

Factory #234

The San Francisco of 2099 is not quite so different to 1999's San Francisco as Los Angeles or New York are to their 100-year-old counterparts, save the piercing neon that cuts through its murky, fog filled sky. If you were to spend some time reading those burning lines, the freshest might stand out, their neon tubes still unstained by the California smog. Sato Industries, freshly moved to San Francisco from their home in Fukuoka City, Japan, is the newest subsidiary of Kobayashi Group, a leading corporation on the scale of Disney-Comcast and Daimler Distributed Industries. Despite being quite new in the corporate sphere, Sato Industries is one of the leading manufacturing groups in the world. In only their first year, Sato Industries managed to outcompete their most direct competitors, Detroit United Motor Corporation and Euromanu International, a subsidiary of DDI. Now, in their first year in North America, Sato Industries had become the fourth largest employer on the west coast, thanks to their ownership and management of several former Toyota Motors factories. All this was good news for the young Mr. Takamori Sato, who, at the age of 27, had become the youngest quadrillionaire in history, and the fourth most valuable person on Earth. This story, however, is not about him, but about a man he employs, Mr. Aron McAvoy, a janitor at factory #234.

Mr. McAvoy is not a special man, in any sense of the word. He is of average height, perhaps a bit below it, and of average weight, if not a bit above it. He is a stocky, ruddy-skinned man with thin brown hair receding from his forehead and eyes that were beginning to fail him. He dresses quite plainly, usually in his corporate jumpsuit. He is not of any particularly interesting lineage; his parents were regular and so were his grandparents and their parents before them. Surely, if you were to trace his descent far enough you might find someone

interesting, a duke or samurai or soldier in the Khan's army, but the same can be said for any one of the very regular people around him.

Mr. McAvoy lives alone in a very bland, sparsely furnished apartment, much like all of the other people he works with, and most of the people he's ever met. Marriage and children are far too expensive for regular people nowadays, only the rich can afford marriage licenses and children are far too expensive for the commoner. His apartment has one room and a bathroom, exactly like the ones that his coworkers have. That is, of course, because they all have the same apartments, courtesy of Sato Industries' employee housing initiative, which strictly mandates and controls every aspect of their housing. It would be inappropriate to pretend that this is a special situation, though, as most corporations provide similar housing. Not that Aron McAvoy would care, as he only ever talks to his coworkers, like everyone else does.

This may seem curious to you, but you must remember that employment is life in 2099, especially so in a growing city like San Francisco. Aron McAvoy is a janitor, and so he lives a janitor's life. Maybe he could have been a businessman or a lawyer, but he was only ever average in school at best and never qualified for the ever-important scholarships that made it possible to afford college. Sure, he could have taken loans, but the McAvoy family has a history of low credit, and he wouldn't have made enough money to offset the debt and would likely have ended up bankrupt and in prison, like many other poor scholars. All that considered, Mr. McAvoy became a janitor.

If you were to ask Mr. Aron McAvoy if he was happy, he would certainly look puzzled for a moment before saying “I suppose,” or something to that effect. If you were to ask him if he had ever been in love, he might look despondent for a moment before saying “surely not.” These answers would surely be the same for nearly any worker you asked nowadays, love is a luxury. This is to say, being in love and pining for some idyllic figure of romantic desire on company time are severely discouraged. No corporation has the time nor the profit margin to tolerate pining, not even Meta-Amazon-Walmart Group.

Many emotions have been deemed non-profitable, particularly love, sadness, melancholy, and jealousy. All of these have been mitigated or eliminated entirely with several patented strategies, most of which involve a mixture of mood-altering substances and subliminal messaging. This has been remarkably profitable.

Mr. Aron McAvoy has likely never experienced true sadness, nor melancholy. He may have once felt jealous toward someone rich, although if you asked him, he wouldn't remember it. Love, however, he has most definitely felt, much to the chagrin of his supervisor. You see, the one remarkable thing about Mr. McAvoy is that his mother enjoyed reading enough to teach him how, fully.

All workers know enough of reading to perform their expected duties but reading for pleasure or for knowledge is strictly discouraged. It can't be outlawed, of course, but the corporations have their own ways of restricting books. The last book publishers were purchased in 2049, and the last book seller was purchased in 2054. They were shut down shortly after. The only way to get a book now is through black market deals, like a drug deal in the olden days.

