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ENGL 2367- Composition II

Sandy's

“Hey, Perry, pick up the pace!” my boss, Alf, reprimands me with his gruff voice. It's just another normal day working at Sandy's, where I spend all day every day making submarine sandwiches under the watch of burly, bearded, and very serious-about-his-job Alf. I'm hungry and tired, but the bills need to be paid. I try not to get discouraged; I am lucky to have this job. Having a job means I have a place to live. Having a job means that maybe, someday, I can get a better job and have a future. Not having a job means that I have no future. Employers would look at my record and turn me down immediately, wondering how the hell I've made it this far in life without working. Work experience looks good, no matter what kind of work it is, because being a hard worker is the best thing you can be. Having work experience shows you *want* to work. I glance over at one of the small televisions we have here and see a reporter on a popular news show talking about how it's becoming more and more popular for people to dedicate themselves to more than one job and how *spectacular* it is that Americans have such great work ethic; it is why we are one of the wealthiest countries with the happiest citizens, after all. The word *propaganda* immediately comes to mind, but I shove it down. I would never say anything like that out loud here; I don't want to get fired, after all. I don't even want to *think* about what would happen if I got fired. It would go on my record forever. I would never pass a background check again. My termination would be attached to my identity until I die; prospective employers would pull up my history and see how unproductive, how lazy, and how careless I was and it would be

over for me. I wouldn't stand a chance. I don't want what happened to Courtney to happen to me.

She was my favorite coworker and a friend. We couldn't have a lot of fun at work, of course, but we would exchange smirks behind Alf's back whenever we thought he was being a hard-ass. What I really miss was walking to and from work with Courtney. We lived in the same apartment building and always worked the same shift, so we would always walk together. We talked about a lot of things on our walks: ridiculous things that happened at work, our hopes and dreams, and our childhoods. It meant a lot to me to really connect with someone for once and have a real conversation that wasn't about how to be the best employee or why work is great. She also saw beauty everywhere. She would point out how pretty the flowers were outside or how beautiful the sunset was. She was authentic and cared about real things you can touch; not ideals. Courtney was fired from Sandy's. She was always really even-tempered, but one day she surprised everyone by yelling at a customer. Courtney accidentally put onions on the sandwich of a customer who specifically stated he wanted no onions. The price of this defective sandwich would be coming out of Courtney's paycheck, so I'm sure she was already upset. It wasn't enough for the guy to have her to make another sandwich for him, though. He had to make it a big deal to yell at her. He called her stupid and worthless and shouted that he didn't understand how she wasn't outside with the other people like her: the homeless people who stand around begging because they are too lazy to work. It was bad. He wouldn't shut up until Courtney interrupted him and yelled back, "Get someone else to make your sandwich! You can't talk to me that way! Step the fuck back!" This great offense was enough for Courtney to get fired. I remember Alf loudly storming over from out of nowhere, probably alerted from all the loud sounds, and dragging Courtney away. After that, I would see her around my apartment building

sometimes, but we didn't talk anymore. I tried to speak to her, but she would always turn away from me. Every time I saw her, she looked skinnier, like she was fading away until one day she disappeared. I haven't seen her in a long time now. She probably couldn't make it without a job; and she was never going to have one again. I would have helped her if I had money to spare. Maybe the reason she didn't talk to me after her termination was because it would only make her sadder: she knew I would try to help but really not be able to do anything.

“Hurry up!” a customer's voice snaps me out of my reminiscing. Courtney is on my mind as I bite my tongue to stop myself from saying something I'd regret. I don't want to make her mistake and get fired over an altercation with an idiot customer. Getting fired even *once*, even from a fast food job, determines your entire future. I take a peek out the window and see a few homeless people, including young adults like me, asking passersby for change. It's 93° outside, and the homeless people look unbearably hot. Some of their clothes have sweat stains on them. I see a guy just like me routinely wiping his forehead, presumably of sweat. All of them look like they are in pain. I do *not* want that to be me. I might be miserable here, but at least we have air conditioning. “PERRY! FASTER!” Alf's voice startles me, and I draw my attention back to the sandwich I'm making. My stomach is rumbling, and being around all this food doesn't make it any better, but I'm getting paid. I really wish employees got a food discount at this place. I'll probably have enough money to buy some substantial nutrition after I pay my rent this time. I would kill for a pizza right now. They're so simple and yet so perfect. I love the cheese oozing off of a triangular slice, the tangy sauce, and the spicy pepperoni. I love the soft, buttery crust of a good pizza, but, mostly, I love how it's hot. A pizza sounds so good right now. A whole 16-inch pizza, hot right out of the oven...

