

Prairie Ink

A literary Annual



Issue Ten



Fall 2019

“There is a way to see inside by looking directly through to seed or marrow.”

-Joan Halifax

From the Editor

Dear Readers,

Art, and especially storytelling, are possibly the oldest traditions of humanity. This is, perhaps, because stories and words are the ways in which we interact with a chaotic and confusing world. Writing brings order to the chaos of life and promises purpose to existence. The words are perhaps unimportant in and of themselves, but it is the meaning behind those words that gives writing life. Writing is an opportunity to share with others those things that words fail to express.

-Scott McDonald

-Cover art by Emily Bucholz

-Content art by Rebekah Willison

About the picture:

Imagine the world if you were a ant. How big world every thing seem?

-Submission page art by Brodie Owens

About the picture:

I wanted to show the time between fall and winter. I have always been fascinated with this type of season. The leaf made a great interpretation of what this season is all about. Leaves begin to die and some berries might still remain, but new life will begin to rise eventually.

The opinions and ideas found in this edition of Prairie Ink represent the creative vision of its contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or ideas of its editors or of Barton Community College. Contributors maintain the rights to their submissions; however, Prairie ink reserves the right to publish or re-publish those contributions.

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Ash Wednesday

By Joseph Doze

Gio was a tall man of sturdy build. His graying hair matched his gray suit, his face was creased by his fifty two years of life, most of which was hard living. His gentle face and soft eyes belied the cold-blooded savagery that he could commit, when necessary. His counterpart, Marco, was a stark contrast. His chestnut hair was glossy and slick, his face was stubbled and sharp, and his plum colored shirt was wrinkled and untucked. He was the quintessential “guido” and damn proud of it.

It was 3:30 in the morning, and the Lincoln Town Car sat idling in the chilly February air. Englewood was quiet at this time, and Gio really enjoyed the serenity. Unfortunately, it was soon broken by his passenger.

“What the hell, Gio? You want me to freeze to death here? Let’s go!” Marco was rubbing his hands together for warmth. Gio handed him a cup of coffee. “I’m allowing myself to wake up,” he answered as Marco grabbed the cup from his hand, “it’s a long drive to Wilmette. I don’t like to drive tired.” Marco sipped from his coffee cup. “Why the hell do we need to be up this early to be in Wilmette?” “We want to get there before the owner does, get the jump on him. It’s a tactic, keeps them off balance and unsure, gets them rattled. Plus, when the Boss says jump... you know how it works, Marco.”

Marco nodded, he did know how it worked. He took another sip of coffee, it needed creamer and sugar. “Thanks for the coffee, Gio,” Marco

uttered, "I needed it. I gotta say that I'm damn excited to work with you, ya know? I mean, you're a big name for the family. Giovanni 'The Gentleman' Oliverio, the man you go to when there's a problem that needs fixed, you're a legend. A guy like you, been in the game for decades, taking a guy like me under his wing; it's like Michael Jordan coaching LeBron James!"

Gio's mouth twitched slightly, hiding a smirk. "Jordan never needed to move to South Beach to win a ring." With that, Gio eased the car out of the driveway, maneuvering through the neighborhood and on to the I-90 Expressway. Marco continued sipping his coffee and pouting about the time and the weather. They were quiet for the first several minutes of the drive before Gio switched the stereo on.

The mechanical whirring of the CD player broke the monotonous silence before a beautiful strain of music came lilting through the speakers. Marco looked inquisitively at Gio.

"The hell is this?"

"It's Puccini. *Nessun dorma* from *Turandot*. Quite possibly the most beautiful aria ever written." Marco snorted a laugh. "You listen to opera? Come on, guy, you gotta be kidding me. Who listens to opera?" Gio's face remained set, but in his mind he labeled Marco a philistine. "I do," he said, an air of pomposity in his voice, "and so do millions of other people with sophisticated taste."

Marco laughed again. "Alright, calm down. Christ."

They continued on, again in silence while the track continued to play.

Gio quietly mouthed the lyrics while Marco stared out the window watching the street lights go by.

“You really like this stuff, huh?” Marco asked. Gio nodded. “Yeah, I do. I was going to study music after high school, but my pops had other ideas. Wanted me in the business.”

“You sing?”

“A little, yeah. I take lessons from a lady in my neighborhood. She taught at DePaul for awhile.”

“No kidding? So, what, didja wanna sing opera professionally?”

“I wanted to teach choir.”

Marco laughed. “I can’t see you as a teacher.” He gave Gio a once over. “Well, maybe with a tweed jacket and some penny loafers, a checkered bowtie, you’d look like a teacher.” Gio had to laugh. For once, he had enjoyed something that Marco said.

“Nah,” continued Marco, sipping his coffee, “not me. I never had the patience for school. I’m just a head buster. I knew I wanted in the game since I was little. My pops never questioned it. It suits me, ya know? I get to bust heads and get away with murder, literally! It’s free rein to do whatever I want, and no one is gonna step up to stop me.”

