**A Study in Water**

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# a pleasant smell that frequently accompanies the first rain after a long period of warm, dry weather

Petrichor gives senseless meaning

To something that

Can only be described

In the present

And a few seconds of future

Like a kiss and the aftermath

# Precipitation

An unburdened foundation of silence. This initial dusting. A caress of white, crystalline water. In reverence, birds hesitate to announce the sunrise. Like an ice-crusted pond, stillness could thin at any moment. Night ices what the sun loosened, preserving the routines of squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, and deer in the crisping layers. The snow seeps into the ground before its time. Coagulated mud launches the world into chaos. Into a state the birds talk freely in.

# Condensation

Fog wafts off the river. Uncertainty in the density. Taillights are predators’ eyes. Road markings swallowed whole. An eagle, his nest above the snaking tendrils, surveys the ground, waiting for a break. For mouse.

Before sunrise, if the temperature drops and the air carries enough moisture, the fog will freeze on the trees. Chrome-plated and foreign. Each a subversion of its former self.

# Snowmelt Runoff

Fields and hills ease out of snow’s caress. Spring, having waited long enough, forces winter back into the earth. Creeks, birds, squirrels, deer, children, all released. Winter’s skin filters through horizons of topsoil, shale, and limestone. Groundwater replenished and abundant. Assaulted by car tires, plows, and chemicals, grey slush joins the morning commute.

Under the sidewalk, culverts roar with exiled water, rushing to be cleansed. City water, like its consumers, leaves for a refreshing break in the country. Surging to a rural filtration plant, it stagnates and becomes pure again.

# Freshwater

Dehydrated unto death, sparse meadows birth nothing but tinder. Trees shed leaves, forsake their fruit, and divert precious resources in hope of water. Roots tunnel through crumbling soil. Rain fails and the water table recedes further. Scorched and leafless, saplings perish. The first drizzle will not save them.

# Surface Runoff

Rainbows swirl in parking lot oil slicks. Plumes of exhaust settle in asphalt rifts. Cascades of industrial waste sludge into ditches. Sewage and wastewater surge through overflowing conduits. Guardrails do not prevent inadvertent tributaries. Plastic bags, styrofoam cups, glass bottles, beer cans, and cigarette butts snare fish in clogged waterways.

Field irrigation feeds rivulets of nitrate into swollen rivers. Clouds of oil, sediment, and pesticide roil under the surface. Pollutants glide over gills and circulate within fish. Until gases bubble and suffocate. Until bloated fish drift on the surface. Until an eagle plucks a diseased fish from the dying river. Until the floodwaters recede, and plows cleave the damp soil in preparation.

# Infiltration

Water invests in the earth, depositing impurities as it sifts through topsoil, shale, and limestone. Just as the soil churns leaves and animals into itself, the earth decays nitrates, oils, and pesticides. Releasing carbon and water, toxins supplement the needs of trees and bacterium. Restoration does not come in the lives of birds, squirrels, deer, or children, but in the tectonic movement of creeks, mountains, and coastlines.

# Oceans

Green at a depth of seventy feet, steel’s moss flowers off the hull. Air bubbles dance on ceilings like mercury from a broken thermometer. Lionfish invade the cavernous vessel. Eels nestle along its impacted waterline. Sea cucumbers slink across the deck. Shrimp scrape algae from the anchor. Corals pilot the ship’s integration to the bleached sea floor.

# Evaporation

Midday rains come with the hope of a cooler afternoon. Sweat soon becomes indistinguishable from the air.

# Cycle

A cyclonic wall hurls itself over the warming Atlantic. Clouds boil as the storm slugs onto land. Brackish surges push estuaries inland and sculpt new coastlines. Groundwater arches upward and drags the floodplain under. The water waits. For rivers to drain excess. For the sun to form clouds. For sediment to rest. For roots to drink. For life to continue.

# Atmosphere

Lines of luminescent greens, blues, and purples unfurl in the polar sky. Meteors burn and shed into shooting tails. Ozone absorbs unseen sunlight, allowing all that is visible to warm oceans, mountains, rivers, and grass.

Viscous thunderheads obscure the boundary between earth and sky. Claps and flashes demand attention, but it is the scent, stolen by the ground, that instills longing.