Peach Blossom Spring

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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 researchers 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 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.

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