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Word Association Exercise

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Cover Page Footnote

*This was created during the workshop as a writing exercise. The prompt for this exercise: to write a short form piece with the words eating, disrupter, plaything, derelict, and eyetooth

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Katie Carithers

They lived in a nice house, but it was too nice, like an ornament that you feel would shatter if you dropped it. None of the four of them were ever comfortable there, eating dinner at the huge oaken table with the big kids and Mom and Dad. They preferred to slip out once the glasses started clinking and the laughter got loud, when no one was paying attention. They would run into the field in the back, bare feet silently streaking through the long grass. They would run until they got to the shed.

With steel walls and a falling-down roof, the shed was derelict but also strangely musical. When you banged a stick against it, it rang. The four of them would run around the edges of the small enclosure for hours, listening to the scrape of wood on metal and yelling at the top of their lungs, being the disruptors they were never allowed to be when they were in the house.

Once they got tired of this game, they would slip and slide down the hill to the river, where the roar of rushing water was so loud it made their heads hurt. They had been well trained to stay away from the edge and always went to the same spot: a patch of dirt behind a massive stone that helped block the wave of sound. There they would entertain themselves with various playthings that had already been brought, each with a story too long to be told. A deflated soccer ball, a broken watch, a long white feather, a scratched black stone. All of them ravaged by love.

They were indistinguishable in almost every way, the four of them. Except in which toy they chose at the river. Carl picked the soccer ball. Allen the watch. Haley the feather. And Cadence the stone. Carl would run along the tree line with the soccer ball, furiously kicking it into the bushes even though that's how it became deflated in the first place. Allen would walk a few yards away from the others, fiddling with the watch even though he was years away from even beginning to understand how it worked. Haley would stay by their spot, drawing slow circles in the dirt with the feather. And Cadence would walk to a spot upstream where the water pooled and slowed and calmed, and she could submerge the stone in the river and watch the way it glistened when it was wet.

The four of them lived in a part of the country where people called their incisors eyeteeth, one of those quirks of speech that didn't make sense anywhere else in the world. Their mother liked to say that she would give an eyetooth for another shot at the council position, she would give an eyetooth for another mimosa, things like that. It was a quirk of speech that Cadence hated, but that fell into her vocabulary anyhow, somewhere along the way.

Carl and Allen were twins but didn't act like it; Cadence and Haley weren't twins but acted like it too much. Haley often came over to the pool where Cadence was running her thumb over the stone, to ask if she could hold it. Cadence always said no. But years later, she would give a stone, and eyetooth, a feather, and all the broken watches and deflated soccer balls in the world to be able to answer that question one more time.

Logan Thrasher Collins

The Feral Factory is a glutton, eating the city at night while all the people sleep. It gobbles down parked cars and musty streetlamps and houses and potted plants. The Feral Factory might appear derelict during the daytime, but when the sun goes down, it opens its garage to reveal a massive incinerator filled with ghoulish green fire, it unfolds its gangly pipes and staggers to its feet, lurching into action. The Feral Factory's smokestacks start to pump out thick black smoke as it devours an office building and the passed-out drunkard laying on the fire escape. It moves on to the residential district, grabbing houses in its robot mandibles and stuffing them past its crooked iron eyeteeth, into its furnace. To avoid being caught, The Feral Factory always waits until you are asleep before it eats you.

Tommy Hart

"I am the eggman," John said, in slow motion, with a declarative an and a long e on the eggman.

"I am going to eat your eggs, then," said Tim. No fluctuation in speech. He was ready.

"Eggs won't be all you eating," John replied, this time yelling all for ten seconds before finishing his sentence.

"What else will I be eating?" Tim asked.

"My dust!" John screamed, and as he did so, Eyetooth walked over, eyeing him carefully with his one good eye. His other eye hid behind an eyepatch.

Eyetooth, the judge, was a serious looking man. He wore a sportscoat and nice pants and also leather shoes that resisted the dust billowing around us. Maybe his eyepatch scared it away.

He looked each competitor in the eye, one by one. It was slightly unnerving to watch his one good eye slowly glance between John's two.

"Now, gentleman, I want a nice, clean race. No one needs to die today; you both know how to fly safe and fast. There'll always be another race. Won't be another life."

"I will give three commands," he went on, "Racers start your engines, Racers to the mark, and then to start the race I'll give a single fire of my pistol. Do you each understand?"

John and Tim both gave him a nod.

"Good," he said. He took a few steps back from the bikes.

"Racers start your engines!" Eyetooth shouted - at this moment a roar came from both of the bikes as their engines came alive. It was hard to tell whose was louder but I think it was Tims.

"Racers to the mark!" Each bike suddenly lifted off into the air; the racers having turned off the disrupters which kept them ground-born. John wobbled a bit uneasily as he took flight, but after a few seconds he stabilized himself. He looked my way. I gave him a thumbs up, even though I thought he was going to lose. He didn't know that.

Those last few moments before eyetooth fired his gun were moments of tension, suspense. My heart was beating, even though I was pretty sure John was going to lose. I screamed "Go John!"

Bam! The gun fired. Tim sped away from the starting line, and it seemed for a moment that John was going to follow him. His bike lurched forward and then stopped, casting him off like its plaything. He fell forward through the air as his bike did the same, falling with a crash.

“John are you okay?” I shouted, running over.

“Yeah! I think I did pretty well. That derelict piece of junk got me farther than I thought it would!”

Madeleine Waters

Sweat runs down her brow. She’s no engineer—they picked her for her stealth, among other, more specialized skills—so she flicks the switch on the radio disruption device like she was shown half an hour before the mission started and just hopes for the best. It’s not imperative that the device work, but it makes her life a lot easier if the target can’t radio for help.

She leaves the device behind (right above the ship’s communication post if she memorized the plans right—and she always does) and continues slithering through the vent that will take her from the cargo room where she was stowed away to the bunkroom of the captain himself.

Her internal clock isn’t as dependable as her sense of direction, and she really doesn’t know how long she’s been in the hold. It could easily be early enough that she’d find the captain awake still, eating or reading or (she thinks with a grim and vicious pleasure) fucking. It would almost be fun to burst in on the bastard like that, but she’s a professional. Her targets aren’t playthings.

The bunkroom is dark, but she can’t hear any breathing. She settles in to wait, knowing patience is a skill that is as valuable to her as her discretion. The vent is not comfortable in the least, but anywhere is better to her than the derelict old shack she grew up in, and the rocking of the ship is soothing in its way, though she’s never been on a boat before and she’s a little worried about the unknown in the event of a confrontation. Any variable is a risk, a chance for things to get messy, and she prides herself on perfect execution. Normally she wouldn’t take a mission like this, her reputation being such that she could afford to be a little choosy, but this wasn’t a normal mission.

The ship is quiet. *Where’s your crew, you bastard? You can’t have gotten to them all. Not like you did Lacy. Can’t sail a ship with corpses.*

Her mental bravado falters. An image of the captain, grinning manically with dark liquid dripping from his golden eyetooth. Her eyes fly open. She screams.