

Foreword

Welcome to StarMart is a series of short “snippets” following three months of the narrator’s daily work life at StarMart, an in-universe supermarket. The stories follow a form of the alliterative or tautogram constraint in which they only contain words starting with letters used in the titles. “Welcome to StarMart” for example, only uses A, C, E, L, M, O, S, T, and W. Please enjoy this look into the life of a reluctant supermarket employee and her quirky coworkers.

Welcome to StarMart

The worst three months of my life started with the StarMart Sixtieth Anniversary Sale, starting on October 22nd. Sixty cycles and corporate couldn’t care less about security or the well-being of their employees. Savage customers stampede through the aisles, extreme couponers argue with the cashiers, stocking the shelves takes three times as long—customers only extend this with their obstructions—and the messes lead to closers staying even later than they already are.

These “essential workers” are compensated with the state minimum wage and an annual employee slash Thanksgiving slash Christmas celebration. Welcome to StarMart, everyone.

Tomato Soup for the Soul

A torrent of apparently hungry families appear at the entrance of the store prior to opening. The manager hesitantly slinks over to the hoard of employees that started assembling at the front.

“A... major tomato soup price slash made print today,” she said.

“How much?”

She looks away. “StarMart owes money for each can purchased.”

The manager shies away following the onslaught of anxious protests. She heaves a heavy sigh.

“Obviously, the store’s unable to honor this, however, the owner hasn’t offered a solution. The store opens in ten minutes, so the matter falls on me,” she stalls, “Limit the sale to one per purchase per group. Let’s hope there aren’t any fighters among them.”

The hoard fights for the punishment of opening the portal to hell. The manager sneaks away to their office, probably using the room to hide from the unavoidable line of angry store-goers cashiers must turn away.

The task of opening the store lands on someone else. Though this life routinely leaves me a poor hand, fate looked tenderly upon me today.

Fred—poor Fred, lost the fight this time. My fellow fighters salute our fallen trooper as he marches off. Rest peacefully, my friend.

Cash or Card

“Cash or card?”

“Card.”

Although cash’s downfall has setbacks, counting dollars causes severe strain on a cashier’s delicate disposition. Our StarMart refuses renovations and refurbishments, so registers don’t automatically calculate change.

“Cash or card?”

“Cash.”

Any attempt at harnessing old high school algebra classes diminishes already depleting confidence and raises customer concerns. After a ridiculously drawn-out counting, customers are handed change.

A change receiver chuckles, “One dollar off, honey.” Dammit.

Ginny’s Charity Case

“Ginny, I can’t give you anything right now.”

“It’s a good cause!”

“Are Taylor Swift tickets considered necessities nowadays?”

Ginny huffs, stomping her shoes in irritation. “Can’t you help a struggling student in these trying times?”

Tyler giggles to himself in the next aisle, “Stop acting like your stepmom isn’t rich, Ginny, you’re angry that she grounded you.”

“This is ridiculous! You seriously can’t spare *anything*? You’d rather hoard your salary than give to a girl in need?”

Sigh. “I’m going to start stocking, stay here if all you’re going to talk about is the tickets.”

“Hey!”

Tyler concealed his smile, “I think I spotted a nickel in aisle twelve if you’re still taking handouts.”

“Can it, Tyler!”

I should have realized that she’d stop at nothing to have her cake and eat it too. I think that girl’s got a salesman’s intuition. I spotted her soliciting customers at the self-checkout, sneakily accepting any spare change the customers could tender. How she accomplished that sans Sofia seeing everything, I have no clue. I have to respect the hustle though, and I’m no snitch. All this to get some concert tickets, geez.

Halloween

Working Halloween night welcomes antics one would expect with a holiday. Associates are only allowed outfits which aren't obstructing of work attire. Employees observe Halloween with artistic-looking werewolf ears, witch hats, haloes, and wild wigs.

Lively whippersnappers enter, acquiring any leftover Halloween wares and leaving a line of litter afterward. Additional work on a lovely night.

Haley appears, wearing her everyday humorless attitude. Now, with her Wednesday Addams attire.

"How appropriate, Haley. How's Wednesday?"

"Homicidal."

Death Becomes Her

"Haley, Halloween's over, change clothes."

Sofia exasperatedly explains her side, trying to convince Haley of her mistake. She's changed her costume since Halloween, sporting a scarier disguise than before. Dead cheerleader, perhaps? Rather morbid, but hardly surprising. Haley shakes her head, her mouth turning to a slight smirk.

"My outfit choices aren't dictated by something as measly as a calendar."

"Regardless," Sofia sighs, "There are rules."

"But Día de los Muertos—"

"StarMart doesn't recognize that holiday, Haley. Don't act surprised."

"Seems racist," Haley scoffed.

