

KOKORO



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KOKORO

Wandering Through a Photographic Life

*An Image Journal
with Commentary, Meditation, Philosophy,
and Unanswered Questions*

J Brooks Jensen

Brooks Jensen



Perhaps Lafcadio Hearn will not protest too much if I paraphrase (almost word for word) from *Kokoro*, his 1895 book of Japanese life. He explains this important Japanese term far better than I ever could:



“The entries comprising this volume treat of the inner rather than the outer life, — for which reason they have been grouped under the title *Kokoro* (heart). Written with the above character, this word signifies also *mind*, in the emotional sense; *spirit*; *courage*; *resolve*; *sentiment*; *affection*; and *inner meaning*, — just as we say in English, ‘the heart of things.’”



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WAITING UNDER A WINTER MOON



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Now that the sun has set beyond
the western range,

Valley after valley is shadowy and dim.

And now through pine trees come the
moon and the chill of the evening,

And my ears feel pure with the sound
of wind and water.

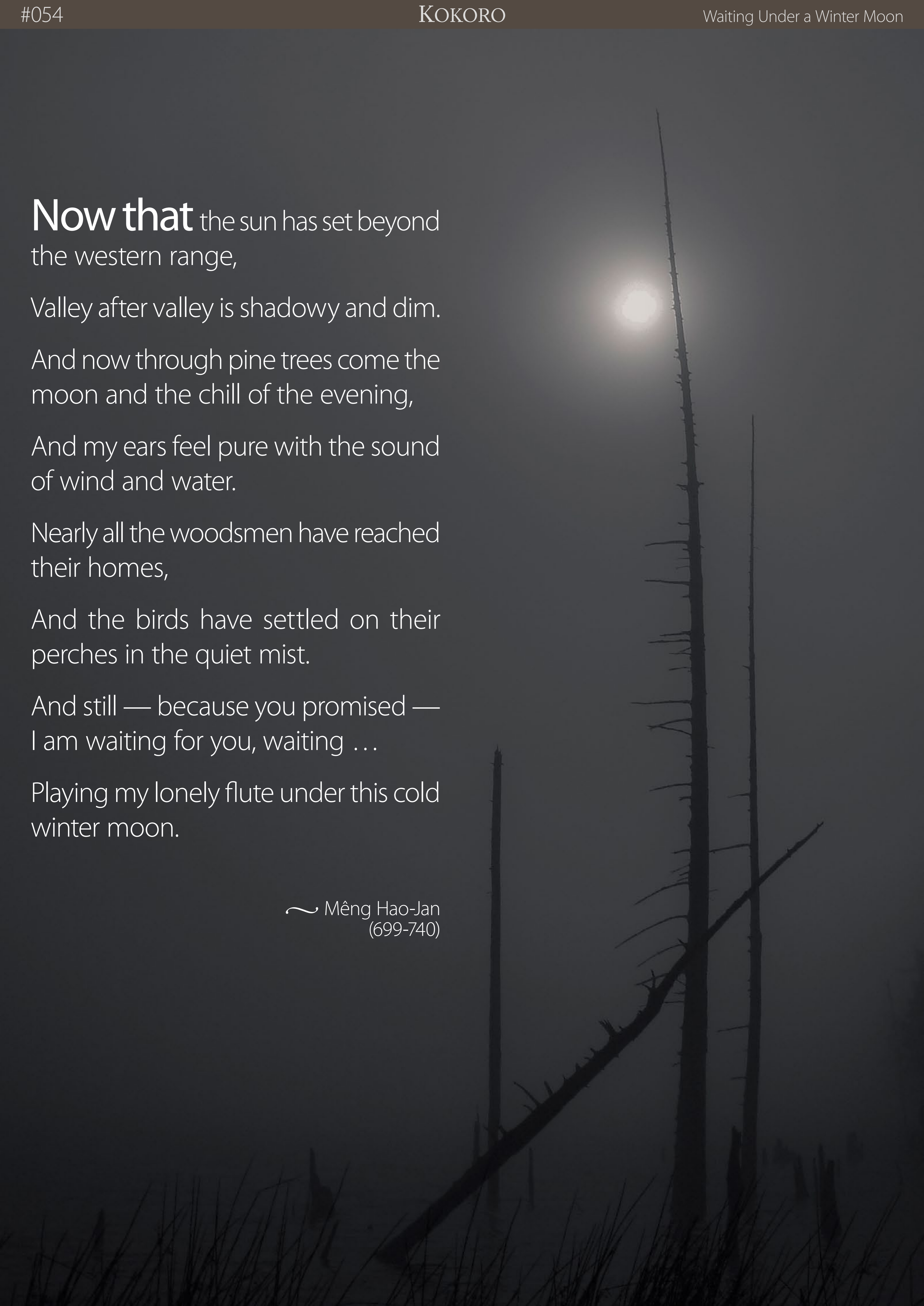
Nearly all the woodsmen have reached
their homes,

