

ISSUE NO 1 LOWLIFE LIT PRESS



POETRY
Micro short
flash



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VERNON MEHAS

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Let's get one thing straight—this isn't some glossy lit mag where we pretend life smells like fucking roses. It's not what would sell. Not what would please the critics. Just what would hit us in the gut and stay there.

Lowlife Lit Press is for the outsiders, the forgotten and the fucked. The ones who never made it out of their hometowns, the ones who did but came crawling back, the ones still clawing their way toward something better.

We don't give a damn about genre. Call it noir, dirty realism, pulp, gutter lit—none of those matters. What matters is that it's real. That's raw. That it hits like a sucker punch and leaves a mark.

We're not here to elevate literature or whatever pompous bullshit other editors claim. We're here because these voices deserve to be heard. Because sometimes true words come from low places. Because beauty exists in the cracks of sidewalks and the fluorescent flicker of all-night laundromats. This is Issue 1. No promises about Issue 2. We're taking it one day at a time, just like everybody in these pages.

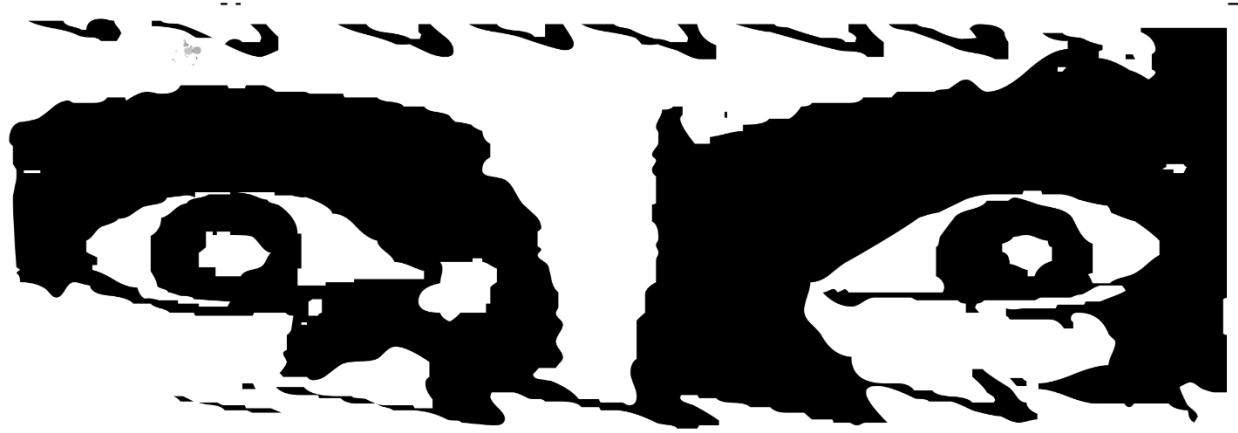
So welcome to the gutter. Pull up a barstool, light a cigarette, and pour something strong.

Now tell us your story.

James William Wulfe
Editor-in-Chief

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POETRY

Self-Reliance
by Sam Hendrian

Boards the subway five minutes past 10
Before the lions leap out of their den
To hunt for heaps of cheap perfume
And lost lambs ready to consume.

Shirt above her stomach, shorts above her knees,
A little honey to attract the local bees
Who'd probably drone on about how beautiful she was
Then shift subjects to the latest Reddit buzz.

Exits at 6th and Broadway
With some sweet stranger named Trey
Whose nerdy speech on widgets
Managed to win her digits.

They part ways at Carl's Jr.
Where a vagrant half moon's her
Faster than poor Trey
Can attempt to save the day.

Descends once more 3 minutes past 4
While sucking on an apple core
In a vague act of defiance
Against those who condemn self-reliance.

Woman Alone

by Sam Hendrian

Elbow sticking out like a family black sheep
Earnest in its earn-less-feel-more philosophy
Waiting for the right pair of wandering eyes
To catch its diagonal trajectory.

Some claim it's insanity
Expecting different results from the same stale habit
Which simply means they themselves are insane
For assuming persistence doesn't reap long-term benefits.

