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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Source: Torque (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988)