

I KILLED A MAN

DRIVING home early one evening, I rounded a familiar curve and faced a pair of glaring headlights.

On the right of the road, a millworker was on his way to work on the night shift. He became confused and jumped the wrong way. The impact threw me a little forward in my seat.

The millworker's body slid flat on the pavement for perhaps fifty feet, rolled over, jerked and lay still. The dinner-box he had carried under his arm rattled along the pavement for another twenty feet, then all was quiet. When we got to him we saw there would be no hurry about taking him to the hospital. He was dead.

During the long court ordeal afterwards it was established beyond all doubt that the accident was unavoidable. I am a free man; free to lie abed on Sunday mornings, stretching and yawning; free to eat when I am hungry and drink when I am thirsty; free to feel the wind and sun on my face, to know the four seasons, to love.

But I cannot forget that because of me a man will never see the white sparks from molten steel again, or smell the hot metal in the moulds, or feel the satisfying tug of his muscles against a heavy crane, or peer

out of a factory window into a moonlit night, or open his dinner-box with the keen appetite of a labouring man.

Because of me a mother will never again hear a familiar footfall when work is done, and she will have things to explain to her babies that will break her heart.

I know all this is not my fault—a court of law has told me so—but I cannot stop thinking how different things would have been if I had started just half a minute sooner or later, or if I had been going just a little slower or faster, or if, in that split second, my skill had been just a little greater and my brakes a little better, or if I had thought in advance of all the possible circumstances that might have been waiting for me around that curve.

It has been two years since it happened, yet these thoughts go round and round in my mind continually. Nothing can make me forget that I am still walking this earth, and that because of me another man is not.

I cannot forget that a combination of factors—factors that could so easily have been just a little different—happened to work out with lethal precision, and I killed a man.—*Scribner's Magazine*.