

## THE SEX FACTORY

by Greg Stolze

Lionel bit the inside of his lip, wishing he could bite a fingernail, he knew just the one, his left pinkie, he could feel that it was a little long, a little raspy, the kind of thing to catch briefly on the polyester blend of his interview pants as he wiped sweaty palms on them before shaking Mr. Debret's hand. He concentrated on a good handshake—firm, not too long, not so hard it would feel like he was trying to crush it but maybe a little stronger than Lionel usually did because he wanted to communicate that he was a hearty guy who could do the work and wouldn't let Mr. Debret and the rest of the company down.

Lionel's breath was astringently minty, he'd chewed three pieces of the strongest gum he knew. His white cotton shirt was soggy in the armpits but no one would see that under the jacket, the one he'd brushed with his mom's lint brush because it had been dangling in his closet ever since he'd worn it to Uncle Theo's funeral... what, a year and a half ago?

"Have a seat, Lionel."

"Thanks. Um. Thank you Mr. Debret, that is."

He sat.

Mr. Debret was in his fifties, probably. The short coarse stubble all across his cheeks was grey and white. The hair specks continued on the wattle of unevenly-ruddy flesh at the front of his neck. He had a mole next to his nose, big and black. The single thick hair curling out of his right nostril was a dark, glossy black, but his eyebrows were steel gray, like the untidy short curls atop his head. He gave Lionel a long, level look.

"So," he asked. "Why do you want to work here at the Sex Factory?"

"Gosh, who wouldn't?" Lionel asked, then immediately saw from Mr. Debret's failure to change expression that this wasn't sufficient. "I mean, everyone says it's a good employer, fair wages... um... benefits... that sort of, of thing."

"Mm hm... so, what do you bring to us? Why should we pick you over our many other qualified candidates?" Debret sounded bored. Lionel didn't want to bore him, he wanted this job, he wanted to be employed, get money, move out of his parents' house, be able to drink when he wanted to and not worry so much about one of his little brothers or sisters barging in on him in the bathroom. Boring the job interviewer was not how that was going to happen. He was supposed to have made a joke by now, wasn't he? He and the interviewer should be laughing and getting along.

"Well sir, I'm a very hard worker. I did, I worked for the city? For a while, I had a job with the park service, mowing lawns and maintaining, you know, the public spaces and playgrounds and such."

"Much experience with heavy machinery?"

“Well sir, the riding mowers were pretty big, um, sometimes we ran ‘em with the snowplow blades on the front? I have an uncle who works a forklift, I’m sure he could...”

“We can provide you any training, if it comes to that,” Debret said, cutting him off.

“I was a hard worker sir,” Lionel repeated. “The reason they let me go was budgetary. My old boss, Mr. Wilkes, he said he was sorry to have to let me go, that I was one of his best workers. You can call him. His name’s Wilkes.”

Mr. Debret exhaled, a long *phssssh* sound even though he hadn’t seemed to inhale with any particular depth. “High school diploma, no college?”

“That’s right sir. I...” Should he say he wanted to go to school? Or would that just seem like he couldn’t wait to get away from the job? His dad’s joke about how you never call your house your *first* house or your wife will start thinking of you has her *first* husband flickered through his brain, he wondered if jobs were like that. “I guess I’m more of a hands-on kind of guy, sir? I fix cars too. Well, I tinker. You know how it is. But, so, I’m good with machines, more than you might think from my, um, my school grades.”

“You know much about sex?”

“Well... um, what I was taught in school, and... and...”

“A few hours of home study, I’m sure,” Debret said. “But you’re not what you’d call familiar with the *industry* of it, sex construction, orgasm assembly or the like?”

“Not... um, I don’t have much, er, experience per se,” Lionel admitted. He was running his right thumb over that damn left pinkie nail, the raggedy one, feeling the texture, the irregular jags, *only biting would fix it* but no, he couldn’t. “My other uncle Joseph worked here and he said it was... um... was a good...”

“Joseph who?”

“Joseph McCandless? He retired last year.”

Mr. Debret cracked into a homely yellow smile with one artificially white incisor. “Your uncle’s old Joe ‘Can-Can’ McCandless? Now why didn’t you say so? He was a shop steward, wasn’t he?”

Lionel relaxed. He couldn’t explain exactly why, or how, but he suddenly felt very much like he was going to get the job.

# # #

His very first day, there were protesters.

