

Vessel

by

Oliver Curry

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Oliver Curry

State University of New York at New Paltz

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the Master of Arts degree, hereby recommend acceptance of this thesis.

Timothy Liu, Thesis Advisor

Department of English, SUNY New Paltz

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Contents

personal mythos	4
Easton Synergy	5
Series of Lies.....	6
It's College Graduation And	7
Hitting Bottom	8
Puking in the Bar Bathroom	9
New Definitions for Faggot	10
Meat Monger.....	11
I Don't Want To But I Think I Will.....	12
Anger.....	13
Autopsy Report	14
How to Get Someone to Care	15
Feeder Mice	18
Artist's Signature	19
Satiated.....	20
Saturn	21
\$10K Life Insurance	22
Dear Dad,	23
Mercy Kill.....	24
Allerleirauh	25
Drive	27
In the Eighth Grade You Wanted to Kill Me.....	29
Then I'm standing there turning	30
Vessel	31
spot.....	32
Post-Teenage Angst.....	33
Apology.....	34

personal mythos

it took until my sixteenth year to twist the womanhood out of me.
unbinded in the boys' fitting room,
my friend watching the door so no over-involved teachers
could glimpse my mediumly-endowed chest,
i clawed into my torso and shimmied out a rib.
like my very own god, my very own adam,
i took that white, curving seed of woman
into my own hands.
i left it behind a ceiling tile
alongside the empty beer bottles we found
stashed away freshman year.

pride made me lift my shirt at every chance.
i sucked in to raise each rib
and show the victory hollow.
friends' fingers ran over taut skin
bumped by bone,
whispering along it like
a smooth sanded wood.
when they pressed hard enough,
they felt the spluttering of my heart,
but i stopped letting them—
it filled us both with the gasping
of being alive.
on my own, i'd snake a hand up my shirt
and press and press and press
until my heart stung from it.

Easton Synergy

She's a hefty thing.
You're not sure how to wield her,
her metal length wider
than the thickest muscle of your arm.
She's silver, purple, dust crusted,
smells sharp under soft and dry,
and when you hold her at the ready
you catch a whiff of rubber grip—
car tire and playground filling.
On TV the men tap the home plate
with eyes peering from under their helmets,
two sharp, shining chips of stone,
so you do too.

Here we go, girl.

Hunker down, gravity low, legs apart—
sturdy.
Hold her just above your shoulder
and get ready. Ask her to work with you.
You two are a team in a world all your own
until that pitcher reels back
and you, your hands bare because
you always forget your gloves,
you swing her forward and meet
that hurtling ball.
Two opposing forces crash
and send their reverb into your skin,
stinging your palms, shaking your bones.
With this you can shove into their world,
make your team of boys with their
jokes and rough-housing let you in.
So throw her aside. Don't look
at the speck of white soaring away,
just let your legs wheel over
each other, take you desperately
to first plate with hair flying behind,
those boys cheering,
the other teams' chasing,
and you ready to prove you're one of them.

Series of Lies

My daughter asks me to cut her hair off
so I pull out the shears.
I sever her umbilical gold
and she picks up bundles to wear as a wig.

She plays soccer with her buzzcut
and raw knees. Dirt mixes
with her freckles. I hit her
with the cold of the hose
and she drips over the backyard chasing the dog.

She's friends with every neighbor,
the pied piper of the block. She leads games
of tag and pretend. Most of the time,
she's home for dinner.

My daughter gets nightmares.
It's the only time she fears me.

My daughter talks and I listen.

My daughter sits on our couch.

I had a fine childhood.

I don't ever want my daughter to exist.

It's College Graduation And

I've erased my parents' shame because finally one of us made it and I strut across the stage like someone proud and get my diploma and then the professors give my head a whack and the urge to cry while getting critique from my boss and the feeling that adult life is just an exercise in pain tolerance fall out of my head and they pour in the knowledge of how much to lie on a resume and when a rule is actually just a suggestion and when I get home everyone who loves me is waiting with a cake that says YOU DID IT AND NOW EVERYTHING WILL FALL INTO PLACE AND BE EASY YOUR WHOLE LIFE and I say you're right everything feels bright and shiny and bright and perfect and it is. Forever.