The bartender is cute enough
And also probably gay
And also probably careless
About where his good stuff ultimately lands.

It's irrelevant anyhow
In her dream-is-a-wish-your-heart-makes mind
Selecting facsimile smiles
As her unique fixation for the night.

Goes home alone as per usual
Not particularly bothered
Since fantasies provide
A proxy plane on which to glide.

Symbol Chasers

by Sam Hendrian

Passed by 50 first/last dates
Unfolding inside a Yelp-approved Cafe
Where \$40 of good intentions
Couldn't compensate for mismatched priorities.

Women are anxious they'll have to end up with someone,
Men are anxious they never will
Circumventing each other
For fear of premature success or prolonged failure.

Many a what-did-I-say-wrong William
With a loose definition of PTSD
Wandered back to the place of rejection
Hoping for some kind of closure.

Food is only as good as what it reminds you of
And therefore only as sad,
Which meant pure William and his pure intentions
Left as empty as when he came in.

Watch any person from 50 feet up
And you'll realize they all are shaped roughly the same,
Stick figures chasing symbols
Of what they've heard they're supposed to want.

Drowning Dive Bar

by Sam Hendrian

A cocktail of liquor and loneliness
Poisoned her boiling blood
Midway to the bathroom
In the drowning dive bar.

Almost made out with a picture
Autographed by a C-list celebrity
Who'd stopped by for a pint
On his way to the unemployment office.

Then she came to her senses,
Settled for a fella with no pretenses
Nursing a Mike's Hard Lemonade
In a Target polo.

Unbuttoned her buttonless shirt
With a twitch of fingernail
Hoping to catch his vacant stare
Before he sighed and overtipped the pretty waitress.

But by the time she got there
He was already fully unaware
Of any charm he had remaining
Beyond the filters of a dating app.

Agni

by Anthony David Vernon

You want the comfort of a close cuddle
I'd rather move ahead and eat out
You always want to stay in
When I'd prefer the dark shades of sin
You're as still as a stone
As calm as a creek
But, don't you want to go drunk driving
And punch the police
Get warm by an arsonist's fire
Have sex in the streets
Well, I've been one for the bedroom
For showers and sobriety
But this shit is boring
It'll kill me in week
You love how I speak so meek
Yet, I want to switch
From handholding to handcuffs
From soft strokes to stabbing seduction
I'll feel the heat of an arsonist's fire
Get drunk and inspired
Have sex on the streets
Punch random people
It'll kill me in weeks

The Bar None

by Mona Mehas

I work the door at the Bar None.
People look twice when they see me,
six foot three, 250 pounds.
My curves are in all the right places,
I work the door at the Bar None.

I wear my jeans tight and a push-up bra
or a short dress with bright leggings.
My hips are round, my legs long,
eyes of blue and lips of red,
I work the door at the Bar None.

Owners trust I'll collect door fees,
regulars know not to give me shit.
Servers are safe from groping hands.
One wrong move, I'll break your arm,
I work the door at the Bar None.

At closing time, I sell the merch,
collect the cash, lock the door.
I'm the last one out every night,
on my Harley, I take myself home.
I work the door at the Bar None.

Mind Blown

by Mona Mehas

I blew my mind this morning. I swallowed all the envy and hate the talking heads on the TV spewed. I hoped the younger, less experienced beings would be spared the trash if I devoured it all. In my attempt to protect the vulnerable, I consumed vitriol and bullets aimed at the masses. My head filled with garbage igniting fires that blazed from my eyes like infernos. I believed I'd accomplished my goal when my brain exploded, shedding residue over my shoulders. I opened my mouth and gathered the dregs so they wouldn't land on anyone else. Bobbing my head, collecting debris, more voices came from the television. Filth spewed from ugly faces, while innocents watched in rapt attention. Rubbish gathered again, and with a sigh so heavy it singed my nostrils, I began to clean up the mess, but the question troubled my mind: was I alone in my efforts?

Like Water

by Mona Mehas

Money runs through my fingers like water.
My check arrives in the bank
refreshing, quenching my thirst
cooling my hands
droplets form on my fingertips
and it's gone.