Even though he hadn’t done anything wrong—hadn’t done *anything* yet, it was just an orientation day—he instinctively blushed deep when he saw signs that said “God Made Adam and Eve, Not Adam and Eve and a Multinational Conglomerate!” or, more succinctly, “Sex Is For Babies.”

Lionel ducked his face and calculated what he'd do if they spat at him or yelled or took a swing with one of their signs. He figured he'd just ignore it in the first two cases, but if they tried to start something, oh boy, he'd give them a show, probably get a reputation with his co-workers...

But Lionel was past them before he'd even fully considered the ramifications. They hadn't looked angry, just resigned. A little bit bored and a little bit smug. As he changed into his work outfit, he asked about them.

"Those guys?" said the man with the next locker, which had the name "DUTCH" written on a piece of masking tape. "Aw, I forget they're even there. Some kook church. Don't like the S-E-X don'tcha know." He shrugged. "They're usually here on Mondays."

Lionel didn't think about them again for the rest of the day.

# # #

Lionel held out his hand, and the older man just laughed. "This ain't a place for handshakes, buddy. Glove up. I'm Stan and I'm going to walk you along the factory floor." His white coveralls had been stained, and washed, and stained, and washed again until they were a delicately patterned gray.

Lionel's coveralls were new, crisp and blinding, over steel-toed boots with a crush-resistant impact plate. He wore the pink hard hat of a trainee, while Stan's was a scratched powder blue with a line of banana stickers across the back bottom rim. Both of them had thick black rubber gloves.

"They told me I'd be working in the climax room," Lionel said.

"Eh?"

"Climax! They told me I'd be working climax!"

"Oh yeah, that's where the opening was."

"Where...?"

"Burnout's a problem, kiddo," Stan said, pushing a door that read AROUSAL ENTRY ONLY. "Mostly in arousal and climax, naturally—that's the part of the factory floor that's consistently hot and noisy."

Lionel stumbled at the threshold, blinking. Stan laughed.

"You get used to the smell pretty quick," he said. "Buckle up, it gets a lot thicker in where you're working. Hey Deb." He waved to a thickset woman with a yellow helmet. She waved listlessly back.

"Deb's stationed at the Erogenerator 2000. Our's is a modified unit, actually. Built with an oversized hopper and optimized throughput."

"Uh huh," Lionel said, looking left and then right and then at the machine Stan was indicating.

“Biggest one east of the Mississippi, third biggest in the world. Has forty percent more capacity than stock.”

“Forty percent, huh?”

Stan laughed.

“So yeah, you can see how the process goes,” Stan said, waving at the conveyor belt. “Barring special orders, which you won’t deal with for years if ever, it’s a relatively limited number of possible inputs, so we just install all of ‘em and the customer...” He shrugged. “Well you know how it is. You use what you’re gonna use and the rest of it, eh, whatever.”

“Sure. Whatever.” Lionel flinched back from a blast of steam.

“Yeah, careful of the condensation,” Stan said, pointing at a battered red rubber grid on the floor. “The belt and some of the assembly points are refrigerated to prevent meltdown or deformation, we try to keep the moisture contained but OSHA is constantly up in our asses about slip hazards.” He rolled his eyes. “Just be sensible, don’t rush it, you’ll be fine. Over here we’ve got Joyce, she’s stage one quality control,” he said, indicating a matronly woman, thin and wrinkled, who watched the product flow by endlessly with a low-lidded, lizardlike gaze. He raised his voice. “SEE ANYTHING WEIRD TODAY, JOYCE?”

“Only you,” she said, never taking her eyes off the rattling assembly line. Stan laughed. As Lionel watched, Joyce gave a single blink, so quick that it made an ordinary blink seem leisurely.

“Yeah, we do QC at here and in Refractory,” Stan said. “It’s a big deal. You do *not* want to take a call from an angry, disappointed customer.”

“Sure.”

“C’mon through here into climax. This is where you’ll work.”

He led the way through another ENTRY ONLY door. Lionel looked up briefly as the heat intensified. His feet seemed heavier, and he stumbled.

“Y’OK there, cowpoke?”

“Yeah,” Lionel said. “Yeah, it’s just... it’s kinda overwhelming.”

“People can get used to anything,” Stan said. “Just try to keep your mind on your business though, sure, I get that it ain’t easy at first.” He gave a little chuckle and moved forward. “Here we got climaxes,” he said, raising his voice over the ambient sound. “Here’s what most people think about when it comes to sex.”

