

Passing It On

I lie in a strange room
through another endless night,
hear wind squall the dark,
its jagged rise and fall

a hungry saw. And I am back
where I most loved to be, feeding
planks to a machine's low roar,
death and danger not a breath away.

On gentler nights when all I hear is
the sycamore's soft rustling, I see
my father astride his cooper's mare,
back bent as a windswept fairy tree,

the whisper of his hand plane
peeling angels' curls for me to catch.
I'm hunkered in the sawdust –
no angel, but a child

with hair as fair and curled
as the fragrant shavings
falling round my feet. Days
when he is lost in measuring,

he silences my incessant questions
with a small knife and a lump of wood
no bigger than my fist. Tongue wedged,
hours pass, or so it seemed.

I was that piece of tree, it came to life.
Each seam, each grain, each knot
took on new life. I chipped and shaped,
pared down the giving matter until

the creature talked to me and I talked back.
How foolish of my father to imagine
I would not follow on his path.
As I lie here, a gnarled old tree now,

I still can conjure up the smells,
scent of oak, beech, maple, common pine.
My rasping hands still know their feel.
In the vastness of the forest I am not alone.

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