

EAE 0422 A

CODE SUJET : EHP 12

SUJET JURY

SUJET CANDIDAT N°

DOCUMENT A

Denise worked all the hours God sent and her union allowed. The chances of overtime were good and so was the money, although of course she didn't do it for that. She lived on practically nothing and burnt whatever money she didn't spend. Working was something that cut down the time and filled up life. Working, it was easier to become zero. The mind was concentrated.

She worked in the kitchens of a bus depot in Seven Sisters. She was part of a team, the members of which were supposed to swap duties every day: Day One, on the till; Day Two, pouring the tea and serving the customers; Day Three, cooking the meals; Day Four, sandwich making; Day Five, stock-taking and ordering; Day Six, dishwashing. Every Day was Day Six for Denise. She refused to swap duties. From the first day, she had known it was the job she needed, the one best-suited to her task. Every other duty involved people. She spent each working day pushing a trolley between rows of tables, collecting cups and egg plates and wheeling it into the kitchen where, stooped and blankly staring at the mildewed wall, she washed each cracked green cup, each thick greasy plate, each plastic knife, fork, spoon and tea spoon with loving and religious attention, in water so hot and detergent so harsh that her hands turned a tender red and began to crack and peel.

The other girls in the canteen, four on any one shift couldn't understand her but were glad that there was someone fool enough to take the lonely, mucky job of dish-washing from them. They thought her mad and kept a respectful distance. Only Carmen, the wide, black and joyous supervisor, recognized that Denise was driven by some urge or other.

'Honey, is you mad or something?' She would ask. 'Why is you always washing?'

'Leave her alone, Mrs Hope,' the others would call, 'she's happy and so's we.'

Carmen would not leave be. 'Why don't you go on the till for a short while? Wash, wash, wash. Take you to church and you would sit in the font.'

Denise would look up vacantly through the steam that rose sluggishly from a sink of suds and dishes.

Carmen could not understand, but then Carmen, wide and beautiful, was on the side of brightness and of life. A tri-coloured bandana wrapped round her large and handsome head, she filled the greasy kitchen with her idiosyncratic versions of jumbled hymns and pop tunes from the radio.

'Honey', she would tell Denise in the quieter moments of the day, 'the Lord gives us troubles and gives us something to fight them back and He is joy itself. He is fun and good time. He is a Saturday night and a bottle of sherry with your husbands and friends. He is peace and he is a cuddle, too. Do you know of the Lord, Denise? I know you don't for I can tell that way. I can see by your mopy way that you won't recognize Him if he come up and bite your backside off. You the most definitely Lordless thing I seen ever.'

Denise, silently, supposed she was. Being Lordless was getting close to zero, she supposed.

'I prays for you and you not grateful one bit.'

Denise didn't want a prayer. She didn't want her name on anybody's lips whatever.

'Know what?' Carmen would say, cracking an egg and plopping it into a bucket-deep frying pan brimming and snapping with bubbling oil. 'What we all want is fun. A little joy. We all wants that. Why, even an octopus likes to get tickled, you know.'

Denise withdrew even further into herself. What Carmen said was only half the story. Joy had to be paid for, it didn't come free. No, the octopus, after that quick tickle, was grabbed and dunked in boiling water to make a soup out of him. Now whereas Carmen would have thought the tickle worth the price, Denise felt you need only learn a lesson so many times before it stuck: you snatch joy from misery and what you get is more misery and, knowing what joy is, misery is harder to bear. Think on that, thought Denise, and then you'll love zero like me.

As the months passed, Denise communicated less and less and words were replaced by brief nods and curt gestures.

'What words done to you that you don't use them no more?' asked Carmen, strangely hurt.

Carmen and her girls fell in with Denise's ways but less willingly as time went on. These girls liked laughs, and work was only bearable if it was like a joke shared in good company. Denise really dragged things down.

Carmen did not give up. A supervisor is like a mother to her girls and Denise was one very strange daughter.

'Was it a man made you feel this way?'

Denise flicked back a greasy thread of hair and dunked another trayload of cups into the sink.

'Honey, you just rude. When I says a thing you don't answer me back. You just plain-as-plain-can-be rude.'

Carmen told the girls to leave Denise alone. 'For she is tapped. She is soft in the head and it is probably catching.'

That was how it was. That was how Denise wanted it. That was how she thought it had to be.

No friends. No talking. No nothing. A scruffy nun of a woman.

James Friel, *Left of North*, London, Macmillan, 1987.

DOCUMENT B

LONDON LABOUR AND THE LONDON POOR. -- THE STREET-FOLK.

The life of the coster girl

"My mother has been in the streets selling all her lifetime. Her uncle learnt her the markets and she learnt me. When business grew bad she said to me, 'Now you shall take care on the stall, and I'll go and work out charing.' The way she learnt me the markets was to judge of the weight of the baskets of apples, and then said she, 'Always bate 'em down, a'most a half.' I always liked the street-life very well, that was if I was selling. I have 5 mostly kept a stall myself, but I've known gals as walk about with apples, as have told me that the weight of the baskets is such that the neck cricks, and when the load is took off, it's just as if you'd a stiff neck, and the head feels as light as a feather. The gals begins working very early at our work; the parents makes them go out when a'most babies. There's a little gal, I'm sure she an't more than half-past seven, that stands selling water- 10 cresses next my stall, and mother was saying, 'Only look there, how that little one has to get her living afore she a'most knows what a penn'orth means.'