And the birds have settled on their
perches in the quiet mist.

And still — because you promised —
I am waiting for you, waiting ...

Playing my lonely flute under this cold
winter moon.

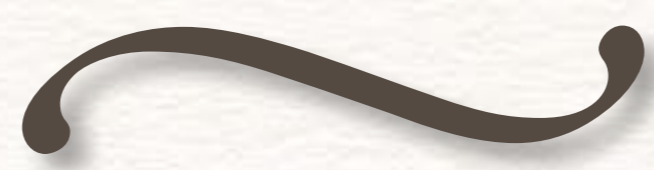
~ Mêng Hao-Jan
(699-740)







WHERE THE COQUI LIVE



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The Big Island of Hawaii started as barren lava, emerging from the vast sea some 700,000 years ago. No plants, no birds, no life — just cooling rocks, surrounded by water. But life will have its way. Over the 700 millenia, multitudinous species came to the island — too numerous to count, barely even comprehensible with our imagination, let alone our eyes. It is *lush life* defined.

Then, in came the small and innocent coqui frog. Along with the palms and the mongoose — now considered an “invasive species” — the coqui have decided they enjoy the tropical island. They’ve decided to *rule* it. Marching day by day up the slopes of the volcano, their nightly calls are cute — at first. But must they court every night, all night, hour after hour? Yes, they must. Life will have its way. Come to think of it, isn’t every single life form on that volcanic island an invasive species?



I searched for hours to see a coqui. They are crafty fellows, hiding and hiding. All I found was *where* they hide, in deep in the protection of their botanical home, silent all day, but oh, so vocal at night.*

*This PDF is audio-enabled. If your PDF viewer can play audio, imagine [this short 2-minutes](#) at 90 decibels, all night, every night, right outside your bedroom window!



















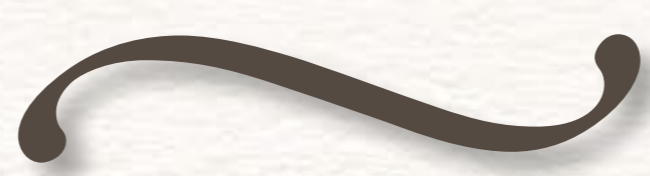








THE WOODGRAIN DEEP IN MY BONES



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The sensuality and seduction of woodgrain