Even with the tantalizing thought of pizza on my mind, I quickly get through the line of people, and feel rewarded with the downtime I get to have. I still have to work, of course, but I can breathe a little now. I start refilling the condiment bottles. I'm so hungry. I glance over at Alf, and he's conversing with my coworker, Lottie. Good. I pick up a slice of cheese and quickly put it in my mouth. I chew quickly. It doesn't really even help with my hunger, and it's certainly not the pizza I crave; it's pretty bland. I don't have much longer on my shift, so I enjoy this leisure time and clean up a little bit. Time goes by pretty quickly, and I walk over to our point-of-sale system to type my employee ID number and clock out. I feel a presence looming over me, but I force myself to stay calm. It could be nothing. "Perry," I hear Alf's steady voice, "Will you come talk to me in the break room?"

I feel like I can't breathe. *Stay. Calm.* It could be nothing. I nod and silently follow Alf to the cramped break room. I feel uncomfortable in this room even when I'm just hanging out here on my 5 minute break. Alf asking to talk to me is out of the ordinary. He sits down in one of the chairs at the small table, and I follow.

After a few quiet seconds, Alf says very calmly, looking me straight in the eye "Perry, you know I care about you. I consider you to be almost like my own child. I hate to think about your fate," he looks up at me earnestly, "but I have to let you go." My world is spiraling around me during Alf's peaceful delivery.

"What?" I question, in shock, "Why?"

Alf takes a deep breath and states, "Another employee reported to me that they had seen you stealing. Did you eat a slice of cheese you did not pay for on your shift today, Perry?" All the color drains from my face. He knows the answer, he surely checked the security cameras, but

he wants to hear me say it. Alf seems kind, but I never trusted him fully to really care about my well-being. Considering that he is sentencing me to a life of starvation and poverty now, I can see that I was right.

“I was hungry,” I said, simply.

Alf shakes his head, “You know the rules. And as much as I like you, Perry, I have to say I’m very disappointed. If you were a real worker, you know that work is a suppressant to anything else. The more you work, the more it fulfills you. What is it that they teach you the first day of 1<sup>st</sup> grade in school?” he challenges me.

“The more you work, the less you need,” I mumble under my breath.

Alf nods importantly, “Taught in every class. Do you see those beggars outside this restaurant every day? They need food so much because they *don’t* work. And, honestly, that’s what they deserve. They must have gotten themselves into that situation somehow, by thieving as well or maybe just laziness. You were my favorite employee, worked more than anyone else here. I just couldn’t be more surprised is all,” he collects himself, “But it doesn’t matter how much I like you, I have to let you go.”

There is nothing I can say. I know I can’t beg to have my job back. I turn my back and walk away. I walk out the back door so I can take the shortcut to get to my apartment. I’m going to go home, knowing that because of this, I am going to die. I am going to die because I can no longer work as a blacklisted person, and I cannot buy food to eat if I cannot work. I am going to live in my apartment for as long as I can. I’ll eat until I run out of money completely. Then, I will die. I’ll enjoy my shelter for as long as I can. I’ll try to enjoy the end of my life.

Walking along, I glance over at the dumpster where we throw all of our food that we don't sell during restaurant hours. There's a lock on it to keep anyone out except for those authorized (the waste collectors and restaurant management). Sunlight hits the lock, and it glints at me, silver and shiny. Is it mocking me? Are the things I learned in school true, and this is the universe's way of letting me know how badly I messed up and how I got exactly what I deserve? I let out a sigh. *It isn't fair.*

## Analysis

In my short story, “Sandy’s,” I attempted to write a unique dystopian story but also incorporate elements of the genre that I have encountered before in dystopian novels. The themes from well-known dystopias that I explore in my own story are lies being accepted as truths, hunger, poverty, and the death of a character the protagonist found solace with. Like other dystopian stories, I wrote my story to reflect current societal concerns.

