

# Appetitive Torque

Vanessa Baish  
Rin Johnson  
Martha Oatis  
Matthew Polzin

Curated by Loren Britton and Rocket Caleshu

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# Appetitive

Appetitive, adj.

ap·pe·ti·tive

'apə,tīdiv/ *adjective*

adjective: appetitive

1 characterized by a natural desire to satisfy bodily needs.

2 “the appetitive behavior of animals”

# Torque

tôrk/ *noun*

noun: torque; plural noun: torques

1 a twisting force that tends to cause rotation.

*verb*

verb: torque; 3rd person present: torques; past tense: torqued;

past participle: torqued; gerund or present  
participle: torquing

- 1 apply torque or a twisting force to an object.
- 2 “he gently torqued the hip joint”

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# Appetitive Torque

by Loren Britton  
and Rocket Caleshu

My love of the taste of blood, its sanguinary pleasures available to me only if I suck on the right part of a body hard enough: a form of desire, maybe even an aesthetic category, under which I want to locate myself. Like this, taste is embodied viscera, a locus of desire and invention. How do we identify what good (or bad) taste is? Does it taste good because it reminds us of something outside ourselves, something that exists in our accumulative memory? Does taste register in the body, an agent of desire, the accumulation of ceaseless experience?

Twisting forces of bodily desire make the images of patterned surfaces and submerged and emerged figures in Christina Quarles, Cheyenne Julian, and Gaby Collins-Fernandez's paintings and drawings in Appetitive Torque. From Gayatri Spivak's reminder of the importance of how to unlearn one's learning and to be aware of

what to unlearn from one's expertise, these works suggest image making as a possibility for undoing reality. In Cheyenne Julian's paintings, the plastic glow in the dark stickers from childhood ceiling have aged pink; now they decorate the fertile skies of flowers that smile back at you. Christina Quarles's work poses a constant transformation of pattern, figure, and ground where a ceramic hawaiian print mug can transfigure into a plastic picnic table cloth for bodies to melt through. In Gaby Collins-Fernandez's drawings, I'm reminded of how it felt when I leaned into my lover, velvet shirt rubbing the wrong way to change color, first hot red then cool blue. Submerging and fragmenting a relation to: archive, childhood, desire and body, the paintings in this show satisfy the palette through juicy slips of legs/ language & cigarettes.

Twisting forces of bodily desire mark the words of Vanessa Baish, Rin Johnson, Martha Oatis, and Matthew Polzin, contained herein. Matthew Polzin's characters seem motivated primarily by their *distaste* for one another: a protracted, banal yet provocative, workplace spat ends with one employee twisting the other's finger almost until it snaps and using a vending machine to barricade her in a bathroom. This is a drama of the everyday:



low-key, yet almost boiled over. Poets (myself included) make much of the Keatsian notion of negative capability; that is, as Keats himself put it, to be “capable of being in uncertainties;” to contemplate the world without trying to reconcile it. In this way, taste becomes a kind of negative capability: a projection forward into a space that can sustain the multiple and the uncertain. The poems of Rin Johnson ask a lot questions, and answer few: “How many U turns until I am going in the right direction?” or, is it really the same body that moves through a space twice? A mysterious plant becomes the companion to Martha Oatis’s elucidation of the phenomenological vitality of aliveness, an ally to Mystery: “My mouth and skull became the size of the field.” Vanessa Baish reminds us that sometimes devotion is all we need to transform the bitter into the sweet, or, the sweet was there all along. Each of these writers leave themselves exposed to the crosswinds of taste and all that it is made of: sense, aesthetic, sex, beauty, labor. The texts here are relevant to our questions of taste precisely because they dwell in uncertainty; each makes me ask, “Why do I hope for a poem to begin in delight and end in doubt?”

My love of taste is rooted in viscera, deep inward feelings rather than intellect.

11 January 2017  
by Vanessa Baish

The structures of feelings that open remind me that there is no imperative for shared taste—how does taste create structure? In the space of uncertainty proposed by the artists and writers in this show Appetitive Torque suggests embodied intellect as a starting point.

Loren Britton & Rocket Caleshu

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11 January 2017

Appetitive Torque

by Loren Britton and Rocket Caleshu

11 January 2017. Thai Summer Rolls (3) \$4.95. Fresh mixed vegetables wrapped in vermicelli noodle served with sweet chili sauce.  
Smooth sweet tang,  
the film of orange sauce

on the meaty middle  
of my tongue  
before

My eyes rest on a silent  
television in the upper corner of this restaurant dining room — on  
the screen four  
faces, mouths  
moving,  
captions in capitals  
are another notice of

bodies being removed  
from the places they have chosen to be,  
this time, by raids.