“OK...”

“Now sooner or later, you’re going to drop an orgasm,” Stan said. “It happens to everyone, but try—*try*—to minimize it. There’s a trick to handling one without it getting away from you, y’know? You’ll get it in time but until you do, the ones you lose come out of your paycheck.” He shrugged. “No one wants an orgasm that got scraped up off the factory floor, y’know? Each

one's a little different, but in my experience it's the little ones you have to watch for. They're eely."

"Got it," Lionel said, glancing down at the floor. Thick drops of perspiration were oozing from his armpits down the sides of his ribs, and when he raised his hand to adjust his helmet, he felt the creak of the rubber more than he was able to hear it.

"There's some lifting involved," Stan continued, leading Lionel to a curve where the conveyor belt turned before abruptly dropping into the floor. A sweating man with a drooping mustache was standing there, feet spread wide apart, lifting with practiced grunts and placing his burden onto an elaborate wire frame rack. "You don't have any lower back trouble do you?"

"No sir."

"Nah, they wouldn't hire you for Candy's old station if you did... oh, and you don't have to call me 'sir,' I *work* for a living. Jaime, my man!"

"Hey," the fellow with the mustache said, unenthused, then grunted again for another lift and pivot.

"This here's Lionel, after I finish the tour he's going to come here, learn how to work the turn station."

"Great. Great to meet you," Jaime said, continuing his rhythmic exertions.

"I'll get him back to you soon as I can," Stan said. As they moved away, Stan paused in explaining the features of the cooling rack to mention, "Jaime had been bumped up to refractory, but when Candy quit out on us, he had to come back to the line. He wanted everyone else to move on down—the turnbuckle there is kind of the low end of totem pole in climax, you know how it is. Entry level. But no one else wanted to budge from their station, he threatened to take it up with the union—you're going to join the union, right?"

"Absolutely. Uncle Joe told me that was a must."

"Oh right, you're Can-Can's nephew." Stan chuckled. "Management eventually promised that the new hire would do most of the work while he oversaw it until he could move on back up."

"Refractory," Lionel said, reading it off the third ENTRY ONLY door. "That's where Uncle Joe wound up."

"It's where *everyone* winds up, they stick with it long enough. It's only a few stations and by the time the product gets here, all the grunt work and heavy lifting's done. It's mostly pre-shipping and another quality control pass—make sure the seals aren't deformed, no one wants leakage in the packaging."

As they crossed into the Refractory doors, the high volume, rhythmic sounds of climax faded. It was cooler, too.

"Whew, right?"

“Yeah,” Lionel said, looking at the aging factory workers, whose expressions were a perfectly ambiguous balance between bored and self-satisfied.

“They get to sit down on the job and everything! Next best thing to being management. But don’t set your eye on a refractory chair just yet,” Stan said. “People work here ten, fifteen *years* before getting that promotion. Sometimes more, Rita there... hey Rita, how long were you in arousal before you got to come up here?”

“Seventeen long loud fucking years,” Rita said. Her hands moved in perfect rhythm, packaging a finished sex act with thoughtless, automatic efficiency. “My supervisor was a bitch, kept giving me bad reviews.”

“Sure Rita.”

“I outlasted that rotten ol’ hoe though...” Rita continued, and Stan kept walking, not breaking stride until they exited into a hallway painted industrial green, with yellow arrows indicating which side of the hall workers were expected to walk.

“So, come on down here to the cafeteria,” Stan said. “We’ll get you a coke or something... make sure to take your gloves off before you eat anything. I mean, you’ll forget at some point but, eh, that’s a mistake that corrects itself pretty quick. The food here’s OK, nothing special. Taco Tuesday, meatloaf Wednesday, pizza Friday... you get a couple state-mandated rest breaks in the morning and afternoon, but for the most part it’s, you know, the grind. Any questions?”

“Um... so I heard we could get factory rejects for free?”

Stan shrugged. “Sure, if you want ‘em.”

# # #

The first time Lionel spoke to one of the protesters, it was after a bad day. He was saving to move out and he’d dropped product and his shift supervisor, a humorless man called Boris, had yelled at him in front of everyone and someone in the lunch room had said “Watch it, butterfingers,” when he’d bumped their tray. So he was in a foul mood, and it was also raining.

