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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