Bills go unpaid while I look for more
books to purchase
concerts to attend
some may not see this as a problem
or understand my challenge
money consumes my life.

When I can't spend freely
on what I want
when my account runs overdraft
a knot develops in my stomach
guilt overcomes my brain
I tell no one.

Eagle flies; the sun shines again
I'll pay my bills, get caught up
then a glint catches my eye
something shiny
a poet reads her work
I must buy her book.

Storms don't pass until the rain
covers me head to toe
my hands try to wring water
from my clothes and hair
but nothing works. Water
runs through my fingers like money.

Claw Off the Lee Shore

by Mona Mehas

caught in a gusty wind
waves cavort, whirlpools form
sommelier takes the sail

raucous music from the shore
gale surges, my ship spins
I fight to stay afloat

vortex forms, threatens death
to swallow would be the end
I beg with leaden phrases

concentrate, inspire imagery
don't censor wayward tides
course through the heavy storm

commandeer every oar
repair neglected sails
use whatever strength I have

to claw off the Lee shore
take out the trash, save my life
claw off the Lee shore

He Chose this Death

by Mona Mehas

he felt alone, no one to call his own
everyone he'd ever loved was gone
life on this plane not worth the struggle
the pain of opening his eyes
staring at the ceiling in his room
his body foreign to his touch
legs that no longer functioned
arms weakened from lack of use
teeth lost in bedsheets
glasses wrapped in diapers

he turned away from food trays
meatloaf, corn, bread and butter
sickening to his palate
candy or cookies if offered
for a year, he ate almost nothing
family tried talking sense
he nodded agreement, lied
to placate, then asked for soda

forced to face a horrifying truth
he had no way to cope
he turned inward and shut down
despite all efforts from family
prayers of friends
he knew of only one answer
he chose this death

MICRO



The Name of Shame
by Barlow Crassmont

What's in a name? Not much, unless you have the worst imaginable one. Why couldn't I have been a Mark, Thomas, Adam or John? Or maybe Michael, Ricky or Bob? Hell, I'd settle for Dick, in lieu of Richard. Or even Lucifer, despite the ghastly connotations involved. But that's neither here nor there.

My father's poor upbringing led to him making countless bad choices early on, one of which was joining an organization that poisoned his mind and corrupted his views on humanity. Since my mother died while giving birth to me, my name ultimately became my father's decision alone. At the time, he was waist deep with the wrong people, engaged in various immoral activities, preying on people he and his cult deemed inferior to themselves. It would've been one thing for him to endure the consequences, but when he dragged me into the pit, he ruined two lives. Regrettably, it took me years to realize how irreparable the damage would be.

The assaults came early in middle school. First it was playful

teasing, then light intimidation. This was followed by other children keeping their distance from me altogether. Eventually, just the sound of my name brought out the worst in others. As long as I was young and impressionable, the abyss I stared into eventually gazed back at me. But High School turned out to be the last straw.

When Robbie Miles, a well-known bully, made fun of my name, prompting laughs from everyone in the cafeteria, I saw red. Every which way. Up, down, left, right. The ensuing scuffle resulted in his broken, bloody nose, and my suspension from school for two weeks. But I no longer cared.

I wasn't going to stand being called The Führer, no matter how fitting he thought it'd be.

Prince Charming
by Barlow Crassmont

His handsome smile warmed Anette's soul, like a comforting fireplace in wintertime. It injected her with hope and a sense of purpose, and gave her something to look forward to. Of all the boys she found attractive, Roman was the most elegant and fashionable. He was pure royalty, in flesh. If only Anette wasn't so shy.

She followed him on social media (Face, Insta, Snap, Twit), tailed him in public (from school to home, from home to the mall, from the mall back home) and often stared at him openly in the school cafeteria, inadvertently telegraphing her feelings to everyone present with her large brown eyes. Even her younger sister, Zoe, noticed her infatuation. The ensuing teasing initially drove

Annette mad. But the elder sister ultimately used her earned wisdom to ignore such childish mocking. Eventually, this subdued her adolescent sibling into maturity.

