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Peach Blossom Spring

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Peach Blossom Spring

April 13, 2018 | Chris Keaveney

*The prefect immediately dispatched officers to go back
with the fisherman. He hunted for the marks he had made,
but grew confused and never found the way again.*

From "Peach Blossom Spring" by Tao Qian

The hand
that returns the chick
to the nest
is called
the machete hand
in a language
spoken only
by a handful
of old people
who live deep
in the forest
in a place
visited only
by poachers
and anthropologists
in a village
where the old
women always
get their way
and the rare
visitors who find
their way through
the thick bush
sleep in tents
made of snake
skins stitched together
where time stands still
because it has
nowhere to bed down
and prayers
are smoked
in the open air
along with the flesh
of a certain freshwater
fish that serves
as currency
between the villagers
and the even older
people who live
in another village
downriver
whose language
is known only
in the half-forgotten songs
of the people
of the first village
and in myths
lost to nostalgia
to the smoke
of the festival fires
and to the gnarled hands
of the soothsayer
as she raises
the feathers
of an extinct
flightless bird
to her forehead
as if to perturb
the certainty of blossoms.