

Sketch

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The Grinder

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The Grinder

Homer K. Gordon

IT LOOKS harmless enough—like all machinery under control. The peaceful purr of its giant motor never betrays the fact that the power of twelve horses is driving that wheel. And certainly just by looking at the wheel one would never realize that its outer edge is traveling nearly two hundred fifty feet a second—it runs that smoothly. It is rather pretty, in fact, to see the brilliant shower of orange sparks mingled with the milk-white cooling solution as the wheel bites into the steel side of a ninety-pound axle, and to hear the br-r-rit, br-r-rit as the axle revolves. It is nice to watch the dull grey bearing transform into a gleaming mirror.

Yes, it is an interesting and beautiful machine to watch—from the side. . . . One doesn't watch from the front, for even the operator is reluctant to stand in front of that madly whirling two-hundred-pound emery wheel. Ninety times a day, four hundred fifty times a week, twenty-three thousand four hundred times a year he walks in front of that wheel, and twenty-three thousand four hundred times a year he casts a wary glance at it.

He remembers too well the time the wheel on Charlie's machine came apart and threw pieces of abrasive four times the size of a man's fist against the wall a hundred feet away with enough force to break three bricks. The company gave Charlie's widow a thousand dollars, but they wouldn't let her see him till the undertaker had made a mask to cover the hole where his face had been.

It is lovely music to hear those six v-belts tapping out amazing rhythms against the steel belt-guard, or the gentle hum of the wheel coasting free, but it is hard for a man to forget how this gentle hum can turn into a sudden maddened roar—a crash—and then silence—silence broken only by the steady drip, drip, drip of his best friend's red blood on the black, oily floor. It's hard to forget how with each step his right shoe clung to the floor and then pulled away with a sound like paper tearing. Who would

think that a little blood on his shoe would cause a man to limp peculiarly the rest of his life? It is hard to forget that one clean spot on the floor in this world of grease and dirt. Especially when the repulsive odor of strong disinfectant still seems to cling to the spot, and he can still close his eyes and see that twisted form lying there.

FIFTEEN years it took him to forget a similar twisted form—another friend killed also by a machine—not a beautiful, harmless looking, quietly humming, spark-throwing grinder, but a destructive engine that killed men by design. Fifteen years is a long time to remember how still a man lies when a piece of shrapnel hits him full in the face just below the rim of that comical steel hat. Will it be another fifteen years before he forgets that a man lies just as still when killed while making an axle for one of those engines?

No wonder that twenty-three thousand four hundred times a year he warily watches that beautiful, harmless wheel.



Snared

Margaret Himmel



Night has caught me in her trap;
She's bound me down with tall damp grass
And hung a million stars to glitter in my eyes,
The moon to leer at me.
She's sent the searing south wind
To whisper in my ears, "Remember!"
And left me only emptiness to clutch.