As he was trudging through the office workers’ parking lot, he saw that there were only two protesters by the fence. One was a fat elderly woman who’d brought an elaborate folding chair that had a home-made brace on it to hold her sign for her. She was there most Mondays and Lionel had never, not once, seen her move. The other was a man in a raincoat, his umbrella too small for the task. The fabric had gotten disconnected from one of the spindles, leaving it bunched up and reducing the overall coverage. His sign (now starting to run) was leaning up against his modest belly. He looked unhappy.

Lionel almost walked right by, pretending they weren’t there, but something made him spin, making a hard-right turn and striding right up to the protester.

“Hey,” Lionel said. “What’s your problem, man?”

“Me?” The man was visibly startled. Lionel wondered if the other workers getting off shift were watching this.

“*Yeah, you.* Who else? I mean, do I come to where you do whatever *you* do and wave signs and make an ass of myself?”

The guy was turning red. “We just... our church... we’ve got a problem... no, it’s really more of a concern...”

“You’re all bunched up about sex, is that it?”

“Not sex *as such*, but the industrialization... the dehumanizing...”

“Oh yeah? And where does your religion get packaged huh? One of the big mills in Boise, or is it some fancy *Italian* foundry?”

The man blinked. “You can’t compare the two!”

“Why not? A job’s a job, and you’re in the way of mine!”

“We mostly construct our faith locally...”

“Oh, ‘mostly’?”

He rolled his eyes. “OK, sure, we supplement some ideology at Christmas and Easter, but *it’s different*, it’s supposed to be, you know, collective!”

“I don’t know if you read the directions, but our product is recommended for at least two,” Lionel said.

“Leave that boy alone Steven,” said a thin, wheedly voice. Lionel turned his head. It was the old woman! She was struggling to her feet. “It’s about time for my doctor appointment.”

“OK Mrs. Calhoun.” The protester—“Steven?”—awkwardly set aside his sign (which got wetter and blurrier in the process) and tried to tuck his umbrella between shoulder and chin while helping her out of her chair, but it slipped and fell, flipping inside out in the process.

“Oh for the love of...” Lionel picked up the umbrella and tried to right it, but it seemed to be beyond quick repair. It was cheaply made.

“Leave it!” Steven snapped. He glared, nostrils flared, as he folded up Mrs. Calhoun’s chair and gathered up her sign. She was leaning on a walker. Lionel suddenly started to feel like an asshole.

# # #

Within a year, Lionel had escaped the turn station and was working euphoric infusion. It was less physically demanding, but the tolerances were close. He was a good fit for it though, able to maintain the necessary focus and steadiness all day. He got a room in a house rented by several other Sex Factory laborers—a loader from shipping and a guy who’d worked the disinhibition station for five years.

He also started seeing a woman named Rhoda. They met at a concert. He was with his friends, some of whom knew some of her friends. They ran into each other again at a party, a week or

two later. They hit it off and got through a couple group-hang dates and one serious makeout session before she got around to asking about his job.

“Eh,” he said. “Sex Factory. Work on the line.”

“At that awful place?” she said.

“It’s not that bad. I mean, it’s no picnic, but...”

“It just seems so... clinical. I don’t know. Like, uncultured.”

“What? No,” he said.

“Don’t you think that sex is something people should make at home?”

He snorted. “Look, that sounds good in principle, but... hm. You’ve made pancakes, right?”

“Of course I’ve made pancakes,” Rhoda replied.

“You know how the first pancake is always a little goofy? Like, it’s ragged around the edges or a little soupy-raw in the middle?”

“I guess...”

“Well, would you want your, y’know, intimate experience to be someone’s first pancake? Not everyone can be good at everything, after all. I can’t do my own taxes... the one time I tried plumbing, Christ, it was a... it was just bad, right?”

“OK, fine,” she said. “If that’s your argument, if that’s so important, why mass produced? Why not get it done by an expert who *really* knows what they’re doing? A friend of mine, she has this boutique supplier out of Kansas...”

Lionel rolled his eyes. “Look, I guess some of the little mom and pop sex suppliers are doing a good job, but there are only ever two ways that can turn out. One is, they go cheap on the basic supplies because they can’t get the economies of scale like a multinational. Or, alternately, they pass the costs on to you, the customer.” He shrugged. “I mean, I believe in what we do. I’ll match our product against any other supplier, foreign or domestic.”

