

# The Suckiest Bunch of Sucks

By John Lemut

1.

“That’s why I wear black. Not as a fashion statement but...Yeah, it does look cool but, more importantly, even if you *do* get blood all over, you can’t tell what it is...Ooh, I spilled a mocha chai latte on myself...They believe it because who the fuck would walk around with blood splatters on their clothes?”

Vam was only half-invested in the conversation until he was shocked into paying attention. “What?” he cried.

The restaurant was nearly empty. Aside from Vam and the proprietor Marco, there was only one other being in the building. He sat in the never-used waiting area at the front of the diner by the seldom-used cash register. His feet dangled just shy of touching the floor. He picked some wax from his ear and looked at it before wiping it on his sleeve. His bushy beard was tangled and dirty, like the several layers of clothing he wore.

This was Barry. He waited patiently for Vam to finish his phone conversation. He learned patience more than once in his 437 years on Earth.

“He fucking *told* them it was blood?” Vam nearly screamed. Patience was not a trait he possessed, but he was forty, and for only ten of those years had Vam been undead.

“Vlad the *fucking* Impaler!” Vam was trying to introduce his own brand of profanity, but with *Jesus Christ* and the like having so much market share, it seemed a lost cause.

Barry considered that Vam had not seen him enter the eatery, so he hopped off the chair and waddled over to stand near Vam’s booth. Vam did notice and held up a finger to Barry, all at once indicating annoyance, warning him not to come closer, and telling him to hold on.

“Of-fucking-course the townsfolk would ash him. He’s dumb enough to wear *white*, dumb enough to feed, and dumb enough to admit it to people—I’d be moving there right now if they hadn’t killed him.”

Barry observed Vam’s four visible fingernails painted deep black with a clear coat. His pinkie nail was longer. Cocaine did nothing for vampires. Barry tried it in Spain shortly after it was first brought from South America. While his associates espoused the medical virtues of the new wonder plant through ground teeth, Barry bit his tongue. The scent of blood from the servant girls gave him a high topped only by its taste.

“Yeah. Hey look, I gotta go. Fuckin’ Barry’s here...Yeah, I know he is...Okay, stake you later.” Vam touched a virtual button on his phone and set it on the table. “Did you know Baron...Whoever, from New Mexico?”

Barry raised his eyebrows. “I know a Duke Whitsend who resides in New Mexico.”

“Yeah, that’s him.”

“Duke is not a title. There’s something to be said for real names.”

“What’s wrong with taking a new name? A new name for a new life.”

“Vam P. Ire? It’s a little too...leading. Is my English correct? I’ve only been here for eighty years”

“Fuck you, *Barry*. I’m not ashamed of what I am.”

“May I join you?”

“Yeah, hop on up,” Vam giggled. Barry had heard it all before, many times over. He was short: five feet, two inches. When he was born, average height was significantly shorter than present day, and he was considered short even then.

While Barry wiggled up into the booth, Vam informed him, “Your buddy Duke is dead. He went fucking nuts and sloppily fed on some kid at a birthday party. Did you know Duke was working as a clown?”

Barry’s response was a look of confusion.

“I don’t know what kind of people hire a clown who only works at night, but they did. After a break, Duke was twisting some balloon animals into shape or something and everyone

noticed his shirt and face were covered in something red. He didn't even try to make something up."

"How did you come by this news?"

"I network. I'm a twenty-first century vampire. I don't feed in a fucking alley and rest in a box."

"Yes, I would wager you spell vampire with a y, as well."

"I spell *fuck you* with a y."

"As do I."

"...Anyways, Duke's dead. They tied him up outside for the sunrise."

"Ashing," Barry nearly whispered. "I'd choose anything before that."

Vam leaned forward in an attempt to intimidate Barry. "If you keep feeding on *my* prey, I'll kill you whichever way you want."

Barry picked his nose. He had encountered many vampires and men like Vam before. "That girl was a runaway. I have not broken our agreement; however, you fed upon a local vagabond with whom I was very familiar not more than a month ago. If anyone has cause to level threats, it is I."

"He came into my club to use the pisser. If someone enters my club, they're fair game."

