

# The Carver's Wood

by Philip M. Mathis

He studies the wood with careful eye,  
mindful of purpose, of woody things—  
trees that reached old age  
despite disease and injury,  
now sawed into slabs and blocks  
fit for the needs of a carver.

Handling the air-dried wood,  
his mind drifts  
to days when now-dead pieces  
were vital parts of living trees;  
trees from which he had gathered nuts,  
collected sugary sap, or eaten red-ripe fruit;  
trees he had climbed;  
trees he had felled.

As he reacquaints himself with the wood,  
the call to carve falls heavily  
upon his shoulders.  
His is the business of resurrecting life,  
of reincarnating sylvan souls  
with a gouge and knife.

Sorting now through his choices,  
he looks for fiddleback maple, curly cherry,  
and crotch walnut—pieces with figure  
or flaw or embedded knot;  
pieces that suggest beauty borne of struggle;  
pieces he can carve  
back to life.