Marco sipped the last of his coffee. “So what’s the job anyway? I was told it was in Wilmette, but nothing else.” Gio never looked away from the road. “There’s a funeral home in Wilmette that would be a good place to have to get rid of certain problems. We are supposed to go over there and try to

persuade Mr. Giavotella to pay the dues.”

Marco nodded. “Makes sense.” He stared out the window again. The expressway was nearly deserted, save for a small smattering of cars now and again. The drive was just over an hour and they had only been on the road for maybe 20 minutes. The opera continued to play and his partner was no conversationalist.

He jerked his head, unaware that he had dozed off. “How long was I asleep?” Gio shrugged. “Dunno. Few minutes. Not long.” Marco stretched and rubbed his eyes. “Christ, Gio, I took this job because of the hours, this ain’t in my contract.” He tries too hard to be funny, Gio thought. “It is what it is,” was all he said.

“How you like it,” Marco asked excitedly, “how do you like *la cosa nostra*? Our thing?” Gio sighed. “It is what it is,” he muttered once more. “Plus *la cosa nostra* is a Sicilian term, and I’m not full Sicilian. My dad’s family is from Calabria.”

“You ain’t full *paizan*? No wonder you ain’t a made man.”

“Neither are you, Marco.”

“Yet.” Marco gave Gio a glare of contempt which had no effect on the older Caporegime. “Anyway, you didn’t answer my question. How’s this life suite you?”

Gio paused for a moment, collecting the right words to use. “It doesn’t,” he finally spoke in earnest. “This life isn’t what I had intended to carve out for myself. It’s my dad’s life, his dad’s too, back in Calabria. Not mine, though.”

There was a pregnant silence, neither man wanted to break it, but both had something to add. Gio was the first to speak. "I'm getting out, going legitimate." Marco whistled in astonishment. "I never seen that happen before. Heard of it, but never seen it. That's... wow... congratulations, I guess." Gio nodded. "Got one more job to do, then boss says I'm clean."

Marco, couldn't understand why anyone would want to leave the life behind. He began to see Gio in a different light. He turned his head slightly and looked Gio up and down, seeing more of the man and less of the myth.

"You got any idea what that last job is gonna be," Marco inquired. Gio shook his head. "Nah, I'm sure it will be something easy as a parting gift. Maybe a shakedown or a collection run."

"So after this, what's next for Giovanni Oliverio? Gonna go get that music degree?" Gio shrugged. "Actually, I'm gonna open a cigar joint. Gonna call it The Smoke Stack. Catchy, yeah?" Marco laughed, "I like that!" He sighed. "Gonna have a lounge with those overstuffed chairs and sofas?" "You know it," Gio said proudly. "Gonna have a place to play cards and dominos, and I'm gonna set up some TVs to show the Cubs. It's gonna be a classy place."

Marco shook his head, "Nah, it'll only be classy if you got the South Side Boys on the tube. The White Sox are the team this year, Gio, I'm tellin' ya. The Cubs won their ring, now they're gonna wait *another* hundred years for a repeat."

"The Sox aren't winning anything without a bullpen."

“They got Soria from KC in the offseason, which solidifies their late game pitching. Their defense is undeniable! The Sox are the team in the AL this year.” Gio shrugged. “You tell yourself that, Marco. I’m just saying, they are suspect.”

Marco became silent. He crossed his arms and turned in his seat to face as much to the door as he could. “Jesus,” Gio laughed, “are you seriously pouting? For Christ’s sake, Marco, you’re 33 years old. That’s too old to be pouting.”

“I’m not pouting,” Marco said sternly, “I’m just trying to understand how you can know shit all about baseball. The frickin’ Cubs. Christ’s sake.” Gio laughed even harder now. “Shut up, Gio! I swear to God!” “Well,” Gio said through fits of laughter, “if you come to my shop, I’ll make sure we get WGN on the TV for you to watch the Sox.”

The rest of the drive was about the same. Marco pressed Gio for more information on what he planned to do after he retired. Gio, who felt more and more hospitable as the drive went on, told him about making and bottling his own wine and possibly trying to market his own Bolognese sauce.

Marco talked about the life. He was excited because he felt that he was going to get made soon. He told Gio about the run-in he had with a Capo from the Villico family. How they were at the same club and the Capo had disrespected the Chiamonte family, so Marco followed him to the alley and beat him into a coma. “They had to pull his plug. Good riddance, the bastard. Talk shit on *my* family? That’s what happens.”

Gio stayed silent, listening and absorbing what little information Marco's stories consisted of. He wasn't surprised at the callousness of his recitation of the beating he gave the Villico Capo. Marco was a man of little regret, and even less forethought.

"You know he was a made man for the Villicos? That doesn't worry you?" Marco cocked his eyebrow. "Worry me? What should I worry about that weak-ass family for? The Villicos are too weak to come at us, plus they got that beef with the Black P. Stones, so all their assets are tied up in fighting them. I told you, Gio, I'm untouchable. No Villico punk is gonna get Marco Costanzo Bruno." Gio shrugged.

Another silence overcame them. They were getting close to Wilmette. Marco fidgeted uncomfortably in his seat. He hated silence.

