

By David Rivard

After his ham & cheese in the drape factory cafeteria,
having slipped by the bald shipping foreman
to ride a rattling elevator to the attic
where doves flicker into the massive eaves
and where piled boxes of out-of-style
cotton and lace won't ever be
decorating anyone's sun parlor windows.
Having dozed off in that hideout he fixed
between five four-by-six cardboard storage cartons
while the rest of us pack Mediterranean Dreams
and Colonial Ruffles and drapes colored like moons,
and he wakes lost—
shot through
into a world of unlocked unlocking light—
suddenly he knows where he is and feels half nuts
and feels like killing some pigeons with a slingshot.

That's all, and that's why he pokes
his calloused fingers into the broken machinery,
hunting for loose nuts a half inch wide—
five greasy cold ones that warm in his pocket—
and yanks back the snag-cut strip of inner tube
with a nut snug at the curve to snap it
at the soft chest of a dopey bird.
Then the noise of pigeons flopping down
to creosoted hardwood, and then a grin
the guy gives me & all his other pals later.
And afternoon tightens down on all
our shoulders, until the shift whistle
blasts, blowing through the plant like air
through lace. As it always has, as it does.
That bright. That stunned.

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