Barry deposited a booger on the underside of the table. "Do you make a habit of encouraging homeless to use your facilities?" Vam began to answer, but Barry cut him off. "No matter. If we follow your logic, as soon as someone steps foot on the street, they are rightfully mine."

Vam let his fangs drop. Ten years earlier he would have stepped on someone's sneaker to show his willingness to bring a disagreement to a head. Barry smiled with an open mouth and slowly extended his fangs in an oft-practiced move. Vam's bravado faltered but he willed his fangs not to retract.

"You are a foolish child. Though this town is not large, there are plenty of drifters for me and stupid twats for you, yet you encroach on my territory. I no longer care to be worshipped. You can have the goblets filled with blood and the cushioned throne. All I need is one lost soul a month upon

whom to feed and I will be content with that, yet you grab for control of the whole town. Adhere to our agreement.”

Barry scooped to the edge of the bench seat and hopped off. He took a couple steps toward the door before Vam called to him.

“You sleep under buildings, right?”

Barry could think of no reason to lie. “Yes.”

“I have something for you. It’ll help you keep track of your scorpion roommates.” Vam reached into a jacket pocket and pulled out a flashlight. He pointed it at Barry’s befuddled face.

Vam grinned and clicked the switch. The ultraviolet light splashed Barry like scalding oil, instantly burning his exposed flesh. He wailed and put his hands up; they also burned in the bath of UV light. Vam laughed and found it difficult to keep the beam steady. Barry made for the door and burst through it into the night.

Vam set the flashlight down and picked up his phone. As he sexted, he made up his mind to kill Barry. Three curt knocks on the window next to the table caused Vam to look up. Barry stood there, his face a smoldering mess. Vam snatched up the flashlight and shone it at Barry again who merely shook his head. Hardly any of the UV rays passed through the glass.

Barry turned on his heel and leisurely teetered away.

Vam shivered. He saw in Barry’s eyes that the little fuck meant to kill him, too.

## 2.

Marco hated the two vampires, although they were his only repeat customers. But then again, it was they who drove away living customers. People wouldn’t even come in for lunch on the sunniest day. The landlord was in a pinch, too. Even if he kicked Marco out, who would lease a slop shack frequented by vampires? The rent was low enough where Marco could survive, but high enough to just scrape by.

When Barry was the only vampire, Marco was okay with it. Well, he was *more* okay with it. A reserved booth in a dark

corner served Barry well, but ever since Vam came to town three years earlier, not only had the two of them become heated adversaries, but Vam insisted on sitting at windowed booths so people could notice him.

And so Vam could watch over the small Arizonian town.

Last night was the final straw for Marco. Those two undead bloodsuckers were his only customers and all they did was fight. As Marco fought to fall asleep after locking up, he began hatching a plan.

The next day found him in the kitchen crushing clove after clove of garlic under the flat edge of his well-worn chef's knife. He stopped counting and smiled as the next steps of his plan fell into place in his mind. In a week, perhaps his lunch crowd would be large enough to require a waitress. He envisioned hanging a *Help Wanted* sign in the window.

Marco looked out from the kitchen at the empty dining room. First things first, he reminded himself as he crushed another clove.

### 3.

Vam ordered steak tartare. It wasn't an uncommon entrée for him. It was easy for Marco to prepare and Vam didn't need to worry about E. coli, but there was something fishy going on. Marco took far too long to bring it to him and when Marco placed the dish in front of him, Vam noticed his hands were shaking.

Plus the pungent stink of garlic was evident as soon as Marco entered the dining area.

Marco stayed at the side of the table. Vam looked from the raw meat to Marco. Essentially he saw no difference between them. "Is there garlic in this?" he asked plainly as one would inquire about pepper.

Marco's eyes shifted before admitting, "Yes—I'm so sorry, Mr. Pire."

Vam sighed and brushed the dish onto the floor. The plate shattered into hundreds of splinter-shaped pieces. "My name is Ire. Vam. P. *Ire*." He considered getting in Marco's

face to intimidate him further, but the reek of garlic kept him at arm's length. "Why the fuck would you put garlic in my food? You know I'm a vampire, right?"

"Yes, but I was forced."

Vam shot an eyebrow skyward.

"Barry," Marco blurted without further prodding. "He told me that if I didn't kill you...he'd kill me." His lip quivered.

