it might as well have been heating Pluto.

He had driven four or five hundred yards when he saw a person walking along the road. It was a male figure—that was all he could make out—and not dressed for the weather. As he got closer, he saw he was a teenager. Mitch recognized him. It was Scott Branson. He lived on Mitch's street with his divorced mother and little sister.

He slowed the car down as he drew closer. The boy was wearing only a thin woolen parka with the hood pulled over his head. His jeans ballooned stiffly on his legs. He had on a pair of shoes—not boots—that were unsuited for the snow. A backpack hung bulkily from his shoulders. Mitch often saw him returning home from school along this road.

He braked slowly, drawing the car into a stuttering crawl. The engine thumped. Mitch honked the horn.

The young man jerked around sharply with a look of alarm.

He rolled the window down just enough to speak.

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you. Get in. I'll drive you home.'

'Fuck off!' the boy returned.

'Scott! It's Mitch Fox!'

The boy didn't answer; he kept walking. Then he quickened his pace in an effort to pull away.

Mitch continued to drive slowly beside him.

'What's the matter? Do you know how cold it is? You'll freeze before you get home in this weather!'

'Fuck off!' the boy repeated. 'Fucking faggot!'

Mitch jerked in his seat.

'What...?'

'You're a fucking faggot!'

'I am not! This is ridiculous. What are we arguing for? Scott...I will take you *home*.'

Sheila Branson's only son had a pale blade-shaped face with a mouth and lips that seemed too wide for it; not handsome but the kind of face that would grow up to be called 'interesting'. He ate all the wrong food and seldom if ever went to the dentist and ended up with perfect teeth. Occasionally he cut the grass in the summer and Mitch watched his lithe muscles slide up and down in the sunlight.

'I hate all you fucking faggots! Fuck off and die!'

'Scott, I'm going to ignore that remark. You have no reason to say any such thing and I've never given you any reason to think that. I'm simply worried about you getting home.'

'Go to hell!'

'Okay. Have it your way.'

Mitch rolled up the window. But there was the nagging feeling that he hadn't done enough. He continued to follow Scott along. After about three hundred feet the boy impulsively changed course and started heading across the park into the soccer field.

'Have it your way,' Mitch repeated. 'You're a stupid kid. You've just added another fifteen minutes to your walk.'

But that was Scott's problem now, wasn't it? It wasn't his. He glanced at the car thermometer. The temperature had dropped another three degrees. Four by the time he reached home. Mitch dragged the bags out from the passenger side and plunged headlong into the wind that came roaring from around the corner of the building. When he unlocked the door of his basement apartment, he stamped his feet. The widow who owned the six units building lived above him. She was up there now, the TV on, the volume blasting. No garden to speak of but a lawn of sorts, by June always brown and patchy. He had a living room, a kitchenette, a match box bedroom and a toilet that bumped up against the side of his stained bathtub.

The heat inside was oppressive. The widow turned everything up with no thought to economy. TV. Hot water (Mitch had come close to scalding himself on more than one occasion), radiators. There were freezing nights when he simply had to open a window before going to bed or die of suffocation. He was forever clearing his throat. But today he was thankful for the heat. He switched on his television and maxed up the volume to blot out hers. He sank down on his couch and picked up a magazine. He flipped through it, then another, when he began to read an article that piqued his interest. Programming was frequently interrupted to report the plunging mercury. Near dinner time, he slipped a prepared macaroni supper into the microwave and boiled water for coffee. He ate and drank one full cup and fell asleep halfway through his third magazine. It was two o'clock in the morning when he dragged himself off the couch, switched off the TV, and staggered, half asleep, to his bedroom.

When he woke it was nine-thirty the next morning. He got out of bed and looked out his window. There were two police cars parked outside. He watched an officer come out of the house directly across the street from his apartment building. The house belonged to Mrs. Parks. She stood inside the door,

hugging her shoulders against the cold. She was nodding her head. Mitch saw the officer shrug, nod in return, then step down from the porch. He went over to Sheila Branson's. Another officer knocked on the door of the house next to Sheila's.

At the same time, Mitch heard heavy footsteps above him. There was a man in the widow's living room. He heard the low, masculine sound of his voice, inquiring, asking questions, and the warbling, treble voice of the widow when she answered him. The Branson's had been broken into last summer. The intruder had taken off with Scott's laptop and a shopping bag of computer games. Mitch was jolted by a knock on his door.