"Today's Valentine's Day," he finally said, "you got anyone special? A wife? A *cumare*?" He nudged Gio with his elbow, trying to entice the stoic driver. "I did, for awhile," Gio answered, "she was good. Real good, but she was too high maintenance. She always wanted a new this or new that, even if she had one already." Marco shook his head in disbelief. "That's the whole point of making money," he whined, "you buy the dames whatever they want and you get favors in return. You can't put a price on a good piece!"

"I don't know, Marco. I just... she wasn't my type. She had no sense in her head. She was so finicky. She never wanted to take the Red Line. Who doesn't ride the trains?" Marco looked at Gio with disgust. "A true goddamn gangster, that's who doesn't! Are you frickin' kidding me, here, Gio? An old

school *goombah* like you, in your three-piece suits and wingtips, is riding the goddamn Chicago Transit? *Marone*, this guy.”

Gio shrugged again. It was his default gesture. He turned off the 94 Expressway into Wilmette and crept through the streets of the suburb. It was just nearing 4:45. He came around a curved street to see a brick building on his right. A red sign with black letters read Lux Aeterna Funeral Home. “This is the place. Boss says this guy gets here every morning at 5 to get working on things. He wants us to meet him in the alley when he gets here and have a little talk.” Marco nodded.

He reached around his back and pulled the gun he had tucked in his waistband. Gio’s eyes widened.

“No! No guns, only words. This isn’t going to be another Villico fiasco.” Marco stared Gio in the eyes in an attempt to be menacing, but Gio stared him right back down. “Put it in the glovebox.” Marco hesitated, but complied grudgingly.

Gio shut the engine off and the pair exited the Town Car and snuck around to the alleyway. The back door was in the middle of the building and opened to a small parking area with a large dumpster. Black fabric bags poked out from the dumpster lid. “Body bags,” Gio said, indicating to the dumpster with a nod of his head. They heard the sound of an approaching engine and hid behind the dumpster.

After a moment, the parking area was illuminated by headlights. The engine died and the lights turned off. Gio strode out from behind the

dumpster, Marco following. An older gentleman, dressed in a white button-down shirt and black slacks exited the vehicle. Marco pushed ahead of Gio.

“Hey! Old timer! You the owner, Mr. Giavotella?” The old man stopped and turned to face the pair.

“Yes, I am Sergio Giavotella. Who are you?”

Marco cracked his knuckles, more for show than anything else. “We got something to talk about, you and us. We got a message from Joseph Chiaramonte.” Gio pulled a gun from under his jacket. “It’s actually for you.” Marco turned around to look down the barrel of the suppressed 9mm pistol. “Sorry, Marco.”

One shot rang out in the cold, still morning. *K-thup*. Marco crumpled to the ground. Three more shots. *K-thup k-thup k-thup*. Gio shook his head. “You were right, Marco,” he said to himself, “it wasn’t the Villico family that got you.”

Sergio unlocked the back door to the funeral home. “Quick, help me.” Together, Sergio and Gio lifted Marco’s body and trudged through the door. Sergio directed Gio to a long metal slab protruding from a large furnace. They placed the body on the slab and Sergio slid Marco into the crematory furnace.

Moving to the side, Sergio turned the furnace on. Gio watched through the window as the flames sprang to life, licking at the body of his former associate. Soon, Marco was engulfed, and was no more. Gio turned slowly away. Sergio came to his side, holding out a handkerchief. “You got some blood on you, Gio.”

Gio took the handkerchief and gingerly dabbed at the crimson specks of arterial spray that now decorated his black dress shirt. The blood was stubborn, not keen to be cleaned off so easily. Gio shrugged and handed the handkerchief back to Giavotella. The undertaker took the handkerchief and placed it in a metal bin marked “incinerate” and then produced a manila envelope bulging with bank notes. “Happy retirement,” Giavotella said, matter of factly.

Gio took the cash filled envelope and stuffed it in his jacket pocket. He noticed more fine specks of blood on his gray suit, which he brushed at absentmindedly. Sergio patted his shoulder. “I’ll tell Papa Joe you did good, and I’ll pay my dues, swear to God.” Gio nodded. “Leave the gun,” Sergio continued, “my nephew will disassemble it and get rid of the parts.” Gio shrugged. It was his default gesture.

He made his way to the door, ambling slowly, listlessly. Sergio could sense Gio’s discomfort and melancholy. “Ashes to ashes, Gio,” Sergio called, trying to comfort the massive Chiaramonte button man. “We all gotta die sometime.” Sergio watched as Gio’s shoulders rose and fell in a great sigh as he continued out the door, to his car, back onto the I-94 Expressway and back home to Englewood.

It was after 7:00 when Gio finally shook the cold feeling of murder from his soul. He had taken his clothes off and delicately folded them up, nice and neat, placed them in his fireplace, and burnt them. He changed into a more comfortable outfit of khakis and a pullover sweater. He decided to take a walk;

he wasn't going to be able to sleep anytime soon. He took off aimlessly, wandering around the early morning streets.

Finding himself at the 63rd Street South Shore Line, Gio descended the stairs to the train stop and jumped on the first Red Line. He chuckled to himself, thinking of earlier that morning. "Right again, Marco," he said to himself, "no real gangster rides the Red Line. I'm no real gangster." He rode to the South Shore stop and walked to Navy Pier.