"There's six on us in family, and father and mother makes eight. Father used to do odd jobs with the gas-pipes in the streets, and when work was slack we had very hard times of it. Mother always liked being with us at home, and used to manage to keep us employed 15 out of mischief -- she'd give us an old gown to make into pinafores for the children and such like! She's been very good to us, has mother, and so's father. She always liked to hear us read to her whilst she was washing or such like! And then we big ones had to learn the little ones. But when father's work got slack, if she had no employment charing, she'd say, 'Now I'll go and buy a bushel of apples,' and then she'd turn out and get a 20 penny that way. I suppose by sitting at the stall from nine in the morning till the shops shuts up -- say ten o'clock at night, I can earn about 1s. 6d. a day. It's all according to the apples -- whether they're good or not -- what we makes. If I'm unlucky, mother will say, 'Well, I'll go out to-morrow and see what I can do;' and if I've done well, she'll say 'Come you're a good hand at it; you've done famous.' Yes, mother's very fair that way. 25 Ah! there's many a gal I knows whose back has to suffer if she don't sell her stock well; but, thank God! I never get more than a blowing up. My parents is very fair to me.

"I dare say there ain't ten out of a hundred gals what's living with men, what's been married Church of England fashion. I know plenty myself, but I don't, indeed, think it right. It seems to me that the gals is fools to be 'ticed away, but, in coorse, they needn't go 30 without they likes. This is why I don't think it's right. Perhaps a man will have a few words with his gal, and he'll say, 'Oh! I ain't obligated to keep her!' and he'll turn her out; and then where's that poor gal to go? Now, there's a gal I knows as came to me no later than this here week, and she had a dreadful swollen face and an awful black eye; and I says, 'Who's done that?' and she says, says she, 'Why, Jack' -- just in that way; and then 35 she says, says she, 'I'm going to take a warrant out to-morrow.' Well, he gets the warrant that same night, but she never appears again him, for fear of getting more beating. That don't seem to me to be like married people ought to be. Besides, if parties is married, they ought to bend to each other; and they won't, for sartin, if they're only living together. A man as is married is obligated to keep his wife if they quarrels or not; and he says to 40 himself, says he, 'Well, I may as well live happy, like.' But if he can turn a poor gal off, as soon as he tires of her, he begins to have noises with her, and then gets quit of her

altogether. Again, the men takes the money of the gals, and in coorse ought to treat 'em well -- which they don't. This is another reason: when the gal is in the family way, the lads mostly sends them to the workhouse to lay in, and only goes sometimes to take them 45 a bit of tea and shuggar; but, in coorse, married men wouldn't behave in such likes to their poor wives. After a quarrel, too, a lad goes and takes up with another young gal, and that isn't pleasant for the first one. The first step to ruin is them places of 'penny gaffs,' for they hears things there as oughtn't to be said to young gals. Besides, the lads is very insinivating, and after leaving them places will give a gal a drop of beer, and make her 50 half tipsy, and then they makes their arrangements. I've often heerd the boys boasting of having ruined gals, for all the world as if they was the first noblemen in the land.

"It would be a good thing if these sort of goings on could be stopped. It's half the parents' fault; for if a gal can't get a living, they turns her out into the streets, and then what's to become of her? I'm sure the gals, if they was married, would be happier, 55 because they couldn't be beat worse. And if they was married, they'd get a nice home about 'em; whereas, if they's only living together, they takes a furnished room. I'm sure, too, that it's a bad plan; for I've heerd the gals themselves say, 'Ah! I wish I'd never seed Jack' (or Tom, or whatever it is); 'I'm sure I'd never be half so bad but for him.'

"Only last night father was talking about religion. We often talks about religion. Father 60 has told me that God made the world, and I've heerd him talk about the first man and woman as was made and lived -- it must be more than a hundred years ago -- but I don't like to speak on what I don't know. Father, too, has told me about our Saviour what was nailed on a cross to suffer for such poor people as we is. Father has told us, too, about his giving a great many poor people a penny loaf and a bit of fish each, which proves him to 65 have been a very kind gentleman. The Ten Commandments was made by him, I've heerd say, and he performed them too among other miracles. Yes! this is part of what our Saviour tells us. We are to forgive everybody, and do nobody no injury. I don't think I could forgive an enemy if she injured me very much; I'm sure I don't know why I couldn't, unless it is that I'm poor, and never learnt to do it. If a gal stole my shawl and 70 didn't return it back or give me the value on it, I couldn't forgive her; but if she told me she lost it off her back, I shouldn't be so hard on her. We poor gals ain't very religious, but we are better than the men. We all of us thanks God for everything -- even for a fine day; as for sprats, we always says they're God's blessing for the poor, and thinks it hard of the Lord Mayor not to let 'em come in afore the ninth of November, just because he wants 75 to dine off them -- which he always do. Yes, we knows for certain that they eats plenty of sprats at the Lord Mayor's 'blanket.'

Mayhew, Henry, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1851

DOCUMENT C



Picture No 10416212

Date circa 1910

Description Ironing Room at Barnardo's Girls' Home, Barkingside

Details Ironing room at Barnardo's Home, Barkingside, Essex. In 1873, Thomas Barnardo set up, a Village Home for Orphan, Neglected and Destitute Girls at Barkingside. As well as accommodation, the girls were given training to equip them to earn their own living.

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