'Good morning, sir.'

'Yes...?'

The widow was standing on the stairs with one hand on the rail. She was dressed in a light cotton duster and over it an old sweater.

'Sorry to disturb you,' the officer began. He stood a big man, a force, several inches taller than Mitch. He had a big clean smell and a fresh haircut. 'A boy from this street was discovered this morning in Parkside Pond.'

Before Mitch could respond, the widow said, 'It was Scott!'

The officer turned his head slightly in her direction.

'Scott Branson? Scott from across the street?'

The widow nodded.

'We're checking with everyone in the neighborhood asking if they may have seen him yesterday. Did you see him, sir?'

'No.' He stood there shivering. He clasped his arms.

'Invite him in,' the widow told him. 'It's cold out in the hall.'

'Of course. I'm sorry. Please come in.'

'This will only take a minute of your time,' the officer assured him.

He looked even bigger in the small room with its low ceiling and cramped space. Mitch offered him a seat, the officer said, 'thank you' and remained standing.

'Scott was last seen leaving school yesterday afternoon. That was about four o'clock.'

Mitch nodded.

'According to his mother he usually takes the route along Watson Boulevard on his way home.'

'I was driving on Watson yesterday,' Mitch told him. 'Returning home from a shopping '. He looked past the officer and said to the widow, 'ShopRite.'

'What time was that?'

'About four o'clock. Maybe a few minutes after.'

'Did you see anyone?'

'No, no one...what exactly happened?'

'We believe he was taking a different route home because of the cold. He cut across the soccer field. When he crossed the pond behind the field he fell in.'

'Oh God! This is terrible!'

'Why wasn't the pond frozen over?' the widow asked. She was standing just inside Mitch's open door now.

The officer turned his head. 'Well, it was, mostly.'

Mitch heard himself say...'he drowned'.

'No. It was hypothermia. He froze to death.'

'Good God!' Mitch cried.

The widow clicked her tongue. 'I'll miss Scott. He was a good boy. He was such a good boy.'

The officer said, 'If I could get a few details, sir. For the record.'

'Yes, of course.'

'Your full name?'

'Joseph Mitchell Fox.'

'Age?'

'Thirty-seven.'

'Are you married? Single?'

'Single. I live alone.'

'Occupation?'

'Maitre d'hotel.'

'Where do you work?'

'At the Grand Hotel in the L'Auberge dining room.'

The big officer said, 'I've eaten there. The food's pretty good.'

'Yes,' Mitch agreed.

'How long have you been employed at the hotel?'

'Eight years. I started as a busboy.'

'Were you at work yesterday?'

'No. I'm on vacation. I have five weeks. I break them up. I take one week in February.'

'I see. How long have you lived on this street?'

'Six years now.'

'It'll be six years in June,' the widow told the officer.

'How well did you know the Bransons?'

'I didn't really. Sheila Branson keeps to herself. I think she's a shift worker or something.'

'What about Scott?'

'I knew him to say hello. I'm not sure he knew my name. He sometimes got into trouble, I think. You guys were at the house a couple of times.'

The widow nodded. 'Scott was such a good boy.'

Before he closed his notepad the officer looked around him. A small gilt framed print of a ruined castle. A porcelain figurine. A reproduction Chippendale low table with Mitch's coffee mug from the night before. He wrote something else down then closed his notebook.

The heat was stifling in the apartment. Mitch pulled his dressing gown tighter around him and rubbed his arms as he'd seen Mrs. Parks do.

The officer tucked his notebook away and tipped his hat. After he left Mitch and the widow stood looking at each other.

'Oh that poor, poor boy,' she said. 'What an awful thing to have happened! I'm going upstairs right now and bake a banana bread to take over to Sheila Branson.'

As soon as she closed the door behind her Mitch sat down on the couch and burst into tears.

Everyone on the street attended the funeral. But there were neighbors from father away, too, and classmates and their parents and three of Scott's teachers together with the school principal. People she hardly knew lined up to press Sheila Branson's hand and offer their condolences. The visitation was held in Peabody's Funeral Home in what was called the Serenity Room, a chaste space with pastel papered walls and blonde wainscoting. Modest arrangements of carnations and lilies stood on wooden pedestals. Sheila's employer had sent a bouquet with a china angel in the center. It was a closed casket. To Mitch it looked shorter than he remembered Scott.