"Fuckin' Barry." Vam looked out the window toward the part of town he knew Barry called home. "Barry would know garlic wouldn't kill me."

"I was hoping it wouldn't, but I couldn't be sure. He didn't tell me how to do it, so I'll just tell him I failed."

"You won't be telling him anything after I rip your arms off and beat you to death with them."

The blood drained from Marco's face. "Just let me live and I'll do whatever you want. I can help you."

"*Nosferatu!*" Vam banged a fist on the table. "Step the fuck back," Vam ordered. Marco complied and Vam slunk out of the booth. "I'm going to my club. We'll talk about this later." Vam left the restaurant and Marco cleaned up.

An hour later Barry walked into the restaurant. His face and hands had mostly healed and he was feeling pretty good about Vam not being present. He got halfway to his booth in the back when Marco burst through the swinging kitchen doors with a foot-long crucifix in one hand and a small glass bottle in the other. He screamed as he rushed Barry, shaking the bottle like he was casting a line. Barry backed away from the crucifix, but not fast enough to avoid getting splashed with a little bit of the water.

The holy water burned like mad.

"Hey. Hey! *Hey!*" Barry tried stopping Marco, but found it to be a difficult feat when he could not get close enough to grab him. "Marco, stop! What on Earth are you doing?"

When the bottle went dry Marco dropped to his knees and crumbled into deep sobs. Barry examined his arm where the holy water splashed. It continued to eat away at his flesh, getting close to the bone. He'd need to feed again tonight.

His initial shock was pushed aside by a rising anger. "What is the meaning of this?" he shouted at Marco.

Marco did not look up as he explained through hysterical wails. A transcript of the confession would have read:

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. Jesus Christ, I'm sorry...[unintelligible sobbing]...hurt you. I would never. You're my friend...  
[unintelligible]... customer...[unintelligible]  
...made me. Threatened me...[unintelligible]  
...slowly if I didn't kill you. I didn't know...  
[unintelligible]...God, forgive me. I'm so scared of him...[unintelligible]...Son of a whore. Please don't kill me.

Barry got the jist of it. He liked Marco and felt his anger melt away into empathy. He knew most vampires were essentially insecure bullies. He was turned by one himself and had never been able to forgive. Barry tried to be something else and spent decades coming to terms with the hypocrisy that was his life: feeding on drifters and bums while denouncing the gaudy lifestyle that all other vampires reveled in.

“Marco, stand up; I will not harm you.” Barry picked at a creeper as Marco collected himself.

Marco's eyes were swollen and red, his shoulders slumped forward. The crucifix lay abandoned on the ground.

“A crucifix cannot harm a vampire, it only repels us. And you would need much more holy water than that to do any real damage.”

Marco sucked up some snot deeper into his nose. “I'm glad. I never wanted to hurt you, Barry. I'm just so afraid of Vam.”

“Fear not. I will set things right.” Barry turned to look out into the night. “Tomorrow.”

Marco rolled his eyes.

#### 4.

Vam sat in the VIP lounge of his club alone. He forbade anyone from approaching him so he could think. This was the

second night in a row he did this. He had trouble collecting his thoughts. If he weren't a vampire, his patrons may have taken his deep, solitary pondering as sulking.

The gigantic doorman tried to stop the tiny, scruffy bum from entering the club, but as soon as he put his hands on Barry, his arms were ripped from his torso.

Barry flung patrons out of his way as he moved deeper into the pulsing club. Most of the people couldn't see what was going on since the floor was so packed. Vam sensed Barry and signaled for his protective detail, a group of five paid goons, to take Barry out. Vam also sensed it was certain death for the quintet.

One of the security guards pulled a pistol from his shoulder holster and fired a couple rounds into the ceiling. Most of the crowd reacted immediately and moved toward the exit. When a clear shot emerged, the guard emptied the rest of his magazine at Barry who took several rounds to his chest. He reeled back but did not fall. When the gun dry fired, Barry charged at the shooter.

It took several seconds for Barry to traverse the short distance. His tiny steps echoed throughout the now-silent club. The guard could have run (and outrun Barry), but he was too stunned that the bullets hadn't killed to move. Finally Barry reached the guard and lunged at his throat. Barry tore out the guard's trachea and took an extra moment to drink a pint of the blood that gushed out. The rest quickly pooled on the floor.