This new news already not commonplace, not  
knowable, not  
well, palatable.

In my mouth my heart in my  
thoughts in my mouth.

My tongue, of its own reflex –  
presses the thin sweet film to the  
roof of my mouth to the  
edges of my tongue  
and the sweetness brings my attention here

while the television goes on.  
Of the four of us seated at the table, one for

each moving mouth, each of us eating,  
I am the one who can read the screen.

*a sweet spice in the heart  
the devout were told  
sweetens all the bitterness that the body drinks*

and

*whoever chews spice must shut her mouth, so that the sweet breath and its virtue  
stay inside.*

However.

I stay as I am for a moment longer  
my mouth  
bright alive  
in my own pleasure.

all we are and are not  
(we do not apologize for any inconvenience.)  
by Rin Johnson

We have all been thinking that we are the same size as one another, this is because we are so used to seeing ourselves in one another that we do notice we are not each other. Why don't your clothes fit me?  
Why do I have to stoop down to hug you?

We will both be having the polenta. The ladies are drinking Bourbon. Where do you go when you are not with me? I will find you in the undermeath. We will bring the hotdog buns to the cookout. You will make the conversation and I will look at the breeze.

I will carry you to the car in a blanket. (I am sorry, this walk, the hotdog buns, coming home for the weekend, these are the only bailouts I can offer.)

**T has Eleven on her t-shirt and nobody can tell that it is Eleven. Eleven is a sinful number because you cannot count to it on your fingers. You must always remember the 10 that came before. Eleven is an exercise in not knowing. We are all so tired of counting to Eleven. E wrote on a journal: Sandra Bland is dead and someone is responsible. We are calling you in regards to the rights you have taken away. We have been emailing you about the rights you have taken away from us.**

**G asks what do you do when you're in an open relationship when you've both been dating other people but then you stop dating each other but sometimes you sleep together. This cycle could go on forever. Maybe one day you could date again. Does this mean that there are no ends and no beginnings? What does Lady Jaye think about this? She and I both know that Genesis is still with her. Just like the beginning it's a rib in your body. You can feel that it was missing and you can feel when it is as near as replaced. Are you the rib from my body? Am I the rib from yours? None of this answers G's question. Is this a cycle?**



If we go into the ground in a box and the maggots turn us into dirt.  
If the box is treated with formaldehyde, if we are treated with  
formaldehyde, will the dirt have formaldehyde? If we are vegetarian  
and our food comes from the dirt are we eating formaldehyde?

How often?

How can I?

Heaven help me.

Hail Mary.

How many herbs do I have to take so that I can drown out the drone  
of white supremacy in my body? (Not to mention the formaldehyde.)

How dangerous is it to drive at night without your lights on?

How many U turns until I am going in the right direction?

How many times will they try to make the smoke from this burning  
molehill into a mountain you can see from far away?

What isn't going on?

Hail Marvin.

I mean I

I

I

I have nothing to say to you except that I miss you and I want you to turn into dirt with me, I want to turn in to dirt beside you. I mean I don't want to turn into dirt just beside you, I want to turn into dirt beside the woman that I am in love with also. I mean I want to turn into dirt beside S and M. And also Q and G and L and R and J and S and M and S. I mean I want to turn into dirt beside all of you. I mean is that even allowed? What would my mother say? I hear the life expectancy for my generation is going to be lower than hers; so my mother will outlive me. I do not want to shame her. As I think about it, I doubt she will care about who is turning to dirt beside me, just that I am turning to dirt first. (It is comforting that I will turn to dirt first. Arrested development.)

Just  
Just  
Just put your hand on the back of my neck.  
Just  
Just lay down next to me.  
Just  
Just look at the snow on the mountains.

My entire family's name starts with K except for mine because I chose mine because the name my mother gave me was stupid. Kristina. According to google it means touched by an angel. 8 letters is too many especially for someone who could not say r until well after age 7. I could not go by Kris. I don't look like a boy. I mean now I look like a boy but then I did not look like a boy. I guess I have always looked like a boy for a girl. Kris is a boy's name. Kris Jenner is a woman. Kris Jenner's whole family's names also start with K. Except for the men. We have a lot in common, Kris Jenner and I.