The service was brief. The reverend knew no one in the room and hardly even knew Sheila Branson. When he took to the pulpit (after the gathering had sung two hymns) he said, 'Dear friends, dearest Sheila and daughter Tiffany. Our hearts go out to you this day. We cannot divine the purpose behind our Father's plan. But in Him we put our trusting faith. Parting with a loved one is a sorrow we carry with us

ever onward. Our comfort lies in knowing that despite our sorrow, he who has departed is rewarded with Life Eternal, a life richer and more peaceful than his mortal lease on God's earth. But always more difficult to understand is a life taken before its time. When the promise of youth and manhood lay before Scott like a golden land. This is the trial of the heart. This is when our faith is most fully tested. Let us pray.'

Mitch lowered his head. His shoulders were shaking. He closed his eyes. Tears came. He knuckled his fists against them.

After the service there was a short reception at the Branson's. Mrs. Parks was taking coats at the door and directing traffic. The widow arrived with a commercial bar cake, with raisins and spices and a white frosting. She had put it on a plate.

'I made it myself.'

'That's very kind of you,' Mrs. Parks said. 'I'll put it with the other food in the dining room.'

The house was bigger inside than it looked from the street. The living room stretched the length of the building and took up most of the downstairs. It was white. To Mitch it looked like the road on the day of the tragedy. There were pictures of Scott strategically placed on small tables and on a bookshelf with knick knacks.

Sheila Branson stood in the middle of the room. She was tall and thinly rectangular with the blank features of a long case clock. She wore a flowing black lace dress that looked vaguely Transylvanian. Her eyes were red-rimmed.

Mitch approached her.

'I'm so terribly sorry,' he said. 'I'm so terribly sorry.' He took both her hands in his and clasped them. They were hot and sweaty, like his own.

'Thank you,' she said. 'It was good of you to come.'

He thought at this point he would pass out. He would faint right then and there in front of Scott's picture. He felt disoriented and nauseous. He left Sheila with the widow who was explaining something about the cake.

Fifty, sixty persons crowded the room. Mitch moved away from them and stood and stared out the Branson's front window. A man bumped his shoulder.

'My mistake. Sorry.'

Mitch nodded.

The man was round and pink. He had a red face and an angry complexion. But he was well dressed in a good dark navy blue suit. He shook his head.

'You think you've got things figured out and then something like this happens.'

Mitch nodded.

'What kind of god is going to allow a young boy like Scott to die before his time? Accident or no accident.'

'Yes,' Mitch agreed.

The man extended his hand—a pink star.

'Bill Hammett.'

Then they watched the minister. He was shaking hands with everyone, moving from group to group, and saying a few quiet words.

'Mitchell Fox. Are you a relative of Sheila?'

'Her former boss.'

'Oh.'

'We've kept in touch. I was hoping she and I would tie the knot one day.' His silence following the remark was pensive. He did not elaborate. They stood without speaking for a few minutes, watching the minister. Then the man asked, 'You?'

'Just a neighbor. I live across the street.'

'Oh.'

'Not really an intimate acquaintance.'

The round man chuckled. He appeared amused by the word intimate.

The minister came their way and extended his hand. Mitch took it without saying anything. The minister was smiling. He was a keeper of secrets and a keeper of secret knowledge. But the fat man wasn't having any part of it. Suddenly he was angry. He declined the minister's hand.

'A lot of good God knows!'

The minister nodded, smiled.

'He gets everything wrong. He doesn't do anything right!' His voice had changed. He sounded now like a carnival barker.

The minister put his hands together in a prayerful gesture and smiled some more. 'God bless,' he said to the angry fat man.

Mitch looked at Bill Hammett.

'Don't God bless me,' the fat man barked. 'A fine boy like Scott. Your goddamned God should be ashamed of himself!'

The minister nodded again but this time did not smile. He glanced briefly but noncommittally at Mitch. Then he turned away and waded back into the crowd. The next glimpse Mitch caught of him he was smiling.

'Goddamn church and its politics!' The fat man simmered. Then he turned to Mitch. He had settled down. 'What line of work are you in, Mr. Fox?'

'I'm a maitre d'.'

'You mean like in a hotel?'

'In a hotel. I work in the dining room at the Grand Hotel. I host.'

'I've eaten there,' the fat man said. He jingled the change in his pockets. 'I suppose you know something about coffee then?'

'Coffee?'

'I love coffee,' the man said. 'I drink ten or eleven cups a day.'