A second guard grabbed Barry from behind and held him while a third wildly attacked with a pool cue. For every blow that hit Barry, one landed on the guard restraining him. Eventually the guard's grip loosened and failed. Barry squatted down and shuffled backward, escaping between the guard's legs. He shoved the guard from behind, sending him into the one brandishing the stick. They fell to the floor together. Barry leapt upon them and repeatedly bashed their heads together.

Barry was transfixed by the mingling blood long enough for the final two guards to grab hold of him. They were brothers. Not just because they were black—they shared the same biological parents: fine, upstanding, Christian folk who would have been ashamed if they knew their boys were running

around with vampires. Together they heaved Barry across the room.

He landed on a small table that broke apart under his weight. Barry was immediately concerned when he saw bits of wood sticking into his chest. The potential for a splinter to kill was very real for a vampire.

The brothers didn't give him opportunity to collect himself. They attacked, stomping Barry with their heels.

Barry absorbed the punishment. His bones did not crack and his flesh did not bruise, but his temper rose higher. As the last of Vam's goons continued dropping heel bombs over Barry, they fell into synch. Their right legs rose and fell in tandem. Barry timed his counter attack when they raised their legs. He shot his arms out and dug his fingers into their Achilles tendons. The men screamed and fell to the ground in tandem, as well.

Barry continued to sink his nails into their legs and tightened his grip until his hand was clamped completely around their calcaneal tendons. He smiled at the snapping sounds as the tendons popped loose of their heel bones and positively beamed with glee when he tore the tendons from their legs. Parts of their calf muscles came with the tendons. One of the men passed out from shock and the other continued screaming.

Barry turned toward the throne in the VIP area. It had been vacated. Vam fled during the massacre.

Barry roared in fury. He ripped a leg off a table and snagged a tablecloth to make a torch. He walked around the club setting fire to every fabric and flammable surface before heading out into the night.

## 5.

Vam burst into the diner and Marco came running into the front. "What's going on?"

"It's Barry! He's gone insane!" Vam looked so scared that Marco experienced an instant of compassion and regret. "He's tearing my club up. I had to send my peeps after him to buy me time to get out of there."

The instant had passed. Marco asked, “What are you going to do?”

Vam grabbed Marco by the throat. “You mean what are we gonna do.”

Marco nodded with some difficulty and Vam released him. While rubbing his throat, Marco suggested, “We can’t stay here. We should regroup at your place.”

Vam nearly agreed but countered, “No. We’ll go to your house.”

Seconds later they were sitting in the cab of Marco’s pickup bound for his house. They arrived minutes later. Marco hopped out of the truck and quickly let himself inside his home. He turned back to see Vam standing at the threshold. He raised his arms, palms up, in a *what-the-fuck?* gesture. Marco returned the gesture.

“Invite me in, dude.”

“Oh, shit, yeah. Sorry—please come in.”

Vam didn’t wait to be asked twice. He slammed the door, locked it, and drew all the curtains in the small home.

For an hour Vam constantly moved from window to window and pulled the curtains back slightly to peek outside as Marco whittled the kitchen table’s legs into spears.

“Do you have any silver?”

Marco stopped working with the knife and admitted, “I have my mother’s place settings. They’re real silver...some old coins, too.”

“Get them,” Vam instructed, still surveilling the road.

After digging around in his kitchen and bedroom, Marco came back with two wooden boxes.

“How about rubber gloves?”

Marco huffed and eventually came back with cowhide work gloves. “That’s the best I got.”

“They’ll do. We’ll wait him out. I’ll need your help getting out of town during the day. You know, I’ve always hated summer because the nights were so short, but it may be a blessing this time.”

“What if he follows us?”

“We’ll find help. I know vampires who will protect me—us, I mean.”

Another hour later Vam Tweeted while leaning back in a kitchen chair, his feet on a second chair. Marco stood watch, looking to the road out front of the house. There was no reason Barry would come from any other direction.

Marco was proven correct minutes later when Barry came walking up the driveway. “He’s here,” Marco said.

Vam jumped to his feet and pulled on the work gloves. They didn’t enhance his outfit and that fouled his mood further.