The Pier was abuzz with joggers and early morning breakfast seekers. Lake Michigan was quiet, and the breeze off the lake was bitter and cold, matching Gio's mood. He ducked into Billy Goat's Gruff restaurant to grab breakfast. He ordered and found himself a quiet corner in which to nestle, away from the other diners.

He picked at his eggs and hashbrowns thinking back on the events of the day before picking up a piece of bacon. He looked at it. It, too, was once a living thing. It, too, was put to the flame.

He went to take a bite when he remembered what Sergio had said. Ashes to ashes. He placed the strip of bacon back on his plate, then took a napkin and wrapped his bacon strips in it and put them aside to take home. He couldn't eat the bacon. Not today. It was Ash Wednesday.



Bathsheba Speaks

By Jaime Abel

I saw him first from the rooftop.

He was bathing.

The water sluicing the soap down his shoulders, his back,

Sheeting off his buttocks.

He turned, eyes downcast, intent on his morning ritual.

Dark hair curled over his ears, his beard neatly trimmed invited notice of his mouth,

Set on its task, curved in consideration of a private thought.

And honey lay below his belly.

Had he not demurred.

I would have been satisfied,

But I could not yet taste,

And I was famished.

So, I sent my husband to the fiercest fighting,

And it killed him, but he didn't die.



Caliphate Part II

By Michael Vick

The Gate to Hell, Nineveh

The cool morning Nineveh breeze felt nice to Micah's face as he stared down the barrel of the .50 Caliber machine (50 Cal) gun across the barren desert plain, the old stomping grounds of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Persians; to name only a few of the ancient civilizations that fought, died, loved and lived on these bloody sands for thousands of years. Such a wicked land. The Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle's large tires carved tracks into the soft sands, once walked upon by the likes of Alexander the Great, T.E. Lawrence, Saladin, and Jonah. Jonah walked here and pleaded with the people, warning them that God would soon destroy their city. Micah's mind refocused as a blond-headed boy darted across the road in front of the MRAP, probably a descendant of Alexander, or maybe just a result of a short-lived love affair between a Special Forces Soldier and an Iraqi woman.

The boy joined a gathering of the dark-haired boys on the other side of the street. Micah could not help but remember himself as a youngster growing up in Del Rio, Texas as one of a few blond-haired white boys in a mostly Hispanic town. He knew how he was sometimes treated with prejudice. He was *Juedo* or *Gringo*. He could only imagine what the darker skinned Iraqi boys might have called this little Iraqi "*Juedo*." Micah's mind wondered back to his scripture

readings. According to the Gospels of Mathew and Luke, Jonah pleaded to God to spare the people of Nineveh. Constant war for thousands of years and it continues. Now, evil grasped the very souls of Nineveh's people resulting in suicide attacks, convinced by the misdirected radical Muslim Daasch leaders that they would become martyrs to Allah and spend eternity in paradise with 72 virgins. What a shame. Satan disguised himself in many ways. "We, in the ages lying in the buried past of the earth, built Nineveh with our sighing," Arthur O'Shaughnessy in "Ode" so pleadingly besmirched this city of doom. And it continues, continues to fall into ruin with each misguided band of thugs, the most recent being Daasch. Daasch destroyed many of the ancient ruins that preserved the tainted history of this city, ruins that they considered "un-Muslim."

The black crows fluttered about and two of them perched on a dead dog in the road. They parked the vehicles in this very bad neighborhood of Tal Al Ruman. Rubble piles lined the streets in front of the blown-up buildings, Clayton dismounted the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) and refilled the radios again with the new communication security. Meanwhile, Glenn and Detrick dismounted and served as the Personal Security Detail (PSD) for LTC Patton. Iraqi children ran about the streets. The Iraqi police patrolled everywhere. Kurdish Lieutenant (LT) Kosrat motioned with his right hand and yelled "*Yala*" (let's go) to his PSD as they dismounted the vehicles, and Glenn and Detrick joined them as they formed a protective perimeter around Iraqi Staff Brigadier General (sBG) Ismaeel and LTC Patten.

They escorted them along the street to where the cordon and search would take place. Micah maintained coverage with the 50-CAL as Don kept the MRAP moving forward along the road. Glenn and Detrick constantly maintained their M4 Rifles at the low ready and scanned the building tops and alleyways. LT Kosrat went to a knee and pointed his weapon towards one of the rooftops. Roberts and Bushant did the same and tried to identify what he saw. LT Kosrat and Hamul spoke Kurdish together and pointed towards the roof of the building, but nothing seemed to be there. The vaporous dust, sand, and grit with the taste of evil flurried around them, corrupting their lungs.

