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The Seamstress (After Roethke)

by Rynn Williams

She unrolls bolts,
lets down cuffs, tacks on snaps,
tucks and shirrs piqué into place.

Oh how she can snip
errant threads and taut armholes,
firm the bust of a tired jacket,

or make a skirt sing
with a sprinkle of sequins,
pressing life into remnants

with her battered machine.
Or sit all night sewing schoolclothes,
her houseslipped foot fast on the pedal.

One patch of cloth
jams at the feeder tread,
gnarls from the hidden spool

a thick, thread-mangled clot;
yet still the cool hands
keep kneading in velvet;

the bright shuttle bobs.
The Singer clatters all night
in her lair of lost pins

and discarded snippets,
swaths of sewn fabric
pulse down like a waterfall,

down past the table legs,
quaking with motor-force,
close to her bare knees

(that right foot treading wildly)
banners of red silk
swirl and billow,

and everything,
everything
shines.