Barry’s footfalls on the wooden steps and porch were clearly audible inside.

The door bell rang. “I’m going to answer it,” Marco said with a rising inflection.

“Do I need to tell you not to invite him in?”

“No, I got that.” Marco unlocked the door and swung it open while keeping back a couple feet.

“Good morning, Marco.” It was 3:17 A.M. “May I come in?”

Marco stammered, “Uh...no, sorry. I can’t let you in, Barry. I’m really sorry.”

Barry saw Vam standing in the entryway to the kitchen. “If you don’t let me in, I can’t help you, Marco. If you don’t let me in, I cannot guarantee your safety.”

“I understand, but I can’t let you in.” Marco mouthed *help*.

Barry wasn’t sure what he was playing at, but it really wasn’t a concern. “You should close the door now.”

Marco slowly closed the door, expecting Barry to force it open up until the moment it latched. Nothing happened.

Barry walked back to the driveway. He flipped down the tailgate of Marco’s truck and removed two five-gallon gas cans.

Marco continued to observe Barry and cried out, “He’s dousing the house with gas!”

“He’s bluffing. There’s no fucking way he’d burn this house down.” Just then Vam’s phone beeped and he read a Tweet: @vam\_p\_ire dude ur club burrnd down lol.

Barry worked his way around the house, sloshing gas on all sides until he came back to the front door. He walked to the truck again and grabbed a road flare from the bed. He struck it and winced at the brightness of the shooting flame. He

considered warning Marco one final time, but reasoned that a gas-soaked house and lit flare were unmistakable admonitions.

He approached the house again and held the flare's dangerous end to the siding. It caught fire with a poof and quickly spread completely around the structure.

After an exciting couple minutes the fire faltered and seemed to die out, but before Barry had the chance to become dejected, the soffits burst into flames. The fire rapidly spread to the roof and back to the walls again. Barry smiled from under his bushy beard.

"You got a basement?"

"Of course not," Marco cried.

"Fuck!" Vam couldn't think again. He grabbed his head with his gloved hands.

Marco was beginning to have trouble breathing so he dropped to the ground. He crawled into the kitchen, wet a rag, and breathed through it.

Fire began working its way inside at the windows and doors. The smoke was getting thicker. Marco couldn't stay inside much longer. He crawled toward the front door.

Vam grabbed him by the collar. "Where the fuck are you going? We're in this together."

As Vam spun him around, Marco smacked him in the forehead with an 1804 silver dollar. It stuck there and began to sizzle. Vam screamed and tried to pick it off with his gloved hands but he couldn't grab it.

Marco took the opportunity to make his escape. He burned his hand on the door knob, but considered it a small price to pay, provided things worked out. As he tumbled out the door Vam worked to pry the coin from his head with de-gloved fingertips.

Barry easily dragged Marco to his feet. Whereas a six foot tall vampire could have lifted Marco completely off the ground, even with Barry's arms fully extended, Marco's feet were flat on the ground and his legs were slightly bent. Indeed the position was more uncomfortable than frightening.

Barry dragged Marco to the porch steps and with his feet on the first step down, finally Marco stood erect. "Let me in your house!"

“Yes, go! You are welcome!”

Barry released him and Marco immediately sprinted away. He doubted he'd ever see Marco again and felt an all too familiar pang of regret as another living soul fled from him. He knew Marco would live the rest of his life in fear.

Oh, well. He turned his attention back to the house. He had been invited in.

Barry took two steps into the front room before Vam slammed into him. Vam pulled Barry's shirts over the back of his head like a hockey goon. Once Barry's arms were restrained and he could not see, Vam punched him in the solar plexus hard enough to send Barry back toward the doorway.

Barry struggled to throw off his layers of shirts and when he was free again, Vam was once again hidden from sight. Barry's fangs dropped with a soft click and he began searching the house.

He did not have to wait long. As soon as Barry stepped into the kitchen, the attack continued. Vam threw fistfuls of coins at Barry. The silver stuck and dug into his skin like ticks. When the coin barrage ended and Barry worked methodically to pick each coin from his torso, arms, and face, Vam opened the box of sterling flatware. He threw soup spoons and salad forks and butter knives like Chinese stars. He threw dessert spoons and dinner forks like darts.

