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Petrichor

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Petrichor

Calm quiet streets, dark clouded skies, and the cold smell of water hanging in the air; this is petrichor: the scent of distant rain. A terribly romantic word, and one of my personal favorites. The Oxford English Dictionary defines petrichor as, “a pleasant, distinct smell frequently accompanying the first rain after a long period of warm, dry weather in certain regions.” I define it as home. Petrichor: the smell wafting through my window on October afternoons after school. Petrichor: the word my best friend loves so dearly that we wrote a poem about it together. Petrichor: the memory of standing next to my grandmother on her porch, watching the rain fall as we sipped cups of tea. That is my home—that is my petrichor. And I must clarify, I don’t simply mean “the smell of rain”; no, I mean *petrichor*. I *mean* the distant smell of rain; the kind that falls in the early mornings or late afternoons; the kind that hangs like a mist over northwestern pine forests; the kind you stand by an open window and sip a warm drink with. Petrichor has an entirely unique collection of connotations, separating it from being the smell of rain alone. It would be the same point as the instance of sirens versus mermaids; sure, they’re both most commonly denoted as half-fish people who sing to sailors, but most would much rather have a run-in with a mermaid than with a siren. Not myself, but most.

I have always been, in the immortal words of my aforementioned best friend, a sentimental little SOB, supported only by my mindset that home is not always a place. Home can be a person; it can be a memory. It can be the sound of a guitar with one loose string, the smell of apple cider and chowder, or even be sitting on the couch next to your best friend, playing Super Smash Bros. And why is that? Shouldn’t home be a place, somewhere you live? After all, we do say, “I’m going home,” or “actually, I’m staying at home today.” Are these phrases really nothing more than reflex? Well no, not for everyone at

least. Home is where the heart is, after all, and for some people their hearts lay inside a physical structure in which they live. For others, however, their hearts lay with other people in other places. Their hearts lay in a dreamy past, in what was a better time, or in a place other than the structure they live in.

Home is an idea, not a place, though the idea can, and often is, associated with a place. Home is a feeling of belonging, of being where you're meant to be, and that can be found in anyone, anything, or anywhere. For myself, petrichor is my home. It's a scent that wraps itself around my mind, mingling with the memory of tea or coffee, decaying leaves, and the smell of my grandmother's hand cream which I can only describe as warm. The same hand cream my own mother now uses. Petrichor is the link I share with my best friend, the word they love enough to share with me, and the word I now hold onto as a gift from them. If you ask my synesthesia, it's a word that is blue, gray, and black, swirling together like a stormy sea—gray waves crashing against rocky shores on a cloudy day, mist spraying all the way up the face of the cliff toward the pine forest overlooking the water. An absolutely beautiful word to speak and see.

That's something about words people never seem to consider; how they look. Is the word beautiful and pleasing to see? Do the images and sensations that latch onto it create a masterpiece? Is it the kind of word that only looks pretty in Times New Roman, or will Comic Sans do? Is it a pink, green, or blue word, or more of a gamboge? Now this adds an entirely new aspect of whether or not words work well when placed together; a green word and a blue word may *look* rather dashing together, but that green word belongs with a bright pink word. The words on the page become an amalgamation of complementary colors that are paragraphs apart, and gentle ombrés forming a sentence. And regardless of the words' arrangement, every page holds a rainbow of colors and memories. Perhaps it's a bit of an English major thing to do, to romanticize a word and give it an appearance, but if I'm meant to be staring at hundreds of pages of words every week...well, I might at least make it pretty.

Petrichor is my home. It is my grandmother, my best friend, my favorite smells, and all my favorite sights and feelings. It's a word that incites a mixture of immense joy and great calm within me. It feels pleasing when rolling off the tongue. I never need to feel like I am lost or far from home, because petrichor follows me wherever my feet may land; all I need to do is wait for a bit of rain. And when a dark cloud holds promise and comfort, I find I have no need to hold my breath and plead for sunny days. When you can find home in the storm, riding it out doesn't seem so bad. When you can find home in a feeling, there will always be a place where you belong.