The room was stifling. It wasn't just because of the people. The radiators were boiling. They boiled and hissed like jurists.

'Oh,' Mitch said.

'Coffee's wonderful. Don't believe all the crap you read about it. Oh, look! There's Tiffany! Hi, Tiffany!'

The girl stopped in her tracks. She turned and looked at the man who wanted to marry her mother. She didn't recognize him and then she ran away.

'Cute girl,' the man said.

'Yes,' Mitch said.

'Coffee, they've just begun to find out, is something of a miracle drink. It's got things in it to cure all kinds of ailments.'

He was hoping Mitch would ask what ailments but he didn't.

'Me? I have ten or eleven cups a day.'

'Oh.'

'I have one first thing in the morning, of course. Then I have a cup with breakfast. I have two cups after that, a cup in the car on the way to work...You serve pretty good coffee at your hotel. Where do you get it?'

'You mean where does it comes from?'

'Yeah.'

'I don't know. Colombia, I guess.'

'Colombian's good coffee,' the fat man said. Then he saw Tiffany again. 'C'mere, Tiff,' he called. He took a step forward and the girl shook her head and moved away in the opposite direction. 'Don't be scared now.'

Mitch was staring at the rads and listening to them hiss. He looked up from the rads and stared out the window. He put his hands in his pockets. He stood in his stocking feet because he'd taken his boots off when he handed Mrs. Parks his coat. One of his socks had a hole in it.

'Mocha's a good coffee,' the man said.

Behind him, a few people had joined together and started to sing. They formed a circle behind Mitch, in the center of the room. The widow joined in with her warbling sparrow voice. The fat man, big Bill Hammett, turned and looked and for a minute was silent and not so angry with God. Then he turned to Mitch and said something about coffee, mocha again or java. Mitch was looking out the window. He was staring out the window, looking straight ahead. And there were so many voices.

We sing as we die. As we die, we sing. There is much singing when we die and when we die it is like a song.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *Some of the details in this story come out of my personal experience—the shopping carts in the Zeller's lot, the pattern of tire tracks—like octopi tentacles in the snow and, curiously, a bar cake with raisins and spices and a delicious petroleum based frosting that I kept eating for like, 2 weeks in a row. The park Scott crosses to avoid Mitch is in fact, a soccer field in summer, and runs along a stretch of boulevard, just as described in the story. Things like this, details, start coming together in my head and I guess forming the bone structure of a story. I say 'I guess' because I don't plan or plot out my fiction. I'm an intuitive writer and by that I mean, I get a story in my head and I write it down. It's mostly an unconscious process—I tell my writer friends I don't write my stories, my id writes them. Ideas stew inside and I'll stop once in a while to think about them and then I'll do something else. The writing actually starts when the Muse hits—and that could be anytime—quite often in the dead of dark morning while the crows still sleep. I don't generally do drafts. When the story is ready it comes into my head so fast I barely have time to write it down. I don't 'think' at this point, I just write nonstop until it's done. If things slow down during the writing, become difficult or don't seem to be working I know the story isn't ready yet so I stop and shove it back into my unconscious. Some stories come back, some stories don't. I don't worry about it and I don't agonize over it. This is how Requiem was written. I tucked it away for a few months, pulled it out, read it again and made two or three word changes. The boy's name was originally Rick but I changed it to Scott which just seemed a better handle for that character. Apart from that, what you're reading is the only and final version. What I like about the story is what's left untold. What were the circumstances surrounding Scott's death? We don't know—again, not something I planned, it just came out that way. I also believe it's a stronger tale because the action lacks a denouement and there is no real 'climax' point in the story—(none of that narrative arc crap they keep*

*pounding into your head in creative writing classes) things just happen and one thing leads to another. The open ended final sentence functions less as a satisfying conclusion than a road untraveled and that was something I did intend. I want to thank my 'bestest' friend and valuable critic Trace for his/her penetrating take on Requiem and to FOTD new Fiction Editor Joey Cruse (Tom Ball calls him 'our man in New Orleans') for his astonishing critique and kind words. The only unhappy writers are the writers who don't write. The happiest are the unhappy ones.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Charles Pinch has a double major in art history and philosophy from McMaster University in Hamilton and the University of Toronto. He cofounded FOTD with his friend, writer Tom Ball, in November 2011. He lives quietly, making Molotov cocktails in the basement while everyone else is asleep.