Listen I am lost inside of you. Listen you are lost inside of me. Listen I am lost inside of M. Listen I cannot find my way out of J. Listen I am lost inside of Q. Why don't your clothes fit me?

We are wondering why those men have their hands against the wall. We are wondering why they have a line on their back. Who drew it? We are wondering how they came to be standing there. Why can't those men come inside?

A few days ago at the Hammer I saw a baby jacket with a Supreme patch on it and I almost bought it because there are never baby jackets with Supreme patches on them. I could raise children with you and approximately 3 others. I do want to have children, just not the way we have been told to have children. You can have them or J can have them or S can have them or we can find them, as somebody else who we do not know will have had them. If I had a daughter I would name her Noor, which means light. It is also a grammatical joke, I do not think that she would like it but I will like it. I hope we will like it in the same way that my mother likes the sound of my

name. When she says it, she can hear all of me, the various iterations of me. Each one needing one thing or another thing and each one receiving that one thing or another thing through some sort of chain all linked back to her. We are all becoming our mothers and not our mothers simultaneously. Noor is a good name because it sounds like a thing that is not: an adamant expression of nothing. It says neither or nor, Noor this thing. This is not a thing to be classified or justified, this is not a thing, Noor, nothing, neither, nothing.

Or.

According to G and the Internet there is currently a meeting of Octopuses (octopi is also correct) near the Great Barrier Reef. They are surely meeting about the sound level in the ocean. Z was telling me that the whales are confused because they cannot hear themselves over the drone of the ships and those navigation systems. Where will they go if we have them thrown off course? G says that the Octopuses are probably preparing for a rebellion.

**A beating is a parable.**

**A quotient is the result of division. For example, when dividing a nation by its own bigotry, the quotient is dead trans women of color. Where will we go now that they are all thrown off course?**

**These are just the pants that we are wearing today. Some day soon, someone will come along and say, these are the pants we are all wearing now. Rarely do we remember what happened to our previous pants, we send them to the landfill to be churmed and buried. Their chemicals seep into our water supply and then we drink them. I do like the chemicals inside of me. I would like it if you were all inside of me. I digress. What I mean is, if it is happening to us, it will happen to you too. Either we drink our pants or we send them to Africa to be washed by hand, hung on a line and sold in the street.**

Rarely are the things that we do as meaningful as we'd like them to be. When we throw something away we expect it to stay away. The bird did not shit on your head to bring you good luck. The bird shit on your head because birds have to shit. Your head is not important. We should all be so lucky to shit where we want.

The share economy is a front for capitalism.

Sage is a cleaning product.

Salt goes behind the shoulder.

My uncle has a sailboat.

Cross your legs when you sit.

Sit under the surface with me.

Move when they believe they have seen you.

Cover the camera on your computer.

Don't forget to silence your cell, we are about to enter the theater of war.

Try turning your program into a hat. You can keep your head warm during the blitz.

We are not here for your shortcomings. We are not here to corrupt your children. We are not coming for you. We want you to be happy. We are sorry you've been tricked in to believing industry is your father. We all have daddy issues. Have you heard of an anti-portrait? A sunset behind clouds is an anti-portrait of the sun. The sun will be setting and that sunset will be visible to those that know what the sun looks like. The clouds do not dawn upon them. For those that can only see the faintest notes of color across the sky, what you are seeing is an anti-portrait. The sun did not set for you.

You  
You  
You  
You  
You

We do not set for you.



**Not you.**

**I have been waiting for you to come back. Can we go now?**

**Why do we have any of this? Why don't your clothes fit me?**

**Why does it sometimes feel like the only reason why any of us have bothered to keep on living is because of our will to make things? In this example, I am sure I am being hyperbolic; I hope I am not being hyperbolic. The caps are melting. Sometimes at my most scared I wish I had bought a starter home. I know buying things isn't the answer. I have no idea what to do. We are sometimes people.**