In my story, working hard is valued above all else. My character, Perry, is hungry but his boss, Alf, believes Perry should not be able to feel hunger because Perry works enough to not have any other needs. This is a belief of the dominant culture. A newscaster in my story reports that working more makes people happier. It is taught in school that if you work, you need nothing else. All of these opinions are presented as facts. If every textbook you have ever read and everything you have ever been told supports an idea as the truth, it is very difficult to argue and say that, actually, that idea is a lie. You would not have any sources backing you up; you would only have your word and whatever proof you can provide, which would likely be discarded with “facts.” This motif of lies being told as facts appears in many dystopias. In George Orwell’s famous dystopian novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the protagonist, Winston, describes how the Party, the oligarchic ruling class of Oceania (the superstate in which he resides) decides what the truth is for everyone by controlling what all the records say. If all records tell the same lie, that lie passes into history as the truth.

Poverty and hunger play a major role in my story, as they do in many dystopian stories. One example of these themes being examined in dystopian literature is the very popular book, *The Hunger Games*. In *The Hunger Games*, the stratification of wealth is very evident in the nation of Panem. Many people starve to death because of the lack of food. However, in the

privileged Capitol, where the wealthiest and most powerful citizens reside, there is an abundance of food of many varieties, and much of that food goes uneaten. There is no actual food shortage in Panem; the poor just do not have access to food like the wealthy do. In my story, I brought light to how there is no reason Perry should struggle to eat because food is wasted at the sandwich shop every day. Perry cannot afford to buy food, and no one has enough compassion to let Perry eat a little bit without paying for it, even though it is likely that *no one* would buy the food and it would go to waste. The food that no one eats could go to Perry or the homeless people outside the store, but it does not because of greed and because of the belief that certain people deserve food more than others, because of their wealth.

In “Sandy’s,” the character of Courtney is a figure that comforts Perry despite the conditions he is in. Neither of the characters are happy with their lives, they are aware that things are bad for them, but they are able to find some happiness in each other’s company. They find solace in each other. Similarly, in *The Hunger Games*, Katniss befriends Rue during the games, under horrible circumstances, but still builds a loving and trusting relationship with her during a time when it is very difficult to trust others. In *The Hunger Games*, the characters participating in the games are to kill each other in order to win (and survive). In “Sandy’s,” it is displayed that not everyone can be trusted by Lottie reporting Perry’s theft to Alf. Because of the possibility of a betrayal that could lead to death, Perry’s friendship with Lottie is quite notable. As a dystopian story, the characters are not free and their lives are at the mercy of those that enforce the rules, so Courtney disappears and most likely dies because she failed to follow the rules, leaving Perry behind. Rue in *The Hunger Games* also dies, unable to survive in the situation that she and Katniss were thrown into. Both Rue and Courtney can see the beauty in life despite their lives being quite bleak: Rue is known for her love of music, and Courtney loves nature. They both

form a bond with the protagonist under terrible circumstances, and they both unfortunately die while the protagonist lives.

In “Sandy’s,” I wrote about a young adult who works many hours at a sandwich shop yet still struggles to eat and pay the bills. This sounds like the situation of many people who are alive right now instead of fiction. I exaggerated the circumstances of the world that Perry lives in to make the situation truly dystopic, but there is a basis in reality. Dystopian author Christopher Brown says in his article *Dystopian is Realism: The Future is Here if You Look Closely* that “[t]he process of writing a literary dystopia helps you realize the extent to which you are already living in a real one. I read several American dystopias this past year after finishing my own, and their futures all read like immanent presents” (“Dystopia is Realism”). My story was purposely written in order to display current societal problems and what life could be like if matters worsen. Writer Alexandra Samuel states that “[d]ystopian fiction has grown in popularity precisely because it takes our generalized anxiety about ... social dysfunction, and consolidates it into something that is specific and eerily imaginable. Dystopias put a synthetic face on the dangers of a complicated world, and make the consequences of today’s choices concrete in an imagined tomorrow” (“How to Find Hope”).

## Works Cited

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