**Content Warning: this piece includes the mention of a suicide attempt and blood.**

Hello, I'm Sandra, I'm Spanish from Valladolid and I've been working at the Barbican Centre for 11 years and it's a real pleasure to participate in your project.

Let's see. The carpets are completely different. Before we had the same carpets on all the levels and now when they closed [the Barbican] they changed the ones for the Ground Floor, the ones for the Mezzanine, to the ones for the stairs. When they closed the first time because of Covid… and the Level 4 carpets they changed it a little while ago, but it looks very, very old. And it's because when there are events, they bring the trolley round and people drop things: they drop food, drink, and it’s very difficult to clean those types of carpets. It is very difficult.

A lot of the time, often a person or another company comes to clean it, much of the time it's up to us to clean it, but even so I think they are going to have to change it because I don't know that it gets cleaned at all. In other words, the marks continue, as much as you use the machine, because we haven’t got the right one to clean it. So we have to use one machine to clean the carpets, that’s more like an extractor. There are other machines: two types of machines that would be better. We don’t have those machines, so special people have come from outside and treat the same marks, the same stains, because of this type of carpet.

*What is the material?*

The material is completely different. Yes, the material above the 4th floor is very difficult to clean.

Very, very difficult. And they also changed, for example, the floor on Level 3 of the Garden Room, the wooden one, when they closed, but they left it until the last minute, they changed it and they put a floor that is also very bad. As a result it seems old, but it's new. They put it on a very difficult floor because in that area you can't use the machines, or chemicals, you can only use a mop and almost dry it. Then there are parties and they throw wine or they throw some drink or food on the floor. To clean it you can't put water on that floor because the floor lifts up; no machine can clean it.

I mean, we don’t have a way of doing things like this, this, this [as in a,b,c]. But we have different tricks to be able to clean it. Because you can't use chemicals, but from time to time where there are wine stains, stains won’t come out with water. And especially if, for example, I don't know, that is usually cleaned at 6am, things happen during the day when there are different events, so we go in and clean it. So we use different tricks I can't tell you about.

*They’re hoovers right? Or cleaners slash…*

Yeah, that’s it. Different tricks that we have there to clean, to look good because it needs to be seen to be cleaned not just cleaned. But of course, if we can't put on a machine, it's very difficult for us because it is twice the work, because if you use machines, well, hey, with the machine you do it faster than if you have to do it by hand. With a mop, it is much more difficult than if you go with a machine that does it faster. What happens is that, of course, there are different materials that cannot be machined. For example tonight, this Saturday right? No on Friday, on Friday, Rafa [Rafael] and I did a special job that was to wash and clean the floor of the Barbican Kitchen. So we had to move the tables, clean, and the boys helped us, they moved the tables with Rafa and I. Those jobs they send us them from time to time.

When there are special jobs and they offer them to you, your manager tells you, ‘Look, if you want to do it, do it’, and we spend all night cleaning there. And there, I know, they use three types of machines, to clean, sweep, then later mop the floor. The machine we use, it rotates, it's like a vacuum cleaner, but a wet vacuum cleaner, not like a normal one. It’s not a water cleaner because you have to use a mop, with very little water, which is not too wet so the carpet stays dry. If not, the moment it’s clean, when it dries, it leaves marks.

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*And what do you think about when you work?*

When are we cleaning? Sometimes. Sometimes we get angry. Sometimes we laugh. Sometimes it's hard for us. Many times. But well, then between us, the friends, how we make each other laugh. And when they come. Sometimes, security talk to us. And how about then? A few times, security talk to us, to see if we’re ok. What's up? Yes. ‘You don’t rest. Take a break, go outside for a bit. Get some air.’ I mean, they worry about us because they know we were going to work that night.

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Then we also meet the homeless.

*What’s ‘homeless’?*

Those who live on the street.

*Oh yeah homeless! [laughing]*

Doesn’t matter.

Who comes, for example. They’re here all day, so they already know us. And they come and talk to us, they know our names and all. And at Christmas, for example, we buy, my supervisor bought chocolates for them to say ‘Merry Christmas’.

*It’s a community. There are people who use this place.*

So they already know us from being there every day. They greet us and they even know our names and everything.

*Is there a person that you remember that came here? Is there someone that you remember, one of those people that you talk to regularly, that you can tell me about?*

Yes, there is. I remember and I haven't seen him for a long time. A long time. But I remember a man named Tom.