“Oh yeah?” Rhonda batted her eyes.

“...yeah.”

“Well I suppose we could set up some kind of blind, side-by-side test.”

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After four years at the Sex Factory, Lionel had married a woman named Tonia who was less fussy about the provenance of her intercourse with him. He’d also gotten certified on nervous system integration machinery repair and upkeep, further cementing his position in Climax. He and his wife moved into a small ranch-style home in the suburbs and budgeted for a modest increase in the use of his employee discount, in hopes of maybe having children. They got a



subscription from a name-brand contentment factory in Connecticut, selecting a plan with modest but consistent monthly deliveries.

It was in that context that Stan (who had moved up to management) called Lionel into his office on the third floor, seemingly a world away from the damp sounds of the assembly line. It was a Friday afternoon, and Lionel had just finished his shift.

“Hello sir,” Lionel said, pulling at the brim of his hard hat (now a well-used blue). Stan laughed.

“You don’t have to start in on all that,” he said. His voice was loud. Years on the factory floor had done a number on his hearing. “Shut the door behind you, ‘kay?”

Lionel came in. Stan didn’t offer a seat, since Lionel was still in his work-stained coveralls.

“So Lionel. You’ve been a good worker. Handled the strike last year with... tact.”

“Thank you.”

“I know you hear stuff in the break room, in the locker room. Don’t you? Rumors, et cetera.” Stan picked up some papers from his desk and lined them up by tapping them on his blotter. They’d looked pretty square to Lionel even before Stan picked them up.

“I guess so.”

“Like what? What have you heard?”

“Um... that Taco Tuesdays might stop... you know, being a thing?”

Stan made a strange sound that was half a chuckle and half a sigh. “Why do they say that’s, um, going to happen?”

“Well, everyone knows the stock price is down. The protesters...”

“Oh, they’re a pest but nothing more than that. Mostly they just agitate for stricter licensing to make our lives harder. No, what it was? That damn trade deal,” Stan said, shaking his head. “The Congress can’t get a damn thing done, except they manage to pass a bill that opens the door to cut-rate Korean coupling. Where are they getting that, hm?”

Lionel didn’t know, but he felt he had to say something upbeat to remain in his superior’s good graces. “People have brand loyalty,” he offered. “Our product is superior.”

“Hmph. People are also loyal to their wallets. We thought we could ride out a trade war, but...”

Lionel’s stomach started to churn.

“Sir?”

“Well, keep this under your helmet, but big changes are coming. It’s getting announced Monday, but I,” he said, looking left and right as if he suspected someone might be hiding in his office, eavesdropping, “have a few discretionary options. Staffing decisions.”

“Like... like what?”

Stan gave him a level look. “Would you like to be a shift supervisor?”

Lionel widened his eyes. Everyone knew that was the royal road to a Refractory position. “Yeah!” he blurted.

Stan held up a finger. “How badly?”

“Pretty bad!”

“Well, if you still feel the same way on Monday, let me know. We’re moving the factory to Taiwan, and with your expertise, I can bring you.”

“T... Taiwan?”

Stan nodded. “Still want it?”

# # #

When Lionel went in for free unemployment counseling, the name plate on the desk said MR. ORATZ, but the guy behind the desk was Steven, the protester. He’d grown a little mustache, but having seen him one or two Mondays a month for years, Lionel recognized him instantly. His first instinct was to say, “Oh *Jesus*,” but he squelched it. He did not want to alienate—well, further alienate—this religious geek. Besides, while he’d been one of very few protesters, Lionel had been one of dozens, maybe *hundreds* of workers who walked by on a shift change. Maybe it wouldn’t be a big deal.

“OK, let’s start with your résumé. Where have you worked before?”

Lionel sighed. “Forget it,” he said, standing.

“No, c’mon, you’re here! Why not just let me see it?”

Lionel had no idea how much the sigh he made, a long *phsssssh* sound, resembled Mr. Debret’s exhalation from his job interview, years ago. He let the paper fall from his hands onto the desk.

“Oh. The Sex Factory.”

“You must be pleased it’s shutting down.”

“Excuse me?”

“You were always out there protesting. I recognized you.”

Steven Oratz suddenly seemed very interested in the résumé.

“Let’s just do this instead of talking... about that.”

“Fine by me.” Lionel sat down and crossed his arms.

“I mean... aren't *you* glad to be done doing... *that?*”

“What do you people think went on in there?” Lionel demanded.

