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PATIENCE
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patience

At 9 he planted a clutch of seed blooms, carefully observed their daily frenzy.

At 22 he began documenting the story of the river which ran behind his house, down from the foothills of a nearby mountain and on to the distant ocean. It told him everything he asked of it, and more, eagerly and without pause, until the winter months, when it finally withdrew, spent and drymouthed, to the mountains to sleep.

It was then that he would write down all that he'd heard, in long cursive script that meandered across the page. He had time; he was alone, and the fire was well-fed with wood from the surrounding forests, whose tale he also recorded, when he was 30.

At 46 he started a biography of the wind, who'd often peaked over his shoulder while he worked by the water's edge; not until he was 54 did he catch her often enough to probe and grasp her deeper impulses.

By the time he turned 63 he was ready to begin his memoirs. It was of course going to be his most difficult work. People lived so fiercely, he remarked once, often as if they could cease to be at any moment, and at other times, as if they were going to be around forever.

No one knows what happened to the final manuscript. Critics who had seen his work in progress described it as a chronicle of history through the eyes of the forgotten. By now he had many imitators as well as detractors, many of whom were once admirers who gave up waiting for him to complete each work.

Years after his death at the age of 110, someone at long last recognised his true magnum opus: a carefully pruned pattern of ash, dew, footsteps and flowering trees in the shape of a single haiku, imprinted on the land where he used to live, and visible only from the heavens.

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