Barry continued picking the coins from his body, ignoring the dozens of pieces of silverware stuck all over him. Vam laughed, “You look like a pin cushion. A...fucking, shrimpy pin cushion.” He doubled over in a fit.

Barry picked the final coin from his stomach with fingertips burned to the bones. Pulling the silverware out piece by piece would have been the preferred method, but time was running short. The building was burning, the sun was fast approaching, and Vam thought he had the upper hand. Barry simply brushed all the silverware off in a few quick strokes. It hurt like mad; the impaled ends tore chunks of his flesh as they popped out, but his fury trumped any pain.

Vam only noticed Barry was rushing him an instant before he was knocked off his feet. Barry was on top of him clawing and biting, tearing and prying. Vam found himself

longing for the pain of the silver compared to the agony he felt from Barry's assault. His hand curled around one of the sharpened table leg stakes and he knocked Barry in the head with it. The wood exploded from the force of the impact and toppled Barry from his mount.

An instant later they were both standing and each held a stake. Vam lunged. Barry blocked the attack with one arm and stabbed his stake into Vam's shoulder with the other.

Vam dropped back to the ground in so much pain he could not scream. Barry grabbed Vam's stake from his limp hand and pierced Vam's other shoulder with it. He pounded on the flat end of each stake with his palm, driving them into the floor under Vam's body like nails. Barry once again straddled Vam and continued his beating.

Before long, Vam lay unconscious. Barry moved to squat over Vam's head.

Barry's fingers curled under Vam's jawbone, his thumbs dug into his ears. After a couple light tugs Barry sat on the ground and put his feet on Vam's shoulders. He heaved and, in the exertion, ripped a huge fart. Undeterred by a shart, Barry persisted and, before another bout of flatulence occurred, he freed Vam's head from its body.

Popping and creaking warned Barry the house would collapse soon. He stood and staggered toward the door, still holding Vam's head. It bounced off his thigh with each step. However, at the threshold, he could proceed no further.

Water ran past the front door. Barry looked out and saw no firefighters battling the blaze. Only Marco stood near the property's well. An electric pump chugged at his feet sending water through a hose that emptied at the front door.

Barry ran to the home's back door and flung it open. Trickling water came from both sides of the door, joined, and spilled out into the back yard. Barry went to the bathroom and poked his head out the window. Water trickled along the side of the house in a narrow, shallow ditch. Barely a ditch. An insult to ditches, really, but it was enough to keep him stuck in the house.

As Barry walked back to the front door, he planned to politely ask Marco to turn the pump off. He would threaten him if he had to. He would curse him if he still refused.

Marco was not laughing or smiling or even crying. There was no expression on his face at all. Barry understood that there was nothing he could say.

Barry closed the front door seconds before the ceiling crashed down upon him. He did not remove the flaming timbres; the long process of bringing him to his final death by fire had begun. He felt ready. He existed for 437 years...it was overdue.

## 6.

Two days later Marco reopened his restaurant. He struggled with simple kitchen tasks due to his mostly useless, burned hand.

The restaurant was still empty so it wasn't a big deal...yet. He wasn't too worried. Even though he had no place to live, almost no possessions to his name, and both the fire department and insurance company had suspicions as to the cause of his house fire, Marco had faith the customers would come.

An hour after sunset, the bells above the door clanged and Marco hustled out into the dining room with a few menus tucked under his arm. Two men sat at one of the window booths. Marco welcomed them while handing out menus. They informed him they were ready to order without looking at the menus.

The first man ordered beef carpaccio. Marco began feeling a little dizzy.

The second man ordered steak tartare with a smile. Marco felt the beads of sweat gather on his forehead.

"That'll just be a few minutes, guys." Marco ducked back into the kitchen. He struggled to steady his breathing. He rapidly pounded his fist on the prep counter several times. A tension headache quickly materialized. His customers had a taste for raw meat...and had fangs.

Marco fired up one of the 28,000 BTU gas burners on the smaller range's top. He wheeled the other range away from the wall and yanked on the braided gas line until he broke the connection. The reek of rotten eggs began filling the kitchen.

Marco grabbed his keys off the counter and hurried out the back door.

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