Shots rang out as a deathly whistling sound came to Micah's ears when the bullets passed over head. A raggedy white mongrel dog skittered across the street and darted into an alleyway. Everyone oriented their weapons to the roof-top where they believed the shots came from. Glenn and Detrick began squeezing off multiple three round bursts with their M-4s while LT Kosrat and the Iraqi PSD's AK-47s sounded off in a steady "rat-a-tat-tat." They quickly moved to take cover behind the nearest HUMM WV, as Detrick keyed the hand-held radio at the same time Micah began to orient the 50-Cal towards the roof top, "Barbarian 5, this is Barbarian 9, receiving enemy fire at the 2 o'clock, over." "Roger 9, acquiring target now, out." Micah quickly chambered a round and swung the 50-Cal around, orienting it on the target. He fired off multiple rounds in a slow rate of fire "Bblat! Blat! Blat!" Lighting up the rooftop as dust billowed above from the impact of the large rounds and more

rubble crumbled from the stone wall to join the other rubble on the ground.

The enemy fire quickly subsided as Kosrat led his squad into the building to clear any remaining enemy and assess the situation. Micah maintained cover of the building while also scanning the perimeter to ensure rear security. Threats could appear elsewhere if this was a coordinated attack. It could be in the form of a Vehicle Borne Suicide Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) or a Suicide Vest Borne IED. In other words, a vehicle packed with explosives driven by a suicidal maniac or a suicidal maniac strapped with explosives with the intent of martyrdom and joining their 72 Virgins in paradise while killing the infidels in the process. No other activity appeared as Micah continued to scan. The Barbarians finally departed Tal Al Ruman and returned to their sanctuary at Spear Base. Thank God. However, this was the kind of mission they would be going on for the rest of the year.



Anonymous Poetry

By The Collective

Guiding hands reach out	Haikus are not hard,
Student learning on cliff's edge	But they can sound weird sometimes.
Clasped hands or ruin	Intimidating.
Poisoned blossoms fall	Pictures need filters,
Far from the sun-swept garden	But our words no longer do
Within the mind's eye.	Annihilator.
There once was a girl named Teresa	Teaching
Whom I love like my sister Lisa.	Hard to do right
She writes really good,	A lifetime to master
And will eat my fine food.	Never seems to go as it should
I'd not trade her for any cold pizza.	Worth it
Just follow the rules.	Where do we go now?
I don't need your stinkin' rules!	The journey is long finished,
Refrigerator	But home is so far.

Where to go from here? I guess
To the press is the best place
From which to start the process
Of this mess called the school space.

Mathmagician - poof!
Sine, irrational, tangent
Fantasy figures

There once was a student from Otis
Whose questions were my frequent
focus.

What page are we at?

Will there be a test over that?

I could only hope that he would
outgrow this.

Teaching a student who tries and fails
Is sometimes harder than one who
Never even begins to
Try something that might fail.

Even worse than that
Is having to
Watch the hope
Leave them
Forever.

Everything you face
Has been faced by someone else
You can face it too.



Why the Pooka Never Says Goodbye

By M. A. Gilmore

The Emerald Isle is full to brimmin' with a variety of folk, that is to say, of the non-human kind; it bein' an island, 'n all, surrounded as it is by water, and with the merrows and the shipfish, they've naught to come face-to-face with a human every while and 'nother while, usually after Belanus has bedded down of an evening.

This is a tale to me by me grandfar, who was told by his grandfar and so on, afar back, about the pookas in Ireland and why they never say "good-bye."

THE WORLD has heard of the *faid-rhe*, the *said-rhe*, the *banan-che* and the *claurichaun*, and has adopted its own sundry names for such, but as for general chicanery and mayhem, there's no candle can be held to a pooka.

The first pooka, 'tis said, fell from the forge of Lugh, as he was engaged in smithin' a set of shoes for King Donough's horse to do battle against King Murragh in the south. A bit of the doss flew up and smacked Lugh in the eye, off the hammer, like, causin' a curse to escape from the forger's lips. The doss landed in a dung-pile to smolder and smoke up the shop. Another curse fell off Lugh as he doused the pile, and a third as the steam came with the smell, and with the three curses, up rose a little man, no taller than a *caman*-bush, and thrice as crooked.

With a thumb and forefinger at his creator, the pooka bent for the woods of Limerick and set to luring out the wood nymphs with false promises, and such

like, and a little while later, the townsfolk began to miss their shoes and their crakes from the doorsteps, and just about everything they'd left outdoors overnight.

Stories began to crop up, about a great black horse with a streaming mane and coal-red eyes, in which form, with a bit of devil's magic, the pooka presented himself to man. The horse was usually spied a-twixt the site of a particular bedevilment that sometimes included brave (or besotted) souls attempting to catch and ride and earn a knock on their arse or their noggin for their trouble.

This went on for a time, and another time, into and after the time of St. Patrick, who went 'round the island chidin' the country folk about their wicker-fires, and their chieftains, and replacin' them, as it were, with the Word of Christ.

But pray as they might, the people went on missin' their shoes and their crakes, and noggin-knocked besides, as the pooka and his children and grandchildren spread into the copses and the fields of the West Country.

That is, until the time of the Norsemen, who'd nothing better to do, but slap on their horned hats and sail off to see what they could see. Most of what they saw in Ireland was the fire-haired, smoke-eyed lasses of Leinster, and took them by guile or force, along with a share of the villages, so that the blood of Lugh was fair-tainted with the Vikings' mischief.