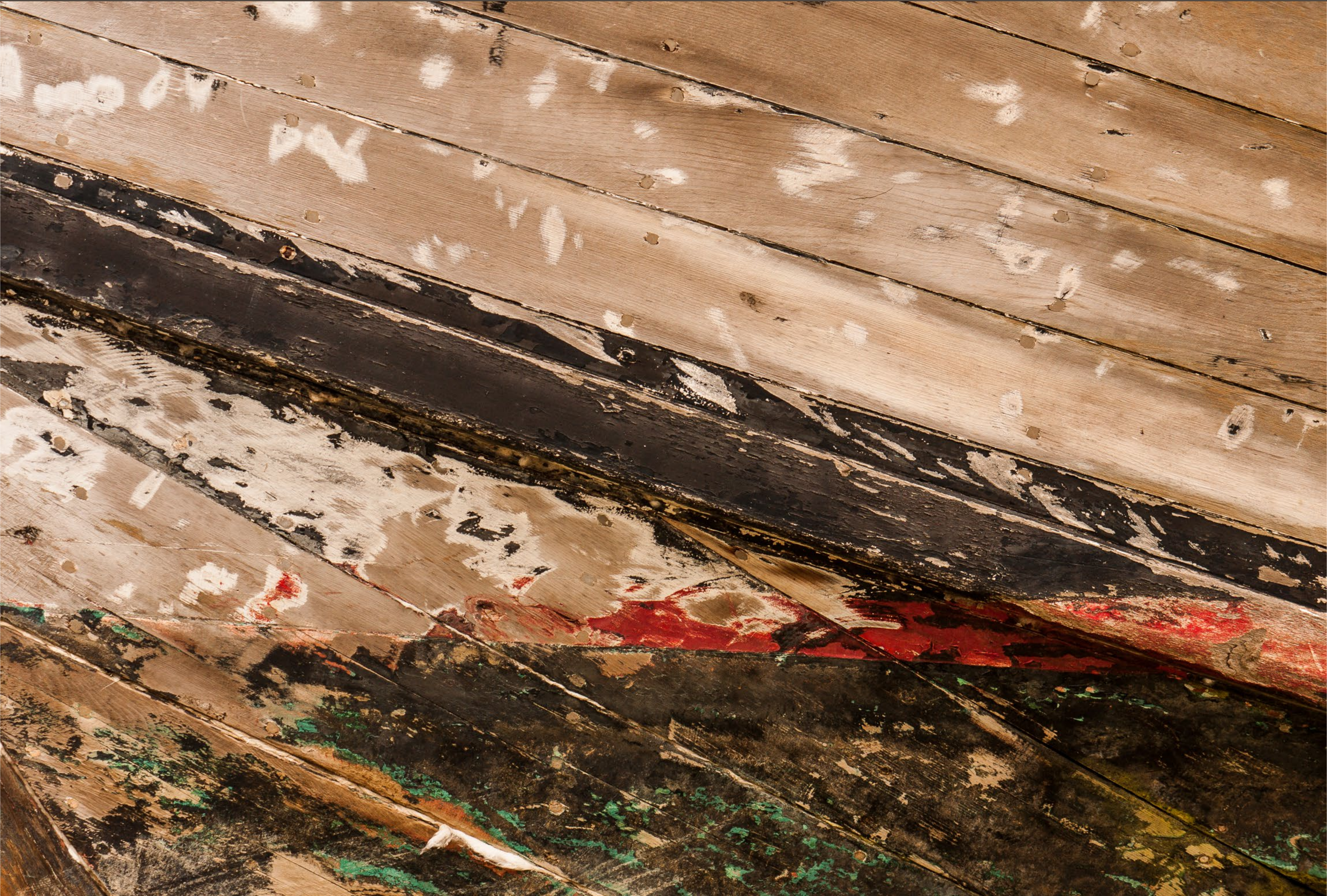
— a wooden boat, a bristlecone pine, a weathered barn — what is there about these textures that connects so deeply? I'd much rather spend the night in a knotty-pine cabin than a glass-and-steel highrise. Not a contest.



Perhaps the grain in wood reminds us so much of the fiber in our own muscles. Perhaps it is the protection that trees and wooden buildings have built into our DNA over millions of years. Perhaps it is the comfort of a campfire. I don't *why*, but I can feel it, deep in my bones.

Boats

















Bristlecone Pines



















Barns



As a photographer, some of the very first photographs I made were of weathered, wooden cabins in the Oregon desert. I quickly learned that photographs like these are considered “cliché” and trite. I stopped showing them, but would secretly look and occasionally succumb to the temptation to make another photograph. Now I’m older and year-by-year sneaking closer to “weathered” status myself. It’s time to let go of the inhibitions and simply enjoy the textures in the woodgrain for its simple beauty. Come to think of it, perhaps that applies to many things in life.