**We all sign our emails with xx.**

**Y is only sometimes a vowel.**

**A zebra is black with white stripes.**

# Quiz Poem

by Rin Johnson

I took a quiz the other day on the internet.  
It explained I needed to eat more leafy  
green vegetables and stop drinking so  
much coffee and booze so that my period  
would finally go from dark wine sea red  
to bursting go fuck yourself tomato red.  
I feel dizzy all the time and I'm sure it's  
because I am always forgetting my iron  
pills and day dreaming about you. You are  
the problem. I am not the problem. I  
miss you but I just saw you. Where is the  
taste if you have taken the calories?  
Ugh. I'll never eat you again. This shaved  
snow tastes like silk and vaginas. Not  
your vagina because you are the problem.  
Anybody could have done that if they'd  
kept their eyes open. A dream deferred or  
worse, bettered. A blessing is getting a  
brain freeze in a heat wave I know this  
because I thought it. I also thought about  
telling you but I did not because I am  
stronger than yesterday and only had 1  
drink as of this afternoon and thusly I am  
definitely stronger than this woman on  
the L train who keeps getting pushed



around and looking surprised while all these other woman keep giving her sympathy eyes but nobody is bothering to tell her that she has to hold the pole and stand her fucking ground. Didn't you listen in Sunday school or during the election coverage – you can never trust anything men do or build and the sea always wants to be parted.

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Indigo  
by Martha Oatis

27

**I came upon a place in the woods, a cleared field past a thicket.**

**The difficult spaces made by those growths resonated with my nervous system like a puzzle and I became intent on navigating them.**

**To solve the disorganization they presented was to know the pleasure of walking.**

**The moment the thicket cleared into this field was confirmation of some new organization within myself.**

**At that moment, I saw the statue and walked toward it.**

Its frame was not human. Still it seemed to me a being.

The statue-being's body was composed of something like limestone, draped with a bright green moss.

Its arms were fixed, outstretched.

I was beckoned and kept approaching, saying *Hi aren't you beautiful.*

In the left palm I found a pile of dark blue powder.

I knew without question that this substance had been carefully awaiting this encounter.

I opened my mouth and placed it on my tongue.

My mouth and skull became the size of the field.

Two roads opened up between my ears, merging at my throat then descending to the center of my belly.

I looked up and saw that I was now seeing from inside myself, up through the stained glass ceiling of my skull.

I looked down and saw a shaft of light moving in and out of my belly button, which had become like an aperture.

My mouth had become a listening chamber and my insides a proscenium.

I knew that the substance was indigo and that indigo could unfold inside me like a film.

I sat in the grass for an unknown amount of time.

# The Chapter in Which Peggy Sorts Trash

by Matthew  
Polzin

Peggy's got to be okay with wearing lots of different hats. That's her boss Walczak's preferred mode for talking about it. Janitorial hats, Reverse Vending Machine hats, and the unwanted Sorter hat, which, out of all of them, is the dunce, and it so happens that Peggy's wearing that cap a lot.

A lot of residents come to the Recycling Center to try to pass off things that can't be recycled as things that can be recycled. A pizza box with an ossified slice in it cannot be recycled. Styrofoam takeout containers with half a meal stowed

inside cannot be recycled. Tissues and napkins cannot be recycled. Peggy has to say this to people, even though the Recycling Center spells out what items are recyclable and which aren't and how you're supposed to separate things out on these large signs all over the walls. These people don't pay attention, though. Their carelessness means somebody has to spend some of their shifts in the back watching all the stuff move slowly by on a conveyor belt, looking for their mistakes.

Peggy doesn't like sorting, it's mindless, a la *Modern Times*, and according to the Excel table her boss Walczak taped onto the staff bulletin board, delegating tasks while he was away at some wedding, Peggy had to sort every day this week. It's not even what she was hired to do. Her official title at the Recycling Center is Fork Lift operator, which entails operating a fork lift as you'd expect, loading and unloading recyclables into and out of the trailers, moving pallets and bins around the warehouse as needed, and also hand-lifting up to 70 pounds of compressed recyclables. Under her job description, though, is this particular line about how she has to be willing to perform any duty assigned by site leadership, aka Walczak. It's too vague of a line. Walczak could ask her to do anything totally irrelevant to the goings-on of the



Recycling Center and still she'd be contractually obligated to perform it, and he's a creep, so.

Not only are you removed from the floor and stuck back in the warehouse where there's not a wink of natural light or a sufficient breeze to clear the air of the incessant rotting smell that builds throughout the day, but sorting is this crapshoot. Maybe if the other sorter that day is D'anna you're fine. Sometimes it's not D'anna, though. It's Tina, like today, who happens to talk a lot apropos of nothing and feels totally okay subjecting Peggy to the wanderings of her small, dull mind, even if Peggy's given no indication that she's interested in the latest from Ira Glass.

