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The Whole Picture

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There's something about looking at life through a camera — it's as if it's not real, just moving in and out through frames while you stand stock still, watching. You're tempted to just reach out, to be part of that moment, but you hesitate, reluctant to ruin something so beautiful. Instead, you stay outside of it, content to capture it and hold onto a piece of the world, however small.

When the shutter snaps shut, a moment will be turned into a memory. Screams will freeze in place, smiles will remain on faces and words will forever be unsaid. By taking a photo, everything will last. He knows that.



It is chaotic — along just one street, there is blood and dirt, guns and children, flags and tears. Despite the madness of the moment, they carry on. Nothing can take the passion away from them — for more than thirty years they have suppressed their dissatisfaction with their government, and can only now express it. Some are yelling and running, some are lost, while others have tears caressing their soot-covered cheeks. He stands there and watches the scene unfold before him, noting their expressions but not their emotions.

Women and children are caught up in the tide of people; some have shed their head-scarves and are using them to draw attention. It's a perfect set-up, the colour and positioning

complement each other well. The lines of riot police act as vectors, directing attention to the blazing building in the background. The disorder of the people contrasts with the order of the police force, their zeal outshining the nervousness of the uniformed men. The colours are bright; the blue of the calm sky, the red of the fiercely burning fires and of caked blood on hands. No-one takes notice of him, for he is just another photographer attempting to capture the magnitude of their revolution. He prefers it this way.

He knows it's a difficult shot but he goes for it anyway, for he knows that this photo will be the image of his life. He prepares to take the photo, removing the cap and placing his eye to the lens. He turns the camera at different angles, attempting to fit the whole scene into the frame. He can't. It's all too busy and he can't seem to focus on just one place. Giving up, he takes a few steps back, deciding to take a photo before the people relent and the opportunity slips away. He leans in again, and rests his forefinger lightly over the shutter. Taking in a breath, he presses down, just enough so that the light begins to flash red.

Once.

Twice.

The third flash keeps going. He's confused — his camera has never failed him before. He clicks the shutter again, harder this time, and it flashes.

Yet still he sees nothing. Just red.

Still peering into the lens, he reaches his hand round and wipes gently. Bringing his fingers to his face, he rubs them together, noticing that the liquid coagulates.

Going back to the lens, he wipes at it blindly. The scene before him begins to clarify, first blurred with streaks of red, then clear with just a stubborn spot at the bottom. Finally, he straightens up to look at the lens properly. He notices only a few things as he moves round to the front of the tripod. Firstly,

he sees that the streets have cleared, with cans of tear gas scattered around. He doesn't remember when they began to throw it. Then he sees that only a few protesters remain, still shouting out slogans, but quieter than before. He can already see the headlines across the world — 'Egyptians give up fight'. The last thing he sees is that the dark stain on his lens isn't a stain at all, but that it's a person. There's a woman, younger than he is, lying at an unnatural angle before him. She is clearly the source of blood. Her body moves, an odd tremble that means she's alive.

He can feel it — this is the photo to move people to tears, to get people to write fierce, passion-filled letters to newspapers, the photo to give him a name as a photographer. It's obvious that she would be pretty, if it wasn't for the dirt-encrusted wound above her eyes. Her fingers are covered in the clotted blood, the same that coats his lens. Her lips twitch in a vain attempt to speak. She's perfect. He steps back again, places his eyes to the lens and moves his finger over the shutter. It begins to flash red.

Once.

Twice.

On the third flash, she looks up. She looks straight down the barrel of the camera, and into his eye. Her eyes are filled with hate, her gaze uncompromising. She sees him. He thinks he can see her, but only through the lens. She only just fits into the frame. He prepares to take the shot, but then hesitates. If he takes the shot now her eyes will be strewn across the world, but they will change. The bright flash will rob her of her strength, and turn it into defeat. The passion she feels will be lost and they will think that she failed. They will feel sympathy for her, and no empathy.

Taking the photo will falsify and manipulate her emotions, and photos shouldn't do that. Photos shouldn't tell lies, but they can't tell the whole truth either — they show only one dimension.

If he takes the photo, she becomes just another protester, just another person injured in the eighteen days of strife. If he takes the photo, he becomes just another photographer, just another who sees, but only through a camera. There will be no gain with this photo.



He moves to the front of the camera again. He takes one step forward, away from the lens. He begins to see the whole picture.



Lisa Green wrote this in 2011 when she was in Year 11 at Pymble Ladies College in New South Wales.