Precision Shells

Robert Dare*
He eased the car away from the curb and swayed into the tracks in the middle of the street. He flipped on the radio and then quickly turned it off. It was the snow, too; the snow and that girl most of all. For almost a year, now, he had been quieting steadily inside. Then he had come here a month ago to work. He had discovered this little place and had liked its intimate privacy. But when he had seen her a week ago, everything had started again. He knew he shouldn’t go there again, but he also knew he would until he stopped seeing her there.

He parked before a modest frame house and walked to the back entrance. His apartment was in the basement, and as he entered, the little place looked deceivingly warm in the glow of a few lights on the Christmas tree he had finally decorated yesterday. He carefully folded his clothes and opened the studio couch. He stretched the sheets and tucked the blankets neatly. Deciding against another cigarette, he walked slowly about the room. Tomorrow was Christmas Eve, and it had always been something special to him. Even now, alone, he had been unable to keep from decorating a tree. He slowly rubbed his hands together, turning the gold band around on his finger. Maybe it would be better after the holidays. Maybe in another year or so it wouldn’t knot him all up.

He wound his alarm and disconnected the tree lights. It was suddenly very dark, and he climbed into the bed quickly.

Jim Merry, Eng. Sr.

Precision Shells

TALL SMOKESTACKS. A long wide hall leading past uniform pastel doors, upon which are uniform names in uniform gold letters. At the end of the hall, a field-house room full of turning lathes. Sunlight—glint—intermittent—whine of steel shaping steel. The man at the lathe removes the completed projectile from the lathe. A raised
eyebrow — calipers — a smile. Ammunition twelve abreast in long curving rows, rising and falling around the levels of the vastness. Many smiles.


I speak to the worker. He turns from his lathe. "Why do you make them?"

"Accomplishment. Many loving open mouths. Success. Food. 1/10,000 inch tolerance. None so perfect."

"What is it you make?"

"Metal, steel, shaped, long rows all shaped."

"Yes, yes, I see, but WHAT are they?"

"Perfection. There are no flaws. Craftsman. 1/10,000 inch tolerance."

"Do you really KNOW what it is you make? Aren't they shells? Doesn't each at last become fragments? Isn't each many of these such as I hold in my hand?"

"Yes — Shells."

"Precision shells are many fragments. Fragments of torn flesh. Flesh, precision warmth. Life. Fragments shattered warmth. Death."


Sunlight — glint — intermittent — whine of steel shaping steel. A fieldhouse room full of turning lathes. A long wide hall leading past uniform pastel doors upon which are uniform names in uniform gold letters. Tall smokestacks.

*Robert Dare, Sci. Sr.*