The worst of it is that sorting means you're out of the action. These twentysomethings come carrying milk crates with empty bottles and aseptic cartons and spent yogurt containers, but obviously the primary reason they're there isn't to recycle the stuff, not really. You can feel it on the back of your neck, how ravenous everybody is on the floor. They think because they're at a Recycling Center everybody else must be as conscientious and ecologically stupendous as they are and so the sex must be good or something. It doesn't make sense, but certain grocery stores are the same way, like Mother Earth's Pantry. Suddenly

you're connecting with someone about dried mango, or what brand of granola you both happen to buy. It makes Peggy sick when she thinks about it, but also she participates.

Like at the moment, she was chatting with this brunette out on the floor, this girl who had the longest neck Peggy had ever seen. She was this giraffe and Peggy was talking her up. Clean denim jacket, not even faded. She had this pretty controlled looking rip on her khakis, too. This young fledgling punk, eager about what else life had to offer. Her haircut was only okay, though. The bangs sat in this way. Peggy and the girl were leaning against the plastics bin chatting and the girl tossed water bottles into the bin and they discussed that. It was conversation. The girl got all abstract. "Humans aren't even supposed to drink water," she said, but it didn't matter what she said. When this girl spoke what she really was doing was offering her neck up to be consumed. She could say anything and you wanted to be a vampire or something looking at her. One scrap is all Peggy needed to feel motivated in seduction. This girl had a neck.

The men on the job are way worse, though, like Creamer, who almost crosses a line. Peggy can't stand watching him

hit on the ladies. Ever since Creamer got promoted to Recycling Specialist, he didn't have to sort in the back like Peggy. The men rose to the top at Center like dead fish in a tank and the women flatlined at the bottom, they were crabs or something. Walczak was that sick deal of a boss. Sometimes he forgot Peggy was a Fork Lift operator and would come flailing his arms, yelling, "Get off of there, you have no right to be in there," even though the words "fork" and "lift" were in her job title and she'd been certificated and even trained by Walczak himself. That was months ago, though, and he must've forgotten. She had this suspicion that Creamer was feeding Walczak lies about her: she was inept, she was shitty with the fork lift, crap like that. Until Creamer's deceitful version of her ousted Walczak's memory of what Peggy could actually do.

"I'll call you sometime," Peggy said, touching the girl's arm. The girl's name was Roxanne or something too much like that, Peggy was afraid to ask again. She'd spotted Creamer standing on a wooden pallet, and so she thought it was best to disappear into the back. Ever since Walczak's departure for that wedding, Creamer was filling the power vacuum, hulking out with a whistle and standing on that pallet, which he dragged to the floor's center.

Obviously if you need a pallet to muster the illusion of authority, you don't have it.

One nice thing about the conveyor belt setup is that if Peggy's with D'anna or anybody but Tina really, the monotony of cardboards or thermoplastics or aseptic flowing right past her is sort of meditative, and the belt hums in this way that's soothing, all of which lends itself to napping, or daydreaming. She can dissolve from the warehouse and project herself back into bed and nod off. But if you're with Tina, she'll report you. The other okay thing is that sometimes things get recycled that are actually worth salvaging, like amidst the broken stereos might be a Sony player that's adequate. Maybe floating by there's some dinky plastic Mickey Mouse watch that's got real kitsch value and could get you some lettuce on eBay. Salvaging stuff from the stream is how Walczak wound up with his prize possession, actually, the one that'd apparently gone missing.

Liver Lips of the Country Bear Jamboree. It was a pretty big deal. There were only so many of those animatronics made. They age out like every five years or so. This one was a dump but Walczak loved it. Patches of fur were missing from its face, like it had mange or something, but worse than mange. It only one had

eye. Literally there was a spring coming out of its other socket. Walczak planted it in a seat across from his desk in his office like it was this person, and whenever Peggy was called into the guy's office to discuss the state of non-ferrous metals at the Recycling Center or whatever Walczak wanted to talk about, it never made any sense, the bear was right there, hunched over in that mauve armchair like the thing was trying to listen but couldn't because it was a robot. Really the bear was just sad to Peggy. The fate of animatronics in this country, it represented all that sadness.