"I heard he's into The Black Keys," Zoe told Annette in the kitchen. "You can ask him if he's going to their concert on the twenty seventh."

What a brilliant idea!

On Saturday, she spotted him at the mall's food court, eating a slice of Sbarro pizza, grease dripping down his adorable cheeks. After his two friends left, Roman was alone, mindlessly checking his phone. That's when Annette took a deep breath, sighed, and mustered up her courage.

"Excuse me", she said, her cheeks blushing, her heart rate increasing. When he looked up at her, it nearly made her swoon. "I'm Annette." He smiled and kindly shook her extended hand. And the following moment, this boy-God, this Adonis eternal, at long last, spoke.

"Hi." His was a charismatic, seductive voice. "Wanna fuck?"

A Fistfull of Rain

by James William Wulfe

Jesse leans against the brick wall, feeling the rain soak through his shirt. He lights a cigarette, but it tastes like ashes. Across the street, Veronica steps out of the diner, pulling her coat tight around her. She doesn't see him—doesn't want to. It's been five years, and Jesse still remembers the way she said goodbye. He should've left town, should've run like she told him to, but some ghosts keep their claws in you. He takes another drag, watching her disappear into the night, and knows he'll still be standing here when the sun comes up.



FLASH

Nickels
by Bull Garlington

Cary's is just past Western on Devon, down where the Indian restaurants are crowded together, and the streets are choked with empty cabs at three in the morning. You can get a shawarma parm, but you can't get a ride. Two Franks and Nickels walk out under the dim light of a streetlamp into the howling snow.

"Fuck me." Nickels lights a smoke, sinks deeper into his coat. He fiddles with his fedora while Two Frank-Franklin Wilbert Franklin to his ma-wraps his mind around the job.

"Get in," Two Franks walks around the 53 Dodge. Nickels can barely open the heavy side door, crammed full of old telephone books. Cheap-ass bulletproof car.

"Fucking Lightner. I never knew."

"Nobody knew," Two Franks pulls out onto Devon behind a salt truck.

"We was just at Rico Bennie's last Wednesday," Nickels drags deep. Stares out the window.

"Crack it, will you?"

"He's not a bad guy."

"We're all bad guys," Two Frank turns left onto Western, drives right by a cop parked under a streetlamp who watches them crawl by.

"Yeah, but Lightner. Are we sure?"

"We pulled the job. We do the job."

"Listen, I owe him paper. Lemme pay him before we do the job."

"That's stupid."

"Come on, Franks, don't do me like that."

"Get your head in the job. Check your gun."

Two Franks parks around the corner from Lightner's Essentials. They get out and stand by the car. Snow sticks to their faces.

"You check your gun?"

Nickel's pistol rattles in his hand as he wipes it clean from snow.

"My gun is good, Franks."

Two Frank steps around the corner into a bright cube of whirling snow illuminated by Lightner's front window. Nickels grabs his sleeve and hangs back.

"Franks, come on. This job is all squirrels. I think something stinks."

Two Franks had enough. He turns on Nickels and walks into him, pushing him back around the corner. "You think? You think—with what, Nickels? You know why we call you Nickels? Cause you don't make a dime—"

"Why're you so fucking mad, Franks?"

Two Frank glares at his apprentice. Turns around and takes one step toward the door.

"Franks! Fuck! Come on, man. It's Lightner! It's Carl Lightner. We know him. He's crew. We can't just blow his brains out. I won't do it. I won't, Franks. It's bullshit. Let's go back and talk them out of it."

Two Frank hides his pistol behind his back and swings the glass door open. He shoves Nickels through.

"Do your job, Nickels."

Nickels skids to a stop at the counter, and there's Lightner, Carl Lightner, with a Luger he stole off a kraut in the war. Nickels

can count the veins in his nose. He knows exactly how many packs of cigarettes are on the wall. The barrel of the Luger is crisp and perfect.

"Oh," he says, shoulders slumping in defeat. "Oh, ok."