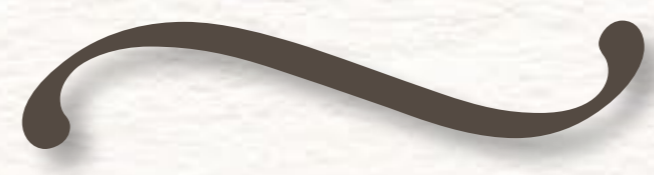








DREAMS OF SPRING



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The days grow shorter
The leaves have all departed
Bare branches give sound to the chill wind
The first snow will fall soon

Gazing at the winter moon
I drink tea and dream of spring







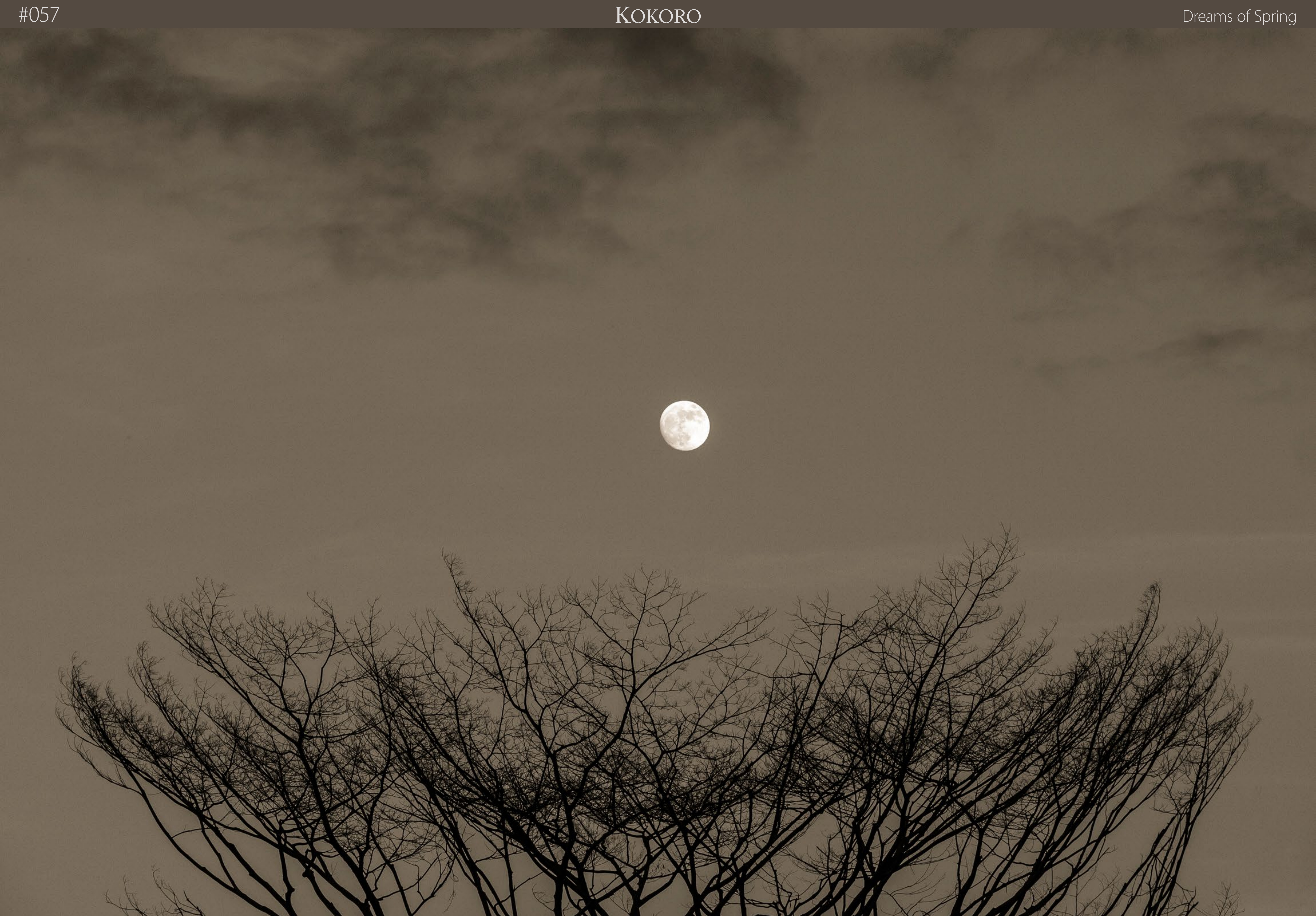












THANKFUL



A short meditation on a few things for which I am thankful.

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Life

As a child, I was taught the nighttime prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep. *If I should die before I wake . . .*" As a child, they were just words. I am older now, and thankful for each day, for each hour, for the joy of having Life while it lasts.





Compassion

The world is a competitive — and often *violent* — place. Compassion and empathy are the twin emollients. Imagine living in a world without the spirit of *other*. I am thankful that Compassion exists.