It'd been on the Disney World stage. That's like the Grand Ole Opry for the Country Bears. You sing there and it's the peak of your career and then there's no where to go but down. The bear was in the Orlando Jamboree from 1983–1989 but then it got demoted to Anaheim and then sent to Paris for an appearance in a spinoff. That didn't last too long, and then the bear was retired. You'd think it'd be some nice easy life after all those years, a good museum somewhere or some private collection for a Country Bear, but animatronics just get dumped anywhere at the end of their run. This one had somehow wound up in the metals bin with the rest of the recyclables destined for the compactor, until someone pulled it off the conveyor belt and

Walczak called dibs and put it in his office, where it'd remained until a few days ago.

Her boss took time off work fairly often, but there wasn't any precedent of him taking the bear with him, which meant it was strange, that the bear would suddenly without warning vanish from Walczak's office while he was gone for his sister's wedding. The jokes were all at Walczak's expense: he can't go anywhere without his teddy, what a baby! Brought the bear to the wedding as a date, such a loser! D'anna told the joke about the wedding reception in this way that killed Peggy, and it went like this: Walczak and Liver Lips are sitting at a table with close family members, and the bear's wearing this dumpy, stained-to-shit Seersucker suit, it's just awful, he's got no taste. Worse than that, he's an animatronic bear. Maybe it was funny only because of how D'anna said it.

In reality, everybody assumed the bear was stolen. Which is what Tina was blabbering about as she and Peggy sorted.

"I'm just telling you what I know, but I didn't have a thing to do with it," Tina said. "What would I need with a Country Bear? Todd's been eyeing it for forever. He's a junkie, Peggy. And you know what junkies do? They steal things and break them down and sell the parts, they do that

with cars all the time, and I wouldn't put it past him to do the same with that poor bear. Of course, a fool and his money are soon parted, don't forget that."

Peggy hated Tina, obviously, but she nodded, as if they'd arrived at some agreed upon understanding, when they had, in fact, not.

Tina continued: "And Todd's always walking out on me mid-sentence, too. I tried to confront him about it today, about the bear, I mean, and he just walked right on away. He's always doing that, and it's mean, Peggy. It just gets beside me, the conceit in that man. And he's the only person with keys to the office, there's that, too."

Her brain was like a crummy clothing sale. She just talked and talked and talked, all the products were marked down but even then the clothes weren't a bargain because they were trash. Folks at the Center are pretty good at tuning her out, but sometimes Peggy will hear D'anna or even herself saying something days later and realize: that's what Tina had said. You didn't even know it was happening as she spoke, but the sheer quantity of words had some kind of subliminal effect on you, and then you're walking around talking like her, which was bad.

"Creamer's got keys," Peggy said.

Tina took her gum out and crushed it into side of the conveyor belt. “What’s Creamer got to do with a Country Bear? You think he took it? I guess he fucked a dog once. So he’s got a checkered past. You think that’s enough to peg Creamer, but I don’t. Why would Creamer turn on Walczak like that? The guy’s got a soft spot for Creamer and that bear and nobody else, he’s hard the rest of the way through, Peggy.”

“I assure you, Todd didn’t have a thing to do with it,” Peggy said to Tina, removing a DVD case from the cardboard flow.

“And how would you know?” Tina asked.

“Jesus, are you Nancy Drew or something?”

Tina’s face scrunched up into a smile. “You didn’t have anything to do with the bear going missing, did you?”

Peggy kicked her stool aside. “You’re such a ham, Tina. And if you have to ask, why are you talking so much shit like you already know?”

Recycling depressed Peggy. She had this fear that it all just went into the incinerator anyway, this grand ruse.

She decided her blood sugar must be low. Usually she didn’t snap at Tina like that. Back at the warehouse’s front,



the air had an edge of decay and bodies and spilled beer. The pheromones of spring. It'd emptied out a bit. There were older lesbians loitering by the metals bin, talking. There were a couple Juggalos feeding two-liter Faygo bottles into the reverse vending machine as you'd expect. Creamer was occupied, talking to some girl. Those scrawny white arms and his receding hair. Soon his forehead was just going to extend all the way back to his neck and then it'd be over. I'm just an egg! More than funny it was sickening, Peggy thought, as she walked along the outer perimeter of the bins. These girls hung around him as if they were interested and as if he was something that could hold that interest. Maybe it was the uniform. Peggy wasn't sure but she wondered if it was true.

