

A SONG OF PEACH-BLOSSOM RIVER

A fisherman is drifting, enjoying the spring mountains,
And the peach-trees on both banks lead him to an ancient source.
Watching the fresh-coloured trees, he never thinks of distance
Till he comes to the end of the blue stream and suddenly- strange men!
It's a cave-with a mouth so narrow that he has to crawl through;
But then it opens wide again on a broad and level path --
And far beyond he faces clouds crowning a reach of trees,
And thousands of houses shadowed round with flowers and bamboos....
Woodsmen tell him their names in the ancient speech of Han;
And clothes of the Qin Dynasty are worn by all these people
Living on the uplands, above the Wuling River,
On farms and in gardens that are like a world apart,
Their dwellings at peace under pines in the clear moon,
Until sunrise fills the low sky with crowing and barking.
...At news of a stranger the people all assemble,
And each of them invites him home and asks him where he was born.
Alleys and paths are cleared for him of petals in the morning,
And fishermen and farmers bring him their loads at dusk....
They had left the world long ago, they had come here seeking refuge;
They have lived like angels ever since, blessedly far away,
No one in the cave knowing anything outside,
Outsiders viewing only empty mountains and thick clouds.
...The fisherman, unaware of his great good fortune,
Begins to think of country, of home, of worldly ties,
Finds his way out of the cave again, past mountains and past rivers,
Intending some time to return, when he has told his kin.
He studies every step he takes, fixes it well in mind,
And forgets that cliffs and peaks may vary their appearance.
...It is certain that to enter through the deepness of the mountain,
A green river leads you, into a misty wood.
But now, with spring-floods everywhere and floating peachpetals --
Which is the way to go, to find that hidden source?

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