Steven wiped his little mustache. “I'm sure I don't know.”

“But you knew you didn't like it so you protested and now it's moved to Taiwan.” Lionel grimaced. “I had some seniority there, not that I expect you to care about that.”

“Look, my job is to get you a new job. I want to. It's what I want to do. So why don't you tell me about your skills?”

“I can operate nervous system integration machinery. Also a heavy forklift.”

# # #

Four years after that, Lionel stopped for a beer at the end of his shift. Usually, he didn't go out with his co-workers, but his wife was out of town with the baby, visiting her sister. He was a little lonely, and a little bored, and a little thirsty. The decision was obvious.

After finding parking, he spotted the guys at the bar. They waved him over.

“Hey Lionel,” Trace said. “Stubby here's scared of the old factory.”

“I didn't say I was *scared*,” Stubby said, frowning. “I said it gives me the creeps. There's a difference.”

“I just wouldn't think a big strong war veteran like you would be scared—sorry, ‘given the creeps’—by an abandoned sex joint.”

“I heard rumors about the freaky stuff that went on in there. They said the government closed it down because of pervy stuff adulterating the... you know, the...”

“The orgasms?” Lionel said, prompting coarse laughter. Stubby blushed.

“I used to work there,” Lionel said, taking his first sip of beer.

“No!”

“I did.”

“Quit kidding around,” Stubby said, giving him a nervous punch on the shoulder but, at the same time, leaning away a little.

Lionel turned and looked him in the eye. “I'm not. I worked at the Sex Factory. It wasn't a big deal.”

“Yeah but... but *sex!*” Stubby was the youngest of the four of them. They worked together sorting packages at a shipping center for Malthus & Sons Political, LLC. Lionel was their shift supervisor.

“Just a product like any other.”

“I’m sorry, I gotta agree with Stubby here,” Trace said. “That’s something that should be personal.”

“Like religion? Shit, be glad people don’t feel that way about politics, we’d be out of work. Again, for some of us.” Lionel shook his head and turned to look at the bar. “I bet you get really irregular results.”

“Hey!”

“Don’t get mad at me just because I know what I’m talking about.”

“Sorry,” Stubby said. “But it’s weird, you know? Knowing that you... did that stuff.”

“It was pretty much the same as the jobs you guys do. Stand in your station. Move the product. Get it processed. Don’t damage the package.” Another sip.

“But it’s so personal.”

“You don’t think the politics you’re handling at work is?”

They were all quiet for a while. Then they watched the game.

The other workers had all had several more beers (and Lionel had switched to water) before they brought up the Sex Factory again.

“So, but like... *did* anything go on there? Like, you know?” Trace nudged him. “*You know.*”

“The most scandalous thing was that people working Refractory fell asleep some times.” Lionel sighed. “I should get going.”

At the door, he paused. “You know, when it was actually *here*, people could hear the words ‘Sex Factory’ without getting all kinds of crazy notions.”

# # #

The funny thing was, Steven Oratz wound up picking up shipments of politics from Lionel, since his office had an ongoing order and it didn’t make sense to send it through the mail. They weren’t exactly friends, but they were *friendly*. So when Malthus & Sons (a small company that had been started to supply the state capital) closed up due to trade pressure from Bremer Politikwissenschaft, Lionel went directly to him.

“I’m starting to feel like a jinx,” he said, joking, but not very mirthfully.

“Nah,” Steven said, “It happens to a lot of people. It’s the era of globalization, everything’s getting internationalized.”

“Hmph. Some things shouldn’t be, maybe.”

“Maybe. I won’t kid you though, it’s dry out there.”

“Come on,” Lionel said, leaning in. “I’ve got management experience... the nervous system stuff is a little out of date but I could catch up fast, I was good at that... I don’t want to be riding a lift, but I’ll do it.”

“Well,” Steven said. “Since you were in politics manufacturing, I might be able to get you something in allied trades. Basically in the policy field, just a little more... volatile. It’s a couple towns over, is that a dealbreaker?”

“Nah, but are the benefits good? My daughter has braces.”

“I... *think* there’s a dental plan, I can check. Do you have any, um, moral objections to... certain jobs?”

“What, is it another Sex Factory? I’ll do whatever, my family has to eat.”

Steven nodded. “OK. I do think you might be a good fit.”

That was how Lionel got an interview at the War Factory.