"It's for that reason I don't recycle cardboard, or any paper products," she could hear Creamer saying, all chummy. It was too much to watch. The girl was twirling the strings of his work apron. "Doesn't it strike you as odd that we recycle something that comes from trees? Trees are a renewable resource, and still we're recycling loads of paper. Even though in the process we're using a whole lotta nonrenewable resources, like a liter of gasoline a page." And she was just bobbing her

head right along, so keen on being enlightened. “Depleting one thing that’s finite to recycle something that could be infinite, does that make a wink of sense to you?” Then Creamer stopped, having spotted Peggy. She was walking briskly and would not stop. “I gotta talk to you!”

“No time,” she said. “Gotta piss, bad. And look, somebody’s got a dog in here. Aren’t you on watch?”

He swung his head around. There it was: some scummy drifter types squatting idly on the concrete floor near the entrance with this brindled mutt. Its owners were chowing down, eating out of takeout containers. Sometimes people threw the styrofoam boxes away without thinking to check to see if there was still half a meal inside. More power to the crusts for cleaning up.

“I already said no dogs!” He brought the whistle to his mouth. “Get that pooch outta here!”

The kids looked at their dog. How might we sever our relation temporarily and act the part of strangers, our friend?

“You mean that dog?” one of them said.

“Oh, please, the leash is in your hand, I see it,” Creamer hollered.

Really, since when weren’t dogs allowed? It just came to Peggy head. But

poor thing. Tail lowered, its head bowed. The dog curled up on the floor. Disowned over rice noodles. Rough. Peggy couldn't stay and watch. Onward to the vending machine. She turned down the hallway by the warehouse's front.

Of course she knew Creamer'd stolen the bear. She had evidence that he did it, too. D'anna had sent her the video. For like months Creamer had been promoting a show at his compound. It was a big deal, actually. Suicide Baby hadn't played the Sin Bin in years. The turnout was going to be huge, everybody was excited, no one could believe Creamer'd booked Suicide Baby. Peninsulas have three sides of water and they aren't on the way to anything and so it's rare for a touring punk band to drive up the Third Coast for the hell of it and play for a bunch of provincial cornfed skinheads at some former body shop. Indianapolis, Cleveland, and Columbus, those cities got music that way, but not a peninsula.

The turnout was, as expected, huge. Because no one knew the band wasn't coming, except for Creamer. Car problems, a collision on the freeway, no one died. The video D'anna had texted her was just the usual sub-par blurry footage of a show like any other and the backs of people's heads. But then it got good. You could hear Creamer talking into the microphone.

“And from the deepest most fucked up parts of the South, we got a special treat for you tonight, kids, yes indeed, very special! It warms my heart to introduce a dear friend of mine, a homebody who brings home to wherever it is he is, captivating tots, tykes, and adults alike with that famous growl, tantalizing audiences as far and wide as cities like Paris and Athens,” and then Creamer paused, grinning. “Kentucky and Georgia that is!” There Liver Lips was under a spotlight, plugged into the wall. Some revivals are better not made, though. Why did Creamer think throwing a country-singing mechanical bear onto the stage to replace the headlining legendary West Coast metal band was anything but some sick kind of sacrifice? Though the robotic bear strummed on his little guitar the best he could and blinked his long-eyelashes all pretty-like, he’d aged. He was made of metal and it’d rusted and there was seemingly some electrical damage, too. The bear didn’t even get through a whole song. He couldn’t very well synch his lips to anything but the one song he knew, and it wasn’t Suicidal Baby, that’s for sure. “That bear’s drunk!” The first beer can hit Liver Lips right in the face, the second was glass and it exploded against the wall behind him. The video cut out as a whole bunch of shirtless skinheads rushed the stage.

So Creamer'd stolen the bear for a show, so he'd meant to return it. So Peggy had gotten drunk one night with her housemates and they'd gone over to his compound and stolen it. You can't return what you've lost, and soon as Walczak saw that video and no bear, Creamer was out. Maybe she hadn't needed to steal it. Maybe the video would've sufficed. She didn't really care, she thought, stepping over a bucket and a tarp somebody'd left out to catch a leak.

She was finally at the vending machine. It was an old school one with a woodpaneled trim, and took only dollars and coins. Twix, and Mars Bars. Kettle Chips, Fritos, and Cheetos. A lot of junk, but then there were the Snickers bars. It never made sense to Peggy why the machine needed to be stocked with anything but Snickers. That's all she ever needed. She started fishing through her pockets for some quarters. For the life of her, if there wasn't three. . .

