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ENG 362-1: Literature of Diversity

29 April 2019

### The Tale of the Shopkeeper's Twins

Once upon a time, in a little town on the coast of a mighty river, there lived a wealthy shopkeeper and his wife. The shopkeeper was wealthy because of his savvy business sense; he knew how to turn ten gold coins into a monstrous profit, and so, his shop became the most successful shop in the whole town. All the other townspeople knew of him, envied him, and wished to be in his shoes.

The shopkeeper had dreamed of such success from a young age, but now that he had finally obtained it, his heart set itself upon a new goal. He wanted a child. Specifically, he wanted a son, so that he could train the boy to eventually take over the shop someday. "If I never have a son," he was wont to tell his wife, "what will happen to the shop after I die? The last thing I want is for it to fall into the hands of those who were not there at its inception...or worse, for it to be closed down forever. I started this business, and my descendants should be able to keep it alive long after I have gone!"

"I agree," said his wife as she doodled pictures of babies into her sketchbook. "We need to have a son as soon as we possibly can."

For many years, the shopkeeper and his wife tried for a son, and for many years, nothing happened. Then, just as they were beginning to think that all hope was lost, the shopkeeper's

wife found out that she was pregnant. She immediately told her husband, and they rejoiced at the prospect of a son to continue their legacy.

When the time came for the shopkeeper's wife to give birth, she bore her husband twins. One was the boy they had wanted. The other was a girl. The shopkeeper and his wife were perfectly happy with this. They had the heir to their family business, and as an added bonus, they had a daughter who could be taught how to take care of the house. They swore to love both of their children and teach them their lots in life.

The twins grew up. The boy, James, was a sensitive soul who cried at the slightest provocation. He was happiest when writing poetry in his little golden notebook, and he did not show the slightest bit of interest in his father's shop. His dream was to travel the world as a wandering poet. Although his father tried to teach him how to run the family business, James never seemed to absorb anything he was taught; furthermore, his math skills were quite poor, and he did not have an enterprising bone in his body. It was often said around town that the day James took over the shop would be the day the shop closed its doors for good.

His twin sister's name was Sarah, and she was everything that her brother was not. She was sharp-witted, business-minded, excellent with numbers, and even better at money management. As such, she took an interest in the family business at a very young age, and she would often listen in on the lessons her brother was receiving. She dreamed of running the shop someday. She knew that she had what it took to make it succeed. She did not, however, find any enjoyment in the artistic pursuits that captivated her mother and brother, nor was she interested in housework.

Unfortunately for Sarah, every time she asked her father if she could have a chance to run the shop when he was gone, he would always say the same thing. “I’m sorry, sweetheart, but that’s not possible. Your brother is the heir. You are a girl, and girls were not meant to run shops. They run homes.”

“But I don’t want to run a home!” Sarah replied on one such occasion. “I want to run the shop! James isn’t even *interested* in the shop! This isn’t fair!”

“It’s how the world is,” was all her father would tell her.

James, meanwhile, continued to lose himself in his poetry, and as a result, his parents grew concerned about his priorities. Eventually, his father took him aside. “Son,” he said, “the time has come for you to take your destiny seriously. When I am gone, you must run the shop in my place.”

“But I don’t want to run the shop!” James complained. “Sarah does! Give it to her!”

His father shook his head. “I can’t. It’s how the world is.”

Many years passed, and about three days after the twins turned twenty-one, the shopkeeper and his wife were both killed in a tragic accident. In his will, the shopkeeper left the shop to his son, James, and specifically specified that the shop must never be sold. James still didn’t want the shop, but he also didn’t want to ignore the last wishes of his deceased father, so he reluctantly took on the shopkeeper mantle. His sister Sarah, meanwhile, left home and moved to the big city, where she found work and prospered.

Two years later, James’s mismanagement and general lack of industriousness had led the shop to the verge of bankruptcy. It was clear that if he continued running the shop, he would run it straight into the ground...which was the absolute last thing that his father would’ve wanted.

Having never quite let go of his dream to become a wandering poet, but still wanting to save the shop for his parents' sake, he came up with a clever plan. The first step of his plan was to contact his sister in the city. "I need you, Sarah," he wrote. "Come at once. Love, James."

So Sarah returned from the city and asked "What do you need, brother?"

"I'm not very good at running our father's shop," he admitted. "I know I am the heir, but I think it would do better under your management."

"Well, you cannot just sell it to me," she told him. "Our father specified that the shop is never to be sold."

He nodded. "I know, but I was thinking that you could be a secret owner of sorts. I will still be the public face of the shop, but I will be only a figurehead, while you pull the strings behind the scenes. How does that sound?"

"That sounds wonderful," said Sarah with a smile.

So it was done. Although James was the owner of the shop in name, it was Sarah, for the rest of their lives, who truly ran the shop. As for James, he would often take vacations in order to finally become the wandering poet he had always dreamed of becoming. Both twins were happy.

**MORAL OF THE STORY: The world isn't laid out for you based on your gender. The world is how you make it.**

### Explanation

The main theme of this story was the subversion of gender roles. I used the characters of James and Sarah to challenge the “typical male” and “typical female;” she has a mathematical mind and wants to run the shop despite being a woman, while he, despite being a male, has no interest in the shop and instead wants to pursue less masculine pursuits, such as poetry.

I hope that I tried to make it clear that normal gender roles aren't necessarily bad, since both the shopkeeper and his wife were content with traditional masculinity and traditional femininity. However, I believe that if people don't want to live up to those roles, they do not necessarily have to. Such is the case with James and Sarah. Even though their roles have been assigned to them from birth by their parents, they both still chafe against those roles, wanting different things out of their lives than what their parents want.

It took me a while to figure out the ending. I considered an ending where Sarah's parents marry her off, I considered an ending where James simply runs the business into the ground, and I even considered an ending where the twins disguise themselves as each other. In the ending, this ending felt the most right to me. The ending--Sarah ran the shop behind the scenes, James got to write his poetry, and both fulfilled their dreams --helped both characters understand that they could craft lives for themselves beyond the roles that had been assigned to them (thus disproving their father's claim that “it's how the world is”). My aim is that it somehow taught the same lesson to the audience.

Since gender roles (and the subversions that can occur because of them) were such a running theme of the semester, I decided to write my story with that theme. I truly hope you enjoyed the story as much as I enjoyed writing it.