"Oh, Dios mío—Stop that! Don't make me draft a report on this."

"Alright, alright. Calm down. Tomorrow my clothes shall be 'according to the rules.' At least as much as they are on any other day. Anything else?"

Sofia rubbed her temple, "Dismissed, Haley."

I Hope She Plays Hot to Go

Spending all shifts in the same spot in the same store... it'll push anyone to insanity. The playlist picked affects the temperament of the entire staff, and that's precisely the reason Ginny lost her AUX privileges. It's all Taylor Swift and only Taylor Swift. If anyone's a tortured poet, it's the store employees after listening to the same ten songs all the time. Overhyped album in aisle one!

Haley's playlist is okay, albeit a little too goth. Lucia, I trust sincerely and altruistically, song taste included. Sofia, I can't have a say, seeing as she's the head honcho. And it's her turn today, so there's that.

I, on the other hand, have impeccable taste. You probably haven't heard of the stuff I listen to. Too high-brow, too hard to grasp, especially if you're a local.

Anyway, I hope she plays "Hot to Go."

TikTok

Kids taste testing iffy items is the idiotic trend in this instance. TikTok influenced these ill-mannered toddlers into threatening their intestines, thirsting for infamy. Turns out, Tide isn't intended to inhale. Instructed to take off, the influencers trudge out, keeling over.

The Woes of Handy Manny

“What’s wrong with Manny? He’s working at half the speed as usual,” Sofia whispered.

“Not sure. We’ve never seen him act this way...”

Manny mopes down our aisle, dragging his tools along the tile.

Sofia scans the shelves, hoping to discover something to distract him. “M-Manny! Here, take this!”

She shoves a doll towards him, “Aquí! A treat for Yolanda!”

He takes the doll wordlessly, staring at the toy with tired eyes.

“Manny, are you alright? You’ve been in a mood all day.”

“My daughter... Yolanda.”

“What happened? She’s sick?”

“Yes... sick of me.”

This was the event that had him so moody?

“Manny, you aren’t serious,” Sofia stated.

“Sí,” he started, “Elena destroyed her dollhouse and she... said she didn’t want my help.”

Sofia tries to hide her annoyance with a smile as he went on. “She went on to mend the house all on her own.” Oh he’s tearing up now. “One day they aren’t able to differentiate a screwdriver and a hammer and the next they’re doing their own home makeovers.”

“Yes yes your daughters are amazing are we okay now?”

What started as soft sniffles turned to echoing sobs. Sofia distances herself awkwardly. Way to make the situation worse. Manny holds the doll to his heart, wailing over his daughter’s “old age.”

Nosy shoppers turn to evaluate the scene. Sofia sighs, whispering to herself, “Seriously?” “Okay, Manny,” she says, “You’re heading home. Move along now! *Ándale!*”

Sniffle.

Managers

Attempts at avoiding superiors are generally sure snafus. Managerial rates aren’t as generous as regular staff, so, as recompense, senses enhance at superhuman rates.

Enshrouding myself among snack aisles and granola stacks, Sofia explores and shouts after me. She stops suddenly, spinning around. She glares right at my spot, although she may not see me. Sofia steps nearer, showing a scowl.

“Get moving already!”

Banana

New banana bunches are big among buyers. Nervous bystanders avoid a band, a brooding bunch noisily babbling about. Associates and bosses alike beware, as bad apples antagonize and attack booths and aisles.

But alas, no befouled banana booths or bunches around. Noisy boys are... noisy alone. Annoying at best.

Are adults biased? Ageist? No, beat.

Territorial Disputes

Periodically, there's a sort of territorial dispute among the employees that Sofia is always left to resolve. Sofia attempts to referee available refrigerator space, ousting people's aggressively labeled lunches and regulating space through a spreadsheet.

These domestic issues endured despite Sofia's efforts at peace, and only persisted and evolved into increasingly drastic offenses. Tens of salads and sandwiches lost to the trash, dozens of stolen sodas drunk in protest.

"Is that... Tyler?"

Lucia turned to see Tyler teetering side to side atop one of the shelves.

"Tyler! Stop that this instant!"

The offender looked over at us, smiling as if the situation is acceptable.

"Lovely day, isn't it ladies?"

"Tyler," I droned, "Is this about the lunch thing?"

"Is this about the lunch thing?—Obviously! I'm trying to enact revenge!"

"I understand, stop thrashing around. It's dangerous."

Tyler scoffs, "The dangerous part is someone stealing lunches! I don't think I'm surviving another day sans-lunch, Tasha."

Tyler laughs, leaning over to stash the thief's packed lunch in the looming pile of dog toys on the top shelf.

"That'll show 'em! That'll teach 'em a lesson!"

"Sure, pal. Sure."