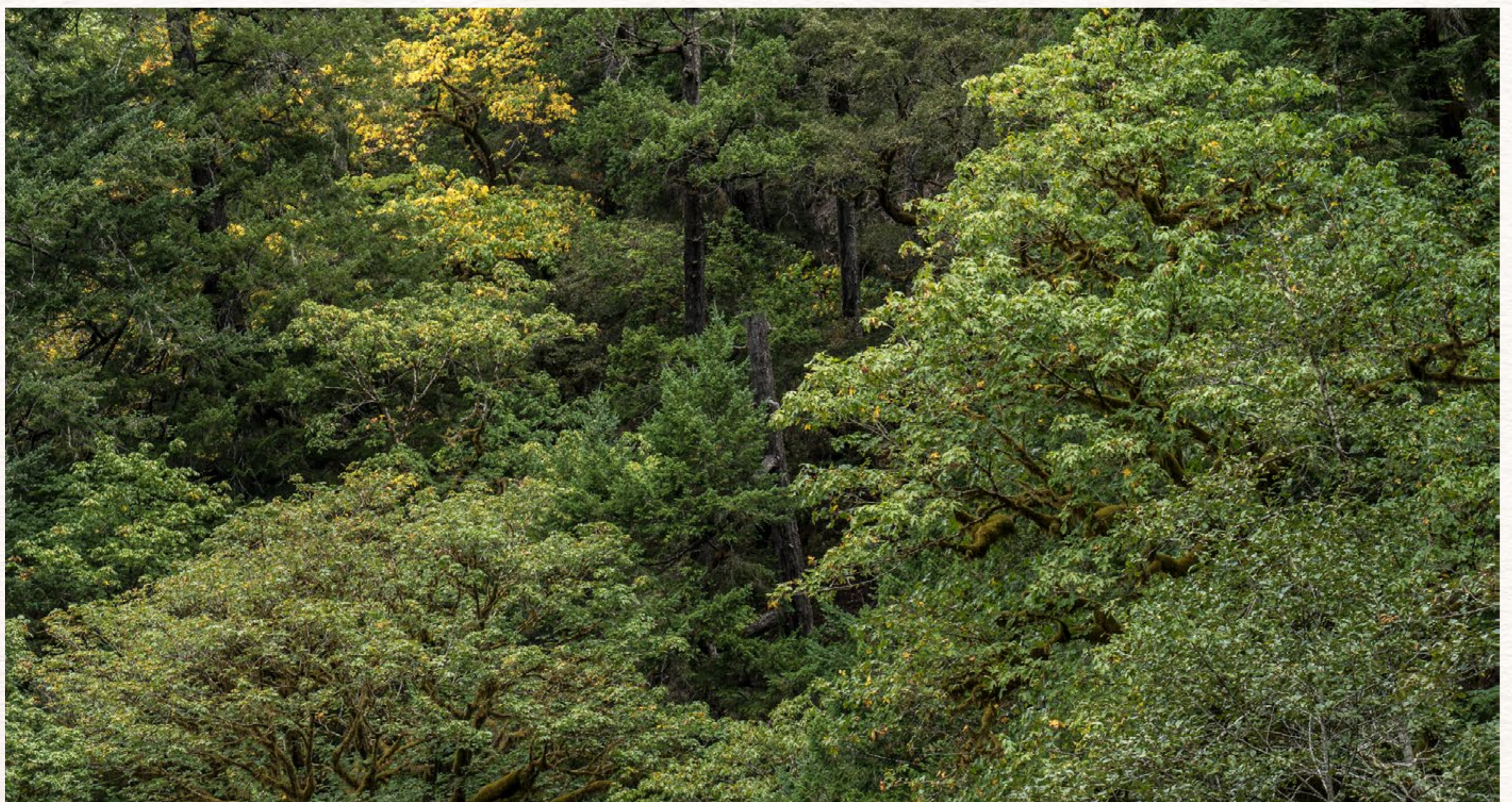
Strength

Life is a battle with the two forces that pull us down, *literally* — gravity and friction. I am thankful for the strength to move and strive.



Trees

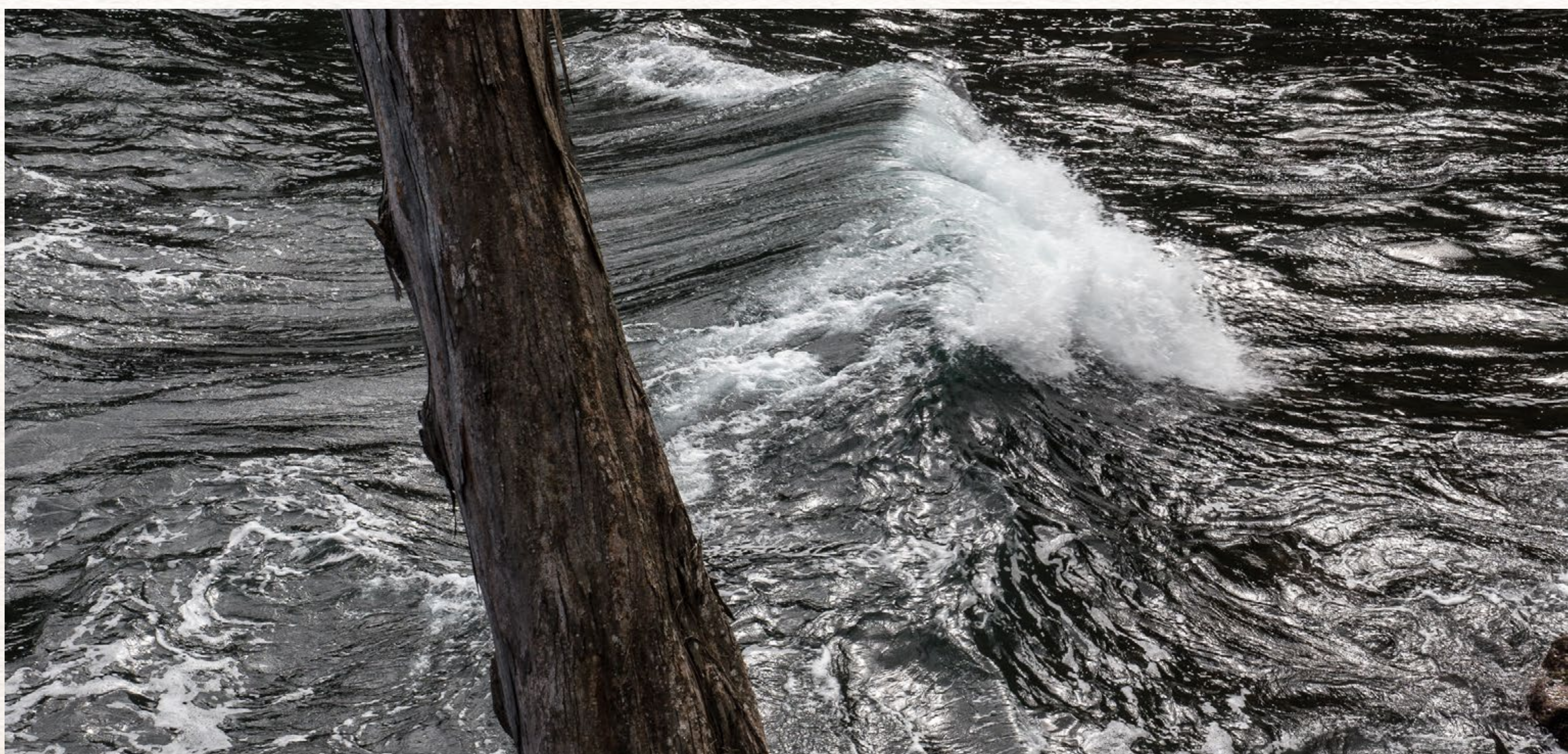
Aesthetically beautiful, functionally useful, life-enabling, shade-producing, protection-giving — just wander a treeless desert and it becomes obvious how interconnected we are to trees. I am thankful that trees are a part of my everyday life.