Lightner puts one through his eye, and Nickels falls backward into a display of Barbasol safety razors. Two Franks looks at him with his gun hanging at his side. The cop comes in.

"Guy was tryin' a rob me, Gary. I had no choice," like it's a script.

"Sure, looks like a robbery to me." Two Franks grabs a pack of Chesterfields from Lightner, gives them to the cop, bulging with fifties. The cop leaves. Frank looks away from his dead friend, looks at Lightner.

Lightner says softly, "You pull the job. You do the job."

This Family
by Laura Shell

She'd been watching them, this family—a man, a woman, and a child—for two weeks. She usually watched women of a particular type, but not this time.

The man of this family had caused her immense grief, and he needed to atone for that grief. So, she sat in her dilapidated SUV, in the hot Florida sun, across from the park, watching this happy, beautiful family, watching them as they sat on the grass, on a blanket, eating a meal, all smiles and laughter. They had the whole park to themselves. Then, the father and son played catch with a baseball while the wife read a book.

They didn't deserve to be so content, so jovial, this family. She suffered while they enjoyed their lives.

Just wasn't fair.

She gripped the steering wheel with both hands, banged her head against it, and emitted a string of foul words. Tears sprang to her eyes as a knot of pain formed on her forehead.

No job, thanks to William Sullivan. No money, thanks to William Sullivan. And she was fucking tired of listening to her belly growl.

She blew out a breath that puffed her cheeks and ended her current tirade. She focused on the family again, grinding her teeth.

When was she going to make her move? She wasn't sure. But her

vehicle held the provisions for when the time came—duct tape, zip ties, a gun, a knife.

The family started to pack up their belongings. The wife carried a basket to the other side of the park, which was dense with pine trees. They'd parked over there.

Now was the time.

So, she drove to the other parking lot, parked next to their vehicle, saw the wife place the basket in the back of a car.

William told his son to gather the blanket while he went to the car. As he approached, he saw the basket's contents scattered on the ground beside his vehicle.

His wife was nowhere in sight.

William's heart thundered as if about to burst from his chest and land at his feet. His hands shook. He ran around the parking lot, calling her name.

Then, he thought of his son.

She smiled as she drove the highway toward her secret hideaway. In the back of her SUV, she had the wife, she had the son. Mouths duct taped, hands and feet zip tied. They squirmed, and they cried.

What to do with them now? Actually, the question was...what not to do with them?

Regardless, all that mattered most was that...William Sullivan was suffering—this family would be no more.

About the Writers

Sam Hendrian is a Los Angeles-based filmmaker and poet striving to foster empathy through art. Every Sunday, he writes personalized poems for passerby's outside of Chevalier's Books, LA's oldest independent bookstore. You can find his poetry and film links on Instagram @samhendrian143.

Anthony David Vernon spends his time thinking and drinking (soda). You can just Google his full name if you want to read more of his stuff.

Mona Mehas (she/her) writes poetry and prose from the perspective of a retired disabled teacher in Indiana USA. A Pushcart Prize nominee, her work has appeared in Paddler Press, IHRAM Literary, Big Windows Review and others. Her poetry, *Questions I Didn't Know I'd Asked* and *Hand-Me-Downs* (LJMcD Communications) and *Self-Centered* (Bottlecap Press) are available now.

Laura Shell has been published in NUNUM, Maudlin House, Typishly, The Citron Review, and many others. Her first anthology of paranormal stories, *The Canine Collection*, was released in 2024. She's a prolific writer and submitter of flash fiction and the Editor of the Flash Phantoms horror fiction site www.flashphantoms.net. You can find more about her at <https://laurashellhorror.wordpress.com>

Christopher "Bull" Garlington (born May 13, 1964) is an American humorist. His first book, *The Beat Cop's Guide to Chicago Eats*, with co-author Lt. David Haynes was published by Lake Claremont Press in 2010. He was publicly recognized in 2011 when the Parenting Media Association awarded him for humor column of the year. In 2017, the Oklahoman published an excerpt from his travel memoir, *The Full English*, calling him "the funniest writer you've never heard of."