So 'twas in the village of Dal Cais, where a particular chief was victim of a Viking raid. So much so, that the entire family was lost, 'cepting the oldest, Mahon, who was chief next-in-line, and the youngest, Brian, who was old enough to sit by the hearth and listen to the travelin' *shenanche*, and learn to despise the Vikings.

Now, the DalCassians were more than fair horsemen; they'd rid and roped for more generations back than 'twas possible to count. Brian, 'twas said, was near dropped from his mother's womb as she was barebacking it home from Derry.

And so Mahon, made chief by default, took it in his mind to set his father's horse and broadsword up against the Vikings, because he was tired of them burning his houses and taking his lands and all his best girlfriends for themselves. When Brian said he wanted to go, too, and clout them for killin' the region's best storyteller, Mahon said "no."

"I ken yer wrath, and it's a fair share of it I'm feelin' as well, but ye'd make not a whit again' a Norse broadaxe," Mahon told his brother. "And there ye'd be, a-lyin' there in two parts, and none's the use we'd have of each of 'em. I'd have lost me only remaining brother and a captain, besides."

Mahon took Brian out to the byre, and handed him their father's steel, so that he might feel the heft of it. "When ye can lift this up, and bring it down so's it can split this stump, it's then I'll let you have yer head against the Norsemen," Mahon said.

So Mahon sent Brian to Clonmacnois, to the monastery there, where he'd be safe from battle and have his head crammed full of Christ and ways to clout the heathen Norse. Mahon gathered his best boys, who'd 'scaped the village sack, and they headed to the copse to set the uprisin'.

Brian went, but he was of two minds about it. By day, he'd learn to read and write and listen to the priests' ramblin'. After matins, though, he'd skirch off to the copse, where he could listen to the trees and animals and hope to catch a sight of the wood-nymphs in their dance. There, he found a great rock, which he took for the head of a horn-hatted Norseman, and took up a branch as big as himself to bash out th' brains.

In about a dozen summers, Brian's shoulders and arms had swelled with the bashin' practice. His head was full to burstin' from the priests, and he could take nae more. For all along, he'd heard Mahon, staunch as he was, couldn't dislodge the invaders from their Irish lustfulness, no matter how many men or horses he could set agin' 'em.

One dark night, as he was gazin' at the moon at Beltaine, Brian thought he'd heard a slight rustlin' and went to scout. Sure, and there was a gatherin' of the fairy-folk, who'd suffered bound to the wood through the winter and were achin' to stretch their wings.

Brian gathered up his stealth to spy and listen to the singin.' The wood-nymphs didn't scatter, for they'd grown fond and fast of the young man and his purpose. They invited him to share their songs and stories, and he told

them of the Norsemen, and how he'd lost all but his brother, who was being beaten back time and agin' to no avail.

"Aye, an' it's a sad tale," said the fairy queen, whose dark eyes swam from the tellin' and her gossamer wings droopin' slack from her shoulders. "We've seen and heard, and it's to help ye we've decided. What ye need, my young man, is a staunch horse to end it all."

So she told Brian of the pooka, of the three curses, and the chicanery and the mayhem, and how they'd fretted over his advances through the ages. Seein' at once how he'd be able to crack two birds with a single stone, Brian asked the queen for advice on how to conscript the pooka to his service, and no harm to himself or his noggin.

The fairy queen went to an old, cracked stump, and took into her tiny hands a bit and bridle near a dozen times larger than herself, and set in in the lap of Brian.

"Here, an' this is the stuff to do it," she told him. She explained that the bit was of iron, casted and beat at the forge of Lugh, and into the bridles leather was worked three hairs of the pooka's mane. One for each of the curses, to subdue him.

"When you swing and mount, slip this over the great horse's head," she said. "He'll buck and run – like the very wind – and it's a heavy bump ye'll get if yer dismounted."

“But when he’s lathered, and spent, and can run nae more, ye’ll have dominion, as such the man of Christ ye are and an Irishman besides, for the pooka’s naught but a whisper of the De’il himself. Ye may ask what ye will, and the pooka’ll have nae choice but to serve. Then, maybe, our fair folk might earn some recompense,” she said, and winked.

They parted, then, with a last word where the pooka might be found close by, ‘twixt times of devilment and at rest.

That next day, Brian bid goodbye to the monastery and the priests, and set out to meet his brother at the site of their first conflagration. “I’m ready,” he said, taking in his hardened hands their father’s sword, and clove the stump at their feet in two halves on the ground.

“Aye, that ye are, and more,” Mahon agreed. “We’re set for a run at the first sight of Belenus tomorra, at their camp yonder, and we’ll see what we’ll see.”

“Before we go, I’ve a small task yet this night,” Brian said, “and it’s sure to bring us aid, by your leave. I’ll be back at dawn.” He left Mahon to wonder, and set off to find the pooka.

After a time, he found the great horse, with its coal-eyes a-smolder, pawning its iron hooves on the ground and sparkin’. He was set to add to his store of villager’s shoes for his kin and collection of crakes and hardware, and whatever else, and preparin’ to throw anyone with a mind to stop him in his purpose.