Mr. Aron McAvoy has never bought a book, but he has read one, and he does still own one. He owns a copy of a long-forgotten romance novel, something pithy and cheap like the ones pumped out by the dozen to appeal to moms trapped in dull marriages starting in the 20th century. He couldn't tell you the title, either, as the century-old paperback has been falling apart for years and the title has long faded, and not just from memory.

It doesn't really matter, of course, whether Mr. McAvoy remembers the title, or if he remembers the story overall, because he remembers what it taught him. That pulpy fiction taught him how to love, in spite of corporate interests. Love, above all other discouraged emotions, is particularly dangerous. This is because not only is love an unproductive emotion, but it is also a remarkably revolutionary one, historically, and not easily redirected. Anger is discussed widely as the primary revolutionary emotion, and it most certainly has played a role, but it is one of the easiest emotions to redirect, and usually without the commonfolk noticing. Corporations and governments have long used fear and scaremongering to direct the anger of the citizenry at foreign organizations and vague nouns but attempts to weaponize love have not been nearly as successful. Attempts have been made, such as the celebrity fueled 2000's and the influencer craze that started in the late 2010's, but the maximization of profit was always held back by love and its child "compassion." So, like they did with the rest of the unprofitable emotions, the corporations did away with love.

Before you assume that Mr. Aron McAvoy's revolutionary love will tear down these authoritarian corporate powers, remember that his home and his livelihood is owned by Mr. Takamori Sato's corporation. Mr. Sato, of course, doesn't care about Mr. McAvoy's desire to love, because he doesn't care about Mr. Aron McAvoy at all. All that Mr. Sato particularly cares

about, save maybe his collection of expensive art, is maximizing the profits of Sato Industries. Mrs. Ophelia Winslow, Mr. McAvoy's manager, and head of the maintenance department at Sato Industries, also doesn't particularly care about Mr. McAvoy. This isn't because she's a terrible person, or that she's a horrific profit-hound, but instead because she is a good worker. She maximizes the profit that her employees make, she optimizes the inefficiencies in her department, and she hasn't felt an unprofitable emotion in years. Her devotion to the company, to Sato Industries, is so complete that she, when confronted with Mr. Aron McAvoy's confession of love, felt entirely compelled to dismiss him, effective immediately. Don't suspect that she felt terrible about this, or that she enjoyed it cruelly. Mrs. Ophelia Winslow simply couldn't care what happens to Mr. McAvoy, she will just hire another employee, with fewer emotions. Mr. McAvoy, on the other hand, is very much out of luck.

Fuck. How could I have messed up this bad? If it weren't for that damn book I wouldn't be here, would I? But I had to go and read that garbage and fall in love, didn't I? I should have known that Ophelia wouldn't feel the same, I should have known that she would have reported me, I should have known that I'd get fired. But I'm a damn fool, aren't I? If only, if only, if only.

After she fired me, I didn't even have the time to clear my desk or pack a bag, I just grabbed the damn book and a change of clothes and bundled it all up in a sack. By then, the Sato goons were there, and they threw me out on to the street. I knew what was going to happen, but I was still in shock when I hit the puddle on the sidewalk. My body was soaked in muck immediately, they'd taken my waterproof jumpsuit when I got fired. So, I wandered down

the 'Frisco streets, homeless, jobless, and without reason to keep going. They did away with the poor houses ages ago, something about "a drive to survive" fueling "them" to work harder so people like me can survive.

I guess finding a job now that I'm marked by Sato will be harder than I thought. I worked a damn long time for whatever corporation owned #234 at the time, and Sato doesn't like it when their ex-employees go on to work for competitors, and anyways, no one wants to hire a damn emotional fool like me. I tried to get another janitorial job, but the corporate world speaks fast, and no one would hire me in that sector, so I tried manufacturing, but Sato owns all the factories in town. Food has been automated, and retail is nearly automated, so I don't know what else there is for me to do. I suppose I'll live until I can't, in between the cracks of society.

Mr. Aron McAvoy died February 19th, 2100. He was 43 years old. He leaves behind no family and no loved ones. He was a loyal employee of Factory #234 for 24 years before exiting the workforce 6 months before his death.