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Tung-Hui Hu

Palinode [“*The Returnees*”]

Oh! how fast you call me back,
though I have settled, already,
into the woods where
the dark shapes of deer and asphodel
do not look like you. Everyone is

dead here & we each have instincts that
will take years to track, to scent out.
Now I know what it is to be startled,
to brush a branch, to look backwards,
and not see anyone following. Only in

the dream you tell: someone sets his hands
on the slope of your shoulders.
You lift your arms up (wings
of a corkscrew) and now he takes your
torso and turns you and you remember

how light you feel, light as the time
you tried to get a good look at yourself,
straining, practically spinning, to see—
what, exactly? But I know.
Your lovely back: rows of muscle, sinew.
Tapestries hung from girders.

Tung-Hui Hu

Bears Back in Their Pits

Remember the rain two years ago
that made the world into old film?
Suddenly the world was watchable:
streets separating into loops of
dirt and grey light, hillsides
become emulsion to bury the people
with the mud of the hillsides.
And the rain was so thick it made
land and sea equal and suspended
you and everyone else, equally,
specimens of the air. Linnaeus
kept birds and turtles next to glass
jars of bats and fishes, still wet,
never touching, everything in its place.
But even Linnaeus was not as meticulous
as the king who always got
what he wanted. Knowing what
he wished to see, people labored
to build villages for him, place
dinner fork on the left,
park planes sorted row to row,
ready to do again the next morning,
world as clockwork, world as
California. But it took ever more
effort to keep things the same, until
the whole world worked for him,
sending bears meekly to their pits,
wolves back to their dens.