"Where were you two nights ago," said Creamer.

Which cut to her bones. Peggy jumped and in doing so hit the wrong button to complete her selection: she'd tapped an 8 instead of a 6, which meant Twix. "So you're following me around?" He was standing beneath a sputter-

ing fluorescent light, flickering in and out of visibility. If only he'd disappear for good. "Two nights ago was Thursday," he said, kicking off from the wall.

Peggy pointed at him. "Don't come any closer."

"Me?" Creamer said, looking around. "I'm just going to the bathroom. You're trying to keep me from tinkling? That's a weird thing to do, Peggy. I'd hate for you to have that on your conscious, making me tinkle in front of you on this carpet. That what you want?"

She chewed her Twix silently, watching him. Really, more than Creamer blocking her exit, she was contemplating how this Twix bar, though the caramel filling would undoubtedly satisfy her sugar needs, just wasn't what she wanted. Twix bars have gluten and Snickers bars don't. Peggy's not gluten-intolerant, she'll eat a cake if you set it down in front of her, but it's the principle of the matter. One sweet treat can't stand in for another. And what good is living in a capitalist society if you can't put money into a machine and get what you want: a peanut crunch at the heart of chewy caramel, not this esteemed cracker.

"Creamer," she said, very serious all of a sudden. "You owe me three quarters so I can get a Snickers bar."

“I do have some quarters. In fact, I got all the quarters in the world,” and he started tapping the front of his Carhartts, which jangled. “Right here in my pocket. Maybe you can help me yank them out, har har har. But first, I’m curious. What’s somebody like you do for fun on Thursday nights? If you don’t mind my asking.”

Peggy finished her bite. “You mean what I was doing this last Thursday? I don’t know.” She started surveying the soft locations of that man for a quick jail-break if need be: through his pressure points, a diagonal hack right at the inside of his knee, or pressing on his jugular and popping his head like he was a big, dumb tick. “If you really want to know, I was a little tired. Didn’t do much of anything, actually, just hung on the porch with the usual suspects,” and on she went, starting to amble both in words and towards him, waving the second of the Twix set a little as she spoke, but casually, non-threateningly.

“Hold on there, horsey,” Creamer said, putting his arm out.

“No, you get out of my way,” she yelled, shoving him aside, but the guy had prodigious reflexes. Grabbed her hand, and then twisted it. “Let me go, Creamer,” she blazed out, bent over in tremendous agony. “I’ll have you written up for this!

You're trying to intimidate me, interfering with my freedom to move with ease, and as I please, around slovenly figures up to no good, like you—!"

"Don't talk like that," he said, bending her pinky nearly all the way to the back of her hand, which caused unruly pain to shoot up her wrist. "This is me doing self defense, Peggy, you were trying to hit me, and you'd have hit me if I didn't do this. Now tell me what did you do with the bear!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she yelled, her features squeezed into a fist. Our own bodies are so easily used against us. That pinky, she didn't want it any longer! Take it! Let go of my hand!

He was eyeing her all wild-like, set on torturing her, driving his unclipped nails into her pinky, too. "I know you got the bear Peggy! I got something real pretty of yours too, and it ain't gonna be delivered back, not until I get that bear! And maybe even then I'll send it back in pieces!"

Of all the cheap moves, going for the pinky was the lowest, the scummiest. Straining to accept sensory input other than the pain that was tearing at her hand, Peggy realized, if she dropped the Twix bar from her other hand. . .

Why hadn't she thought of that? She grabbed his nose.



“Who’s honking now, asshole? How’s it on your knees? You like it, yeah, I know, you butt-muncher.” She shoved his face away with the palm of her hand and planted a single Doc Marten on his chest for the KO. By then they were both laughing. Seething, but laughing. Deep down Peggy had a soft spot for Creamer. They spoke the same language.

“See you,” she said, spitting on him. But she’d turned her back when she shouldn’t have. He grabbed her ankle, and then her wrist.

He dragged her like that into the single-stall of the men’s bathroom, where he left her. He turned off the light, guffawed, and shut the door. When Peggy finally did get her bearings, and found the stall door and pushed her way into the absolutely pitch-dark bathroom proper, it was no good. Because in front of the bathroom door, which swung out into the hallway, was a large, solid thing. So the door would not open. It could not move. The vending machine would not allow it.

## Biographies

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# Appetitive Torque

Vanessa Baish  
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Christina Quarles