Water

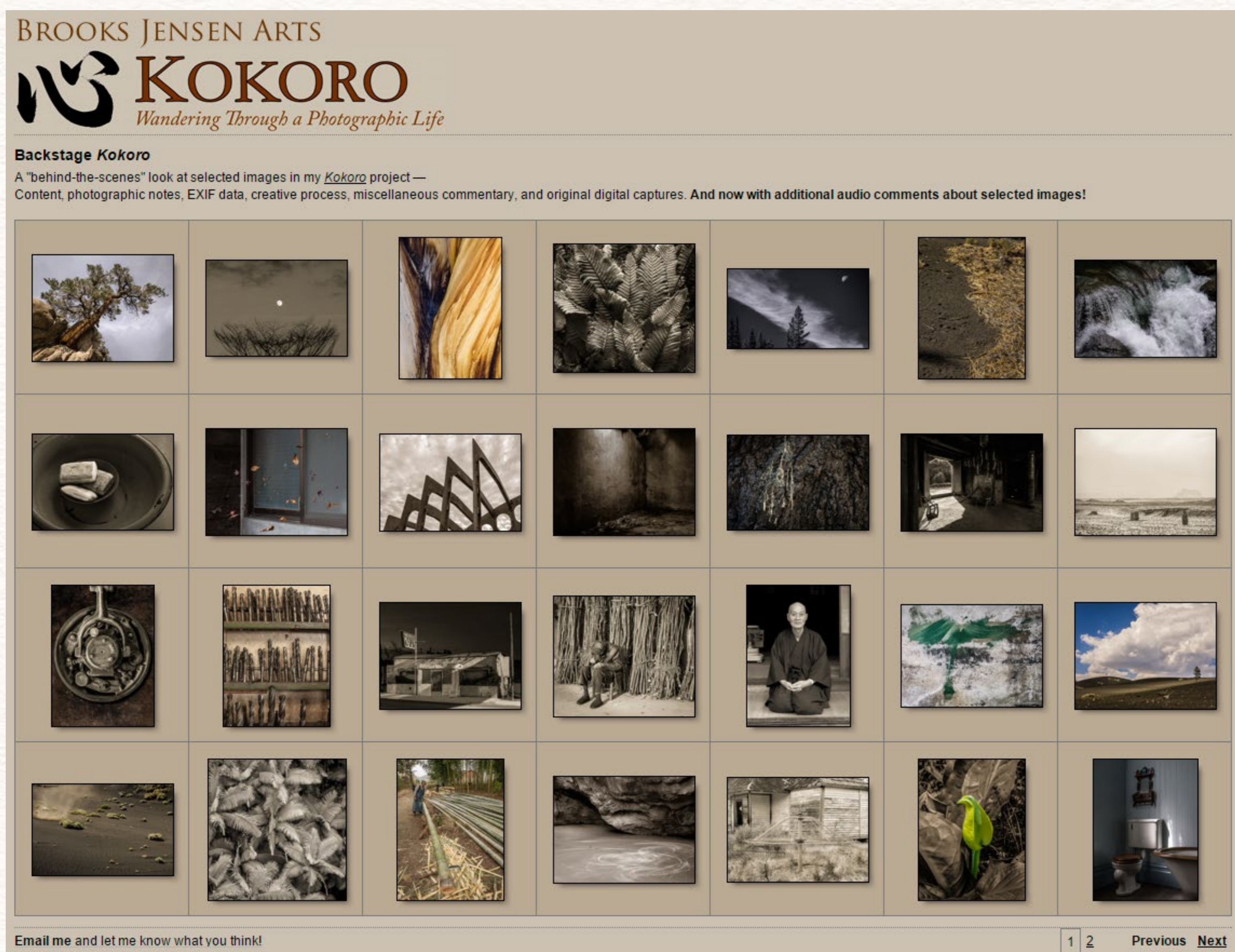
The planet is mostly water; we are mostly water. Life is only possible because of water. Change our planetary orbit just a bit, and the water evaporates or turns to ice. A bit more sunshine, or a bit less, and the water evaporates or turns to ice. And so would we. I am thankful for the simple ubiquity of the water that sustains us.



