

The Knack of The Trouble Shooter in Markus Zusak's *The Messenger* (2002)

C. M. Sharmi Rachel

PhD Research Scholar

Registration number: 18211274012016

and

Dr. B. Beneson Thilagar Christadoss

Associate Professor of English

St. John's College

Palayamkottai

Affiliated to M. S University

Abishekapatti

Tirunelveli - 627072

Young adult fiction, a recent trendy sector of literature, influences the adolescent readers extensively. Markus Zusak's *The Messenger* (2002) deals with the life of a young adult, Ed Kennedy, who is the messenger and the message in the story. As the novel gradually reveals the encrypted messages to the messenger the abilities of the young man is put into trial. As the messenger, he overcomes his ordinary state to take bold decisions to solve other people's problems daringly instilling in the reader to inculcate in them such a proficiency to handle strenuous situations with ease. This research paper aims at analyzing the problem-solving skill of the protagonist who prefers wise decisions to bold decisions in bringing harmony in the lives of others.

Markus Zusak is an Australian writer who has an international acclaim for drafting novels featuring young adult protagonists. It is by his effective intervention through novels

he reaches young readers and instills countless valuable aspects of life. In this novel, *The Messenger* or *I Am the Messenger* (2002), the lead character introduces a twin skill that makes him worthy of the novel's title. It has five parts and the story deals with a bunch of youngsters and one among them is the protagonist. Each part is represented by the Aces from the pack of cards and the last part has the Joker. With each card a set of messages is delivered to Ed Kennedy, who is a cab driver and the messenger in the novel.

This novel begins in medias res with a terrific bank robbery. As Ed Kennedy saves the bank from the robbers he is placed in the pinnacle of praise by the newspapers. Newspaper propagates and acknowledges the efficiency of problem solvers and announces them as the heroes of the day. And Ed is a pawn showcased for being a problem solver at the time of crisis. Following this, appears an obscure card of Ace in his mail box. After deciding to break the mystery of the card he deciphers the contents of the card only to solve the problems of the people at the specific address. Once his deed is done the game continues with Ed and his unanimous cards. As expected, all the Aces from a pack of card arrive with its own adventures. At the end he is surprised to find the last card, a Joker indeed, in which his name and address, is scribbled. When Ed takes time to decode the meaning of this peculiar card and game, he discovers the motive of the mastermind. This makes him realize that he can bring changes in the lives of others in due course but the ultimate thing which he learns is that he can change himself for the welfare of others. The story is narrated by Ed himself to the reader who is also assumed as a character in the novel.

This paper deals in detail recounting Ed's experiences in lending a needy hand to the people around him. Ed's adventurous intervention impacts the lives of his friends, a few families, and in the end, his own life. To start with Ed's friends they are Ritchie, Marvin and Audrey. Though they have been raised in different familial and social backgrounds their affection towards one another seems genuine. When Ed receives a unanimous post of an Ace of Diamonds his friends, out of concern, suggest him what to do next. "Something's going to happen at each of the addresses on that card, Ed, and you'll have to react to it." (Zusak, 41) But