Brian's eyes narrowed, thinkin' if there'd be a discourse to start, an' there was. "So, ye think ye can best the likes of a pagan's curse, take that, and welcome," the pooka said.

"Aye, that I will, and by Christ on the Cross, I'll have ye for my bidding," Brian countered. As he did, he swung a hardened leg over the great horse's back, and threw on the bridle and set the bit, all in a motion—just as he'd done since a whelp at his daddy's stable.

The surprised animal reared and set off, unsuspecting of the tether, and sped into the night. For any that could catch a glimpse, would've been a wonder, with the horse's eyes burning fire to light the way; hooves sparking the turf for a path behind and the great black mane flying in a mix with Brian's own red top, as he clung for his own dear life.

On, and on they went—past Ballyoutogue Castle, where Grainne surrendered to her lover Diarmond—past the corrag ports to the West, over the sand and across the water.

For 'twas the pooka's intent to deposit his rider at the gates of Tir-nan-Og, Christian as he was, where the ancient Tuatha slept, near-forgotten in island lore. That, and to teach him that no Christian, before nor since, could lift a pagan's curse—especially one sprung from the Great Blacksmith himself.

But as the gates of the Tuatha's realm hove in sight, the horse began to flag. The harder he ran, the higher he jumped, the tighter the bit drove into

his mouth as Brian's grip tightened on the fairies' bridle that cloved him to obey.

Making a great, wide turn, the pair sped back, across the green grass, past the trees and farmsteads, while all the while Carridwen's bright, lovelorn eye looked down full from above.

All a-lather, the pooka stopped short in one last futile attempt to dislodge his fire-haired rider, but failed. He sank, exhausted, to his knees, with his great flanks heavin' from the effort.

Off Brian clambered, victorious. Bridle still in hand, he thundered: "Now, ye wretch, ye spawn of horse's dung, yer mine! By the Hand of God, ye'll do what I ask." And he removed the tether.

"Aye, though it's me vurra nature ye've suborned," the pooka snorted. "Ask, and I'll obey."

Givin' careful thought to the phrasin', Brian told the pooka he would carry him to Leinster to fight the Norse and do their best to drive them back across the water.

"Aye, it's done," the horse said to the first.

Next, Brian said, that it was his wish to have the pooka come when called, whenever Irish blood was threatened, should the invaders chance to return.

"Aye, it's done," the pooka assented to the second.

Last, the pooka would forsake his habit of assailment of his kinfolk and their like, and the fairy folk as well, and leave off cracking every Irish noggin he'd come across, until the end of days.

At that, the horse shrank into his form as a defeated, wrinkled and crooked man-elf, and keened. "Nae, nae, I canna' do tha'," he wailed. "That's agin' me vurra bein;' I'd fold up, go down to dust, an' die," he blubbered.

The pair argued; the pooka swore, and Brian vowed the wrath of God, and the pooka wailed th' more, until they reached accord on the final point. He'd never again assail a single Irishman from that day forward, unless his pate was addled with drink, and useless. He'd leave off the fairy folk, as well. "Then, ye may do as ye may do, and God help the Irish for that," Brian said.

The two creatures—man and monster—spat on their palms and shook hands, to seal the bargain.

The pooka took his equine form and Brian hove aboard. The pair trotted toward Mahon's camp in time to see Belanus' first rays spreading across the sky.

What happened next is a matter of record, and legend. How Brian, aboard a great, black stallion with smoking red eyes, rode into a mass of Norse and clove their heads from their bodies with nary a scratch from an axe; how Mahon, in the heat of the battle, was run through and expired, elevating Brian to the post as chief; and how the great horse disappeared into the evening

mist; and how the townfolks' shoes and noggins were mysteriously spared any further mischief.

All through Brian's storied reign, he fought the Norse and won, driving them back; and when the upstart northern clans began to rise, he fought them too. Until, his path took him to the Stone of Fal at Tara, where he was made High King of All Ireland.

Yet, as with many kings, the hardship of the office finally killed him, at Clontarf, and as the nation set to keenin' no louder noise was heard from the cospes and the fairy-circles in their mourning, for Brian was truly King over all.

At the wake, there walked a great, black horse, in full daylight, to pay his respects. But, being of pagan birth, he couldna' hold the Mass, nor invoke the name of God.

"Sleep well, O Prince of Boruma," was what those who stood too near the wakin' ale said they heard, as the horse strode off and disappeared. For the pooka, bein' as he was of earthly birth and not a child of Heaven, that was as close as he could come, without surrendering his own corporation.

And that is how the pooka was born, and lives; how he was bred into the Irish story; and how he was suborned by a king with the help of fairy magic.

And why, try as he might, he can never say, "Good-bye."



Heartless Acts

By R.E. Willison

Even today this far I see heartless acts.

It is hard not to react.

I feel so often I am under constant attack.

When this happens I must Say No!

I must refuse to go down that road.

I look to the sky,

I fall to my knees,

Then I quietly plea for help.

Help to calm the raging storm in me.

Help to hear His voice that sets me free!

I see His hand that gives me the choice and lifts the burdensome Load .

