



CHANGING *THE LENS*



**Student
Sherry Ibrahim**

Changing the Lens

My vision came so slowly; I was beginning to fear I was going blind. I blinked and blinked, but everything was blurry and faded, like I was watching an old movie. I tried to make out my surroundings, but the harder I tried, the more terrified I became. I was able to tell by the darkness and the chill in the air that it was night. Nothing was familiar, and no one was passing by. No! This can't be happening. I can't be lost again... Not again!

And just like a chronically ill person clings to an unlikely hope, I found myself hoping – hoping for help, for luck, for something against all the odds. It's not the smartest or the most adaptable one who survives. As strange as it may seem, it's the naively hopeful one. And what did I have but hope anyway? What does anyone have but hope?

And just like a child trusts anyone who smiles at him, I found myself trusting a shadow approaching.

I prayed for help. I had no idea that God answers that quickly.

The figure approaching was lean and tall. His hair was blond and messy. And even though it was so dark, he had his sunglasses on. He took them off to give me a surprised look. They were covering his thick eyebrows and sharp blue eyes. His eyes resembled the ocean, dangerous yet deep and inviting. He wore sneakers, jeans, and a stained blue shirt. After taking few more steps toward me, he gave me an ear-to-ear grin which showed his front broken tooth. I couldn't put my hands on it, but something about him was quite familiar.

Suddenly, he came to a halt, and his grin disappeared, presumably noticing the fear that filled me bit by bit until it became apparent in the way I looked at him.

"What's wrong?" He asked, suspiciously.

"I wanted to go downtown, I asked for directions, but..." After all, I barely know him.

“Downtown,” he took a moment before saying, “that’s where I am heading. Come along.”

“I don’t know –”

“Come on, I won’t leave you here alone that late. Besides, I am your only hope right now,” he said giving me his ear-to-ear grin.

Something about the way he said it gave me chills, but he struck the one right chord. I had no other way out. I smiled briefly enough and started after him.

After walking for almost twenty minutes, I heard a loud sound that made my legs stop, my mouth open and scream, and the words choke in my throat – a **gunshot!**

“Go hide behind that tree there. I will take care of some business and come back to you,” he demanded.

“Business?” I asked, scared and steamed, but he had long been gone, running back to where he had found me and beyond, I assumed.

I considered running away, trying my luck for the second time, seeing where it got me, but I couldn’t. I was lost. I knew no one and no place to go to. I might not find anyone to guide me, or worse bump into that shooter. Every choice had its own risks, and the weird sense of familiarity I felt around him forced me to stay. I swallowed my fear, told myself that he probably had nothing to do with the shooter and was unarmed himself, and stayed where I am.

“You tried to run away, didn’t you?” He asked with half a smile on his face, making me curse my eyes for giving me away. He had one dark, swollen eye, a trace of blood, and a look that showed both remorse and pride.

“What happened? You’re beaten.”

“Just like I told you: I took care of some business,” he answered teasingly.

“To answer your question, yes I tried to run away. And the reason is *you*.”

“Might want to show some mercy to the one helping you reach your destination,” he said with a smile.

I didn’t feel his smile was real, but I couldn’t read what was underneath it.

“I will – when you tell me what happened.”

“I had no idea you were that adamant. You took that from your father?”

“Don’t you dare talk about him!”

He didn't answer, but I could see a genuine smile appear on his face, squeezing his eyes and making him look Asian. He looked as if what I said was somehow pleasurable for him, which made me angrier.

We walked for half an hour before he finally managed to say, "I went to attack the shooter."

"You what?!" I admired the confidence he said it with, but still something about it was off. Least of all, he wasn't as safe as I fooled myself into believing.

"He is bleeding. The paramedics are on their way."

I swallowed hard. *Run for your life*, my mind ordered, but I couldn't. Not before I knew why... not before handing him in. *Yes, that's the plan*, I thought. *I will contain my fear for the sake of that innocent man he injured. There must be a police station at the downtown. That's where I'll take him.*

But no, what if I was next? I won't let that happen. I will escape, and then I'll call the cops. I am not strong enough for him anyway.

I didn't run for two meters before I found him taking me by the elbow.

"You asked for answers, and now I am giving them to you. You can't chicken out now."

I tried to break free but couldn't.

"When I went back, I found him holding my brother, aiming a gun to his head. Five feet away, there was a body with a bullet in the head, drowning in its own blood. I couldn't let him kill my brother. Not when I was there. Not when I could help him. I went and hit him hard on the head. He bled and yanked my brother free. I made sure my brother escaped then came back to you."

I wasn't that easily trusting, but he seemed to be telling the truth: his eyes were teary and his voice trembling. He *was* telling the truth.

"But the cops may be searching for you."

"I am not afraid of them. I beat a killer who was threatening to kill my brother. That's no crime."

We continued our walk silently.

“See, our lives are made of choices. You may think I took the easy one, but I would disagree,” he said as if he was reading my mind and understanding my confusion.

“I just don’t know why you got back there. How did you know it was your brother?”

“I didn’t and it doesn’t matter.”

“That’s dangerous! If you continued to live like that you won’t live to be thirty.”

“You only enjoy the game you play – you only enjoy the life you live to the fullest.”

“Well, I enjoy watching others play.”

He smiled. “You can choose to be one of the millions of watchers. I choose to be a player, a champion. The players are the ones who practice, who stumble, who fall, and who get to their feet each time they do. They are the ones who have torn tendons and broken bones, yet they are the ones with the most joy. You never see a player giving a game up because he is in pain, do you? Ironically, it’s the exact opposite,” he paused for a minute, “that’s downtown, Grace.”

I didn’t recall telling him my name.

I doubted my memory.

“I never got to know your name.”

“Evan, Evan Brown,” he said with his genuine ear-to-ear grin and eyes burning with emotions.

And just like lightning strikes people walking in peace, his response struck my spirit, shook my inside, and made me sob so hard.

“Dad?” I finally managed to say.

He hugged me so tightly, giving me a strange sense of calmness and security, dissolving each shred of fear I had.

“What about you, Grace?” Mrs. Helen, my English teacher, asked – waking me up from a very long dream, hitting me with reality.

“Uh, would you mind repeating the question?”

“Who’s your role model?”

“My father,” I said without a moment’s hesitation. “He is the bravest person I have ever known.”

Epilogue

Maybe it wasn't a dream, after all. Since my father died last year, I've tried to communicate with him in every possible way. I've tried to feel his presence, but was never able to. Maybe God heard my prayers. Maybe God doesn't answer that quickly, but He answers anyway. He answers when one is ready.

I still don't know why I dreamed of the young version of him. The version I have never seen before. But again maybe it was real, maybe I went back in time and actually lived a moment of my father's youth.

The questions are abundant, yet the answers so hard to reach. Right after that dream, I did all I could to know if that incident really happened to him, but that got me nowhere. I spent many sleepless nights, pondering over the many different maybe's and what if's until it finally hit me: **it doesn't matter**. I could keep searching for answers but lose my life in the process. Sometimes we lock ourselves in the labyrinth of suffering. Indeed, we become watchers instead of players. We focus on the things we could never change. We focus on the past that has no turning back. We focus on our fears and insecurities. We focus on the negatives. We focus on the problems. We focus on losing our lives – *unintentionally!* And we start becoming more bitter with each passing day. And we start viewing happiness as something far away, something so out of reach. And we start living as dead.

But no, that won't be me. The choice is in my hands – my life is still before me. Emitting happiness will be my second name. Giving hope will be the purpose I live for. The dream was a life-changing message for me. Like many other things in life, it had many mysterious questions hiding inside, yet its purpose was crystal clear. **I choose to focus on the purpose.**