You might also like...

BACKSTAGE *KOKORO*

A “behind-the-scenes” look at selected images in *Kokoro*



This [stand-alone web presentation](#) offers comments about the creative and technical process for one image per topic in *Kokoro*.

- Text and audio comments about content, and the making of the image
- Photographic notes
- Creative process comments
- Includes EXIF data for each image
- Original digital captures (downsized for the web) to illustrate the “before” and “after” of post-processing

Support the artist!

For over 30 years, Brooks has shared his photographic lessons, failures, inspiration, creative path — and more than a few laughs. If you've enjoyed his free *Kokoro* PDFs publications, or been a long-time listener to his free audio commentaries (his weekly podcast *On Photography and the Creative Life*, or his daily *Here's a Thought* commentaries), here is your chance to tell him how much you appreciate his efforts. Support the artist!



Choose whichever level of support fits your appreciation and pocketbook. We thank you, he thanks you, and here's looking forward to the exciting content that is yet to come in all our *LensWork* publications and media as Brooks continues exploring this creative life.

\$15 Applause - Thanks!

\$25 Standing Ovation - You'll receive a signed copy of *Dreams of Japan*

\$50 Basic Support - You'll receive a thank you of a signed 6R (8-page, 6x8") chapbook, handmade and signed by the artist

\$100 Essential Support - You'll receive a signed Full Quarto (16-page, 8x11") chapbook handmade and signed by the artist

\$250 Sustaining Support - You'll receive a thank you of an original, signed print + wall hanger

\$500 Friend of the Arts - You'll receive a thank you of a signed original print with wall hanger plus a Full Quarto chapbook

\$1000 Patron of the Arts - You'll receive a special thank you of, well, you'll see!

[You can donate to support Brooks' creative life using this link.](#) Thanks!



Brooks Jensen is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, hand-made artist's books, and digital media publications.

He and his wife (Maureen Gallagher) are the owners, co-founders, editors, and publishers of the award winning *LensWork*, one of today's most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in 73 countries, Brooks' impact on fine art photography is truly world-wide. His long-running podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 900+ podcasts are available at [LensWork Online](#), the LensWork membership website. LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with *LensWork Extended* — a PDF based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of seven best-selling books about photography and creativity: *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Single Exposures* (4 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); and *Looking at Images* (2014); as well as a photography monograph, *Made of Steel* (2012). His next book will be *Those Who Inspire Me (And Why)*. A free monthly compilation of of this image journal, [Kokoro](#), is available for download.

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