Jeshawn Chrite

Every year I exist I realize how much dumber I was the year before. This year I take it out on a cigar every once in a while, today being no exception. The burning in my lungs feels a hundred times better than my awareness of what’s been going on around me. How I wish I stayed in Italy… How I wish I wasn’t so naïve. I can’t remember being a man that wanted more. I was always happy with what I could do to make things better, fun. Simplicity is my method, art my execution, wood my tool. Life was craftsmanship, totally unlike the hell I’ve surrounded myself with. There isn’t room for me here, not in this city, not in this factory.

I look to my left and let the blood rush to my forehead. I almost miss my target and turn my head back to the work I’m presented with. It’s a beautiful piece of work, but not of art. It isn’t warm to the touch, but rather cold.

Cold, and metal.

It’s just a hexagonal bolt in a hexagonal bolt. The simplest of all tools and the easiest to use, it’s an excellent supply for even the most skilled… at *making* contraptions. That hurts to ‘remember’, even after being here for nine years. It feels as if all around me there is nobody that thinks like me. I used to believe that America would be a change in my family’s life, that Detroit was the place to be if one wanted change for the better. What was there to change for the better? Who put that garbage in my head? Who else ever questions it? We showed up in 1899, eager to see what this new place had to offer[[1]](#footnote-1). We knew what we had and were proud of it and were ready to start selling again. We didn’t know it would be rejected.

“I’m just saying that we’ve got a lot to put up with. We have to remember that we aren’t the only ones in America[[2]](#footnote-2). We’re going to have some pretty tough competitors.”

“Is that not the beautiful aspect of it? You and I both know we’ve got our talents; is that not all we need?”

“Of course not, Romandi. We also need buyers, don’t forget that.” Bernini sets his end of the table down and I do the same. He was definitely telling the truth, although I was too blind to ever think it had any real value. All I could think about was my family, waiting for me back at what was their new home. They knew I was setting up shop with my partner that day and didn’t hesitate to celebrate once we got the awning up. The awning made it look authentic.

“All wood, all heart,” I wave my hands at the sign, “that should be our slogan!” It read “Bernandi’s Woodworks”, something I was ready to make into a local, respected name.

It’s true, I’ve noticed, that we wanted work. Many came along from other countries like Germany and Britain, yet we were blamed the most for ‘true Americans’ losing jobs. It makes sense that an entire race of people be hated for just being here[[3]](#footnote-3). It happened all the time in history, only it to be our turn this time... My question to the world, however, was that of *my* relevance to this. What did I have to do with any of this mix-up? My friend, my family, and I have known no end to racism since we arrived. They smash the workshop, vandalize our property, endanger my loved ones, and lie about us to the public— but why? I never came here for a job; I came here for my career. I had faith that I could do even better by moving part of a business to another level of consumers, and went with it. I only wanted to make things easier for those that I love, I only wanted to keep what we had going somewhere else. I brought my *own* work to do this with and, all of a sudden, it’s not even considered because of my immigration status and the changing times…

The changing times… I believed that a man lives a lifetime before he sees things change. The way humans dress and talk are always explainable, as it is done for convenience. The lifestyle of the city, however… It pains me to remember, for I see it with my own eyes every time I punch out on that clock. Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock, all that matters is the time on that clock. It never matters who would be affected by it, as we all work by it. Time is something that the people around me have grown accustomed to a lack of. Just another perk of living here, I suppose; I could never mean that in a positive way. People here are part of a system they’ve had to conform to in order to *survive*. They read a book that tells them how to take care of themselves, get a job at the nearest place hiring regardless of the position, and attempt to feed themselves. Nobody speaks of this desperation as there are many unemployed out here, hungry, diligent. This system is the same thing that put me out of business; it is the fault of these new and loud contraptions us workers build so tiredly. They require no style, no art, have no authentic value, and somehow caught the attention of the public. The idea was great, I must admit—a machine that gets you from point A to point B?[[4]](#footnote-4) Nothing living to worry about? Totally care free, void of need, the new American. I’ve been at this job for almost a decade now, and despite my heritage I believe that I am one of the most unlucky people on this planet. I’m surprised I made it this far.

There’s always so much going on that nobody stops to think what any of this change in direction means. I know cities to be full of life and original, like the carriages I used to make. Now it’s all made for convenience; cars instead of horses, jobs instead of careers, control instead of the power to change one’s own fate. We move forward, humans do. Why on earth would we decide to go in a circle after all this progress? It’s infuriating, seeing people leave here ignorant of what’s happening right under their noses. We live to work and work to live now, nothing in between and nothing more or less. The assembly line? The belt never stops because it’s the same belt. The oppression and unemployment is for the same cause as it has been before; a poorly rendered repeat of the past. My art, my blood, has proven useless, and then the outcome is complained about.

Another skilled profession, gone, to make room for the zombies occupying the positions around me.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The art has disappeared from this place, and I am an artist. I—“Ross, look at what you’re doing!” someone shouts at me. I almost forget to turn my bolts.[[6]](#footnote-6) The assembly line keeps moving.[[7]](#footnote-7)

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1. The first Italians to come to America emigrated from Northern Italy in the late 18th and 19th centuries. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tocqueville described in his book “A Fortnight in the Wilderness” how he and his friend came through many trials and tribulations out of curiosity; nobody around them thought that was very smart or even productive. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bernini was later arrested for committing a crime he didn’t do, a theft at a jewelry store across town. Although his alibi was perfect, he among many other Italian immigrants was blamed for taking jobs and being unable to be trusted. It was a common stereotype that the Italians were dishonest, unlawful people. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Martelle described in his book how revolutionary the automobile was, as it ‘replaced horses and carriages with loud and annoying engines’. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dean Herron of the Honors College at Wayne State University said in a lecture that people are farther apart when they seemed even closer together. The assembly line is a perfect example, as everybody wants to outwork those with enough potential to claim their jobs by means of effort output. It made people want to be the best and therefore get lost in their own worlds. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In Charlie Chaplin’s Modern Times he played a worker that stole from society when he couldn’t make an honest living. When he worked on an assembly line he barely had time to wipe his sweat. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The assembly line is an efficient way to mass produce a product that is still used today. Romandi began working at a factory that featured this once he saw his workshop desecrated and overall destroyed. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)