That helps me go on my way till the next time

I see a heartless act!





Submission to Prairie Ink

We are a literary annual that welcomes fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, drama, literary criticism, and graphic narratives.

We serve as a vehicle for emerging writers who attend Barton Community College or reside in one of the seven counties within Barton's service region.

The editor of Prairie Ink encourages submissions from Barton students, alumni, and community members from Barton's seven-county service area: Barton, Pawnee, Rice, Rush, Ellsworth, Russel, Stafford; and from students enrolled at the Barton Fort Riley Campus and Grandview Plaza Outreach location.

To check out submission guidelines or to submit your work, please email the editor at prairieink@bartonccc.edu.

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Mission

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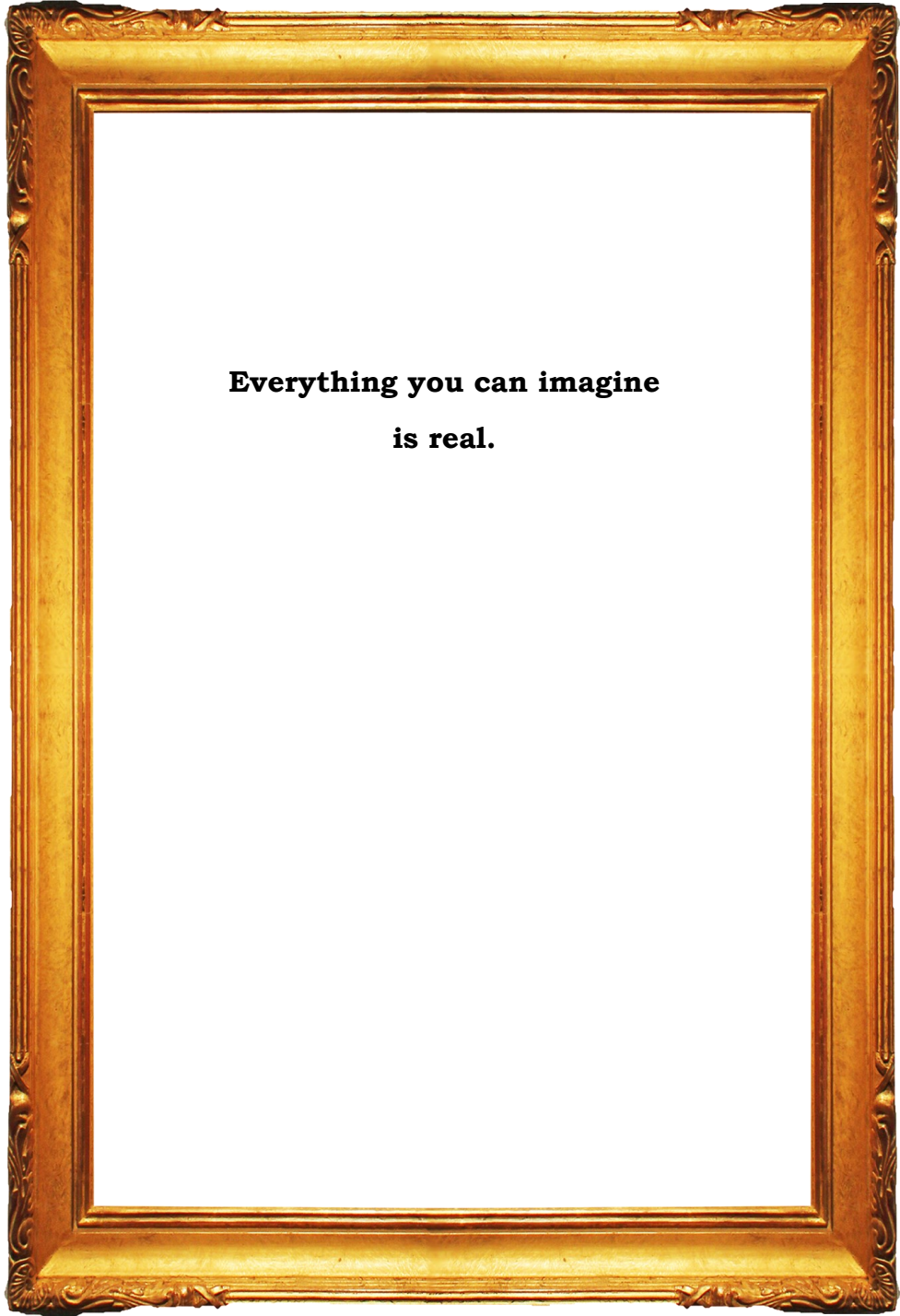
We will seek to achieve our mission through [eight ENDS](#) and four Core Priorities (Values) that define our commitment to excellence in education.

ENDs

1. Essential Skills
2. Work Preparedness
3. Academic Advancement
4. "Barton Experience"
5. Regional Workforce Needs
6. Barton Services and Regional Locations
7. Strategic Plan
8. Contingency Planning

Core Priorities (Values)

Drive Student Success
Cultivate Community Engagement
Optimize Employee Experience
Emphasize Institutional Effectiveness



**Everything you can imagine
is real.**