Hitting Bottom

Let's not eat.
Let's beat each other up.
Come on I know you wanna
pull a *Fight Club*
and yeah I mean the fighting
but also the kiss mark
chemical burns and the
shaving our heads
but fine we can not do
the domestic terrorism.
Buzzkills.
I wanna test the limits
of self-imposed suffering.
We can stay awake all night
or two or seven
colorpick our bruises and see
just how purple we can turn
find out how quickly
a person can kill their liver.
I was born to kick rocks and eat dirt.
Give me asphalt minced
palms and knees.
I'll look hot
spitting out teeth and blood
and you know it.

Puking in the Bar Bathroom

On my knees at the gay bar
(this could be more fun).
Pull my mask down
to expel into the waste-catcher
and hope I don't catch any waste.
It's still pretty white for this time
though it's likely I'm now ruining that.
I'm missing one of three emo songs
from this entire function,
but all I'm thinking about
is how fucked the air vent
staring from the corner is,
bent out of its rectangle and
half falling off the wall.
I flip it off.
It's in no place to judge my shit
when it looks like that.

New Definitions for Faggot

An honorific for the hottest and most interesting bitch at the grocery store.

Dyke's twin, or perhaps lover.

That kid who vanished in middle school.

Example of *faggot* in a sentence: I hear that faggot's a girl now.

A fourth grader reading on the playground.

That guy you're banging.

Impolite form of when straight girls call their boyfriends twinkles. Or fruity. Or zesty. Or when they get the ick. Or

Tranny's definite lover.

That guy you wish you were banging.

Ironic American slang for a vape—Juuls, not Elf Bars, which they call fairies.

A sensitive cutter boy.

That guy you might be in love with.

The thing you are, whether you like it or not.

Meat Monger

Drifting through fall-off-the-bone days
where the veil is so thin
the deli ham starts oinking.
A customer asks for a Tower of Babel of liverwurst
but an Angel of the Lord comes through
the hole we had to make in the ceiling
and reminds him of his blood pressure.
Now we just have this pâté antenna
picking up Portuguese radio, then static
when the vultures peck off the top.
I'd sculpt these meat discs into
their live form and reanimate it, but
frankly, I have no idea what animal they're from.
I paste the wall with them
then crawl around and peel them off.
My manager taps the "No Yellow Wallpapering"
sign right above the suicide hotline.
On days like these, it seems easy to
chop off a hand, but I'm scared no one
would want it for their sandwiches.
How embarrassing.

I Don't Want To But I Think I Will

When you start to fear your hands
you have to break them.

Understand: hurting is easy
as pushing through air,

easy as ripping this page to shreds.
Try it. Feel it yield like nothing.

Someone who loves you won't expect
to have to use their will against you.

Use this to your advantage.
Go to a parent, lover, brother, friend

and beat them. Reel a fist back. Hit them
with your own meek strength.

Don't hesitate for a second before
landing the next punch. It will take a moment

for them to respond, except you can ensure
they never manage. Picture this:

your dearest with their face smashed in.
Bloodied. Defeated not because you're better

in any way, only because they never thought
to protect themselves at all.

You have to break your hands.

Anger

Sit with this thing inside you
and wait for it to tire out.
When it won't, cover it
like a popping hot pot.
Let's stop spitting oil
when the heat's on low.
Drama queen.
When it's still
as nerve-firing as ever
at least guard hands and tongue
from its weedy spread
so it can't escape
in a flaming
burst.

Autopsy Report

DECEDENT: Deadname Curry

AGE: 17 years

SEX: obviously not

EXTERNAL EXAMINATION:

Short, unfit, and unattractive 17-year-old “male” with a shoddy at-home haircut. There is vomit on the ugly button-up. There are a multitude of healed and open lacerations on the shoulders and thighs, with clear intent to just get attention. The body is unpleasant to look at, as is the face. The lips and fingertips are blue.

ANATOMIC DIAGNOSES:

No use of gun or knife indicated. No clearly fatal wounds. Weakling options noted.

TOXICOLOGY REPORT:

Nobody bothered.

OPINION:

The decedent died of an overdose suicide, the more common type for people of its sex. Its death was overdue. None of the doctors wanted to look at it anymore.

How to Get Someone to Care

Step One: Don't do it in the first place. Please.

Fifteen and the world makes no sense.

Fifteen and you discover a new religion—
something to roll in your mind like a hard candy
until three in the morning
to replace obsessive praying for safety.

(Don't worry, that will come back.)

Fifteen and you've got a secret for the first time
in years

only this one you might actually keep.