*Tom?*

Yes. And he looked older, but he wasn't that old, but he was. He was a little older, but he lived on the street and was very good with us. Well, he would go and pick up things from the tables. ‘Don't worry’, that's it. And he knew everyone's names. Then came other times, then it would change season, he wouldn’t come and then he’d come back. One of the times he came with the hospital bracelet people have after leaving the hospital and then we never saw him again. We do not know anything. Nope, nothing.

And there is another. We met him recently. When they [Barbican] opened after the pandemic, when they opened, I thought he had a problem with drinking. Well, he’s an alcoholic but very funny and he doesn't mess with anyone, he doesn't mess with anyone, he's in his world and he doesn't mess with anyone. And yeah, it’s true. He goes to all the concerts and he likes to listen to them. But of course, later, an hour later, when he has already had too much to drink, you know? That’s it, then he goes. And I, for example, since I don't work on Saturdays, on Sundays, he comes on a Monday and by the weekend he had broken his nose. He said, ‘I went out drunk and he told me I can't drink anymore.’

‘Sure, but you can't drink more. You have to watch out.’ And he's also very polite, he's very polite and very, you know, he doesn't, they don’t get in trouble.

There are some that, yes, there are some who are a little aggressive, but the ones that are a little aggressive, we try not to talk to them or anything, we try to do our work and if we see something on the table we say, ‘Yes, can we take it? Are they finished?’ But because we already know they come every day, you already know who you can talk to, who you can't, who, what deal [or relationship] you can have, if you can have a deal, if you can’t have a deal.

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To be honest, when the Barbican was closed, as we were used to working with a lot of people and facing customers, it was very sad because we were closed, not hearing any sounds or seeing anyone. To tell you the truth, it was very hard. One time, I had to clean something which was very shocking for me. It was when, on the 1st floor, a lady tried to commit suicide, she cut her veins and the ambulances came. The whole bathroom was full of blood, that was the first time I had to clean blood and it was hard because it was very depressing, but also because of the impact of the smell. The smell it stays with you… I don't really know how to explain it, it’s a very distinctive smell. I cleaned it with my supervisor, who at that time was [redacted] and the truth is that the Central Managers treated us very well, they told us that after we had cleaned that, if we wanted to go home we could go home. They were going to pay us either way and that, if we didn’t want to go home, that we should take at least 1 hour outside the building clearing our minds, going for a walk, getting a coffee or anything. I was forbidden to go back to the 1st floor toilets for a week by the Central Managers so I could protect myself mentally. And overall I was very well treated, it was the first time that I got training on how to clean blood. It was a very poignant moment and a hard moment, but we got it done and well, we are here to learn.

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It's also what I explained to you one day that our group, the one on the afternoon shift, we're very close, you know? Very, very together. But why? Because we help each other. In other words, we work a lot as a team. Because to keep such a big building you have to work as a team. ‘Well, I'm going here.’ – ‘I go there.’ – ‘Hey, I need help.’ – ‘What's up with people here? What are you doing?’

You move throughout the building. You go to the 3rd [floor]. At the 4th [floor], at least one. At least to Cinema 2 and 3. To Cinema 1. I mean, you're moving all over the building. You are not always in one area though, no. We leave, moving from one side to the other. For example, in the cafe after closing: ‘Do you want pizza?’, ‘Do you want a sandwich?’, And those from the Bars as well. And we don't have any problem.

The truth is we talk to everyone and they are very respectful. You can think that since you are a cleaner they are not going to talk to you, it doesn’t work like that no, no, on the contrary. Everyone talks to us. The managers are very good. There is also Jonathon. Jonathan. The truth is he’s very polite and whenever he sees us he always thanks us for everything. He is super polite. Mo and Cherry. I mean. Not only Centre Managers, but all the managers. The truth is that they treat us spectacularly and are very respectful, they are very very good, they respect us a lot. **BEN??**

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Many times. Let's see, because we take everything with the best philosophy, with jokes, we make each other laugh. But many times it gets hard because you go to the bathrooms, you’ve just cleaned them and the manager comes by or something happens, and they say that we have to clean the bathrooms again, they’re dirty and I say ‘well, I just cleaned it’. You can imagine what people do. F\*\*\*. I mean, they do everything outside, instead of where it should be. You say ‘Oh, my God!’ Or when they flood the bathrooms, for example, you have to run a machine to dry the water, then use the mop. Here the bathrooms often flood. But it's normal, because people use paper, instead of using the toilet paper, they use hand paper. Then they clog the toilets. That happens many times.