Step Two: If you disregard step one, then find someone you care about. Inevitably, they will have an emergency. Be their shoulder to cry on. This will strengthen your bond.

It's funny the ways you see yourself.

Your friend tells you you'd be able to manipulate them
and you balk

(You were in the middle of manipulating another friend).

People already care.

That has always been your problem.

Step Three: If you are not already in the process of destroying yourself, now is the time to start. Let them notice what you're doing to yourself. Alcohol or drugs are popular for this step, but an eating disorder or good old-fashioned self-harm are near guaranteed ways to get sympathy.

You can't stop reading about things you can do to yourself.

You can do anything to yourself.

(It's true, the internet makes you do it
no matter how much you hate the grownups who warned for that.)

The stories you read are all about sad people who get caught
and loved out of their sadness.

You rattle when you think you've left behind a drop of blood.

You turn to ice when your mom sits you down to ask
if you know what she found.

Scroll through pictures of girls so thin
you don't want to complete the metaphor because it's too painful to think
when compared to you. And you hardly even want to look like them.

Step Four: If possible, avoid a true addiction. It's enough to seem like you have a problem, and it'll be easier to give up once everyone gets sick of it.

Sixteen and you're scared of weed and Lana Del Rey
because you don't need any more bad influences.

Fight against your worst instincts.

You're a teen that wants to die but you can't even sabotage your future.

Find out your friends drank at the beach without you
and resent it despite knowing you'd never have joined.

No matter what else you do, at least keep up your grades
and don't get caught

when changing in the fitting rooms.

Step Five: Shit.

Everyday do something to hurt yourself some more.

Feel like there's some secret, glittering world you've entered
while sitting in your suburban bedroom

but you're a faker. Nothing you do is anything but a show
to see if you can prove suffering to yourself.

Get a job you can't even show up high to
(or with open wounds)—

not even a functional addict,
just someone fucking around sometimes.

**Step Six: Get back in control, dear God
get it**

together.

Remember when you thought you'd grow out of it?

You only start getting serious about self-destruction
in high school, years after your peers.

And years after them, too, you keep it up.

At twelve all you had were empty suicide pacts
and no marks to show you might be serious about it.

Your friend says you are compulsively masochistic,
a word you first heard at six in reference to yourself.

Face it: unlike those other kids,
you hurt yourself like you were born to do it,
not *resorting* to it.

**Step Seven: You ruined it. You know that, right? You made it all *terrible* everything you touch is
terrible so do it again you bitch you've already ruined it so you may as well keep going,
keep that knife to your thigh, that bottle to your lips, and feel better and worse and *terrible***

Your mom asks do you know what I found?

and to smooth things over

all you have to do is stop drinking for, oh, a week.

You're a better liar than anyone knows.

She tries to soothe you, rubs your arm
and feels a bump that you brush off as a bug bite
(long and thin and multiple).

She lets it go.

Maybe it's not about how good you are at lying.

Tell your teacher you're anorexic
so she can get into competition with you—
you only confess because you know she'll never snitch.

There's nothing to ruin with your self-destruction—
everyone knew this would happen
when they met you.

**Step Eight: You feel a hand on your own. It's meant to comfort. They are angry at you, but
they're here, and you are so unworthy and so**

so

so

so grateful.

Your doctor says you're ugly, now, and will be forever.

The first people you sleep with don't recoil.

You're yourself only because you can do anything you want to this body.

All that disgust and shame has seeped out

so implosion is just the thing you do.

You will not watch your parents cry over it—you won't let them learn.

Final Step: Don't pull this shit again.

Feeder Mice

Tucked far into PetSmart's back corner
past cats and gerbils and even betta fish for adoption,
I find my coveted pets:
the one-dollar mice, circling their cage.
I have a dollar.
Even at eight,
I can scrounge up so much.
But Mom tells me no every time
we pick my sister up from work.
I have no money for a cage or food.
I am not responsible enough to care for them.
Mom doesn't want me to get bitten.
All of this she tells me
until the day she finally decides
(due to some new maturity or my pestering)
that I can know these mice live only a year
at most.
They're not pets.
They're only here so someone's snake
can swallow them whole—
alive and frightened.

Artist's Signature

All the instruments of your art wait for you
to paint into my dermis.
You've learned but not yet practiced
except on orange skins which don't yield
soft and pliant like a person
but offer up their citrus scent from
leathery peel.
You want something real.

I make a fine canvas. Or at least, a willing one.

My young flesh yields to the
pokepokepoke
of your buzzing needle.
"You bleed a lot," you say.
"Sorry," I say.
"Don't be," you say.
"You take the pain so well."

You stand me before the mirror again and again,
each session hours of you.
Tattoos wound like sunburns
and heal like scars,
sending pain at random
to hypervigilant nerves.
I crane my neck to see
reddened skin etched with
black-lined pools.

"Aren't they great?"
Yes. The colors blend and shine like oil spills.
"Don't you love them?"
No.
But it's only my self you've marked.

Satiated

Take my flesh in your warm mouth and fold your lips around the tender living meat, then tear with rending strength so skin's softness splits, using penetrating incisors to gouge a chunk of me and swallow it so that the blood that runs through me now runs through you.

My flesh in your warm mouth and lips around tender meat, rending skin's softness using penetrating incisors and swallow so that the blood that runs through me runs through you.

My flesh in your warm mouth and lips tender meat, skin's softness piercing swallow the blood that runs through me runs through you.

My flesh in your warm and tender skin the blood that runs through me runs through you.

My flesh and blood runs through you.

My flesh and blood you.

Flesh and blood.

Saturn

Born last
shadowed in loss—
I stay latched at her hip
longer than any other.
I rise splendid with the sun
to sit by her side and
fold in her secret woes,
promise to never grow up.
I think she may need me
as much as I need her.
I think one day, one way
or another, we may
kill each other.
We are joined
in an outpouring of
viscera and veins
wound up tight
and tied in a bow.

\$10K Life Insurance

I am worth more dead than alive.
With my corpse my mom
couldn't pay off my debt
but she could get my casket
and a suit to wrap me up in
and still get herself something pretty
like some Macy's diamond earrings.

When my stepdad died
I got \$350 for "Covid relief."
His worth signed off
on a check.
Well, he's still dead
and my lungs still sputter and ache
and my mom will only get \$10K
if I get sick enough
to follow him down.

Dear Dad,

Happy Birthday!

I know it's been a while
since I've written you
a card. I forgot about
mail. But I hate to think
of the gaps in the years
growing wider. I know
a card can be a record.

I'm sad that any love
I've shown is gone. Do
you remember that I've
still cared about you
while away at school?

I haven't seen you
as much, which wasn't
a ton to begin with.

I know you're not alone
anymore, but I think
of the years you lived
by yourself and I am
as sad as I was then.

It's scary to think of you
leaving and coming home
with no one to greet you.

If you got into an accident
who would know?

Well that's done now,
but I guess maybe I hope
you wish that I was
around more too, even
though you seem pretty
glad us kids are finally
out of the house. It's okay.

I'm glad your life is
full without us.

Mercy Kill

Palm-sized to my smallness,
wriggling and leaking

on the hot dark pavement
in the cooling twilight,

the black beetle lies dying.
I see it from afar as it

bleeds contrasting white,
pus-like and repellent.

Pity overwhelms disgust
but only just, and guilt

rears up to surpass them both.
To look at the thing's

panic-pain and blanche at it
as though *I* were hurt.

I point it out to Dad in search
of an adult solution.

He finds Mom's phonebook.

Allerleirauh

Your mother left you misfortune—her head of gold
and a father bound to reward lovely as her. Just a girl,
you have no power against the whims of your king
but to give conditions. Demand a cloak of the skin
of every animal and the heavens woven in a dress,
tasks he must fail—but he doesn't. You have to get out.

You flee from hunting dogs you knew as pups, let out
to track your flight. You're weighted by grief and gold
but don't let it stop you. As disguise, you dress
in the pelts your father slaughtered for. Shirk the girl
you were for beast. In a tree hollow, muddy your skin
and complete the change. Here, you're found by a king.

As you've learned, you have no way to stop a king.
By your luck he shows pity. He takes you out
of the woods and the kingdom you know. Bask in
the safety but mourn everything else. The gold
morning sun doesn't warm you. You were a little girl
last night, now a runaway bride with filth for a dress.

You're made a servant, given a closet to sleep. All address
you as an animal, the reputation of your own making.
And beasts work. You remember what it is to be a girl
when the king holds a ball and you're given a night out.
Glimmering in your father's engagement gift, the gold
gown, revert to a princess, like putting on your own skin.

Dance with your new king until he asks whose kin
you are. Feel your heart skip a beat. Run away, undress
and make yourself an animal again. But remember gold
candlelight in eyes like a father's. You don't want a king
to rule your heart again, but you allow yourself to doubt.
Perhaps he won't make you a bride, just let you be a girl.

Make him soup and drop in your ring so he'll seek the girl
who cooked. But when summoned in your beast's skin,
see the lust in his eyes. You're a conquest. Make it out

with a lie but fall for it again next ball, next dress.
Remember your father when he was more than king.
Of course you're fooled. He binds your finger with gold.

There is no way out of being a girl for long
even when gold curls are covered in skins of beasts.
As he rips through your wedding dress, learn a king is always a king.

Drive

We are one foot apart the

Doors are locked the

Ground moves fast

Can we hold hands

Sorry no I know I don't

Wanna talk about this I'm

Like a baby I can't stay

Awake your food's smell

Is everywhere please stop

Yelling at me wait

Lemme play this song next

I'm not in the mood to talk

Right now it's so hot

I'm gonna puke my

Knee hurts can we stop

For coffee someone's

Behind us where else

Are we going it's fine

I'm having fun

The light's green now stop

Looking at me like that I'm sorry

I made you pull over I'm sorry

I made you cry listen

No it's okay. We can keep going

Yes I'm buckled in don't worry

I'm not going anywhere.

In the Eighth Grade You Wanted to Kill Me

How did you picture it?
You're not the type to just point a gun
and shoot off—
you're too passionate for that.
You'd go for something intimate.
Would you force a dagger into me?
Your hands so coated in my slick
blood you couldn't grip the shaft
and pull it out?
Maybe your fingers roamed
round my throat.
You might have pressed your weight
against mine—
limp, like the dead thing you were making me
or throbbing and thick like a blood-gorged leech.
I bet you sealed your lips to mine and took
the breath I never gave you.
You kissed me in.
I groped desperate hands
to get you off,
but you just kept going
as into your hot skin, breathless and urgent,
I mouthed one last
"I love you."
You never knew if I meant it.

Then I'm standing there turning

empty.

My legs are nothing but sticks.

My eyes are sprung open big

but they're only seeing

refracted light.

I could become anything,

even correct.

Come fix me.

I want to fill me with something

while my self goes for a walk.

Could you give me all your

good?

Wash out my crevices

or make me puke out my rot

all those fluids—bile, blood, and tears—

running out like

scared rabbits scurrying.

Fist up my shirt and

drag me anywhere.

Come on. I'll sleep in the front seat.

I'll turn up my neck at you.

All you've gotta do is

bite.

Vessel

Hollow-boned and breakable
I am full of stagnancy.
Sharp eyes notice how
I stand doll-like in
my keepers' shadows
held upright by expectation
and approach me at the
grocery store, ready to siphon off
their secrets into me.
I keep them locked tight
in the mire of other
wants and woes filling up
the spaces where a will
should have formed
and roll them in my memory
like jewels. Covetous and proud
of the only things I have,
the shining of another's
fullness, glittering through
the lightless caverns in me.

spot

they wanted a dog so i heeled.
when they asked
mom please get me a dog, did they hate
that she brought back a baby?
did they pat my head
to start it? or did i do it to myself
when they said "i wish i had a dog"
and i heard "get down on all fours"?
i thought they might want me
as a pet, but they didn't like
my game. they never taught me
to fetch or sit and stay.
(they didn't have to teach me to roll over.)
they only played along
when they learned a
starved mutt would do anything
for a scrap of offal and a "good dog."

Post-Teenage Angst

I stutter into mundanity and stretch at the seams. I am learning how to be real in this world, but I still inspire my HR director to tell me *that's a strange thing to say*. The kids my age like me now because it's cool to be kinda weird in college. I see them scorn the kids who are still too weird, even for college. My mom tells me stories that boil down to *it doesn't get better*. I always hoped different but knew as much. There's this furious light inside me skin's translucence can't hide. I'm making myself out of metal instead.

Apology

I didn't know when you leaned to me on the bus and I turned stone that it would be the last time someone wanted to kiss me. Or that someday I would want someone to want me like that, and every other way someone could want me, when I couldn't stand someone looking at me yet. Not that I was a late bloomer, I just couldn't even think about the hole of shame inside of me then, while now I beg someone to ravish it. All this is to say that I wish I hadn't turned away from your oddly wet lips but let your reaching hand pull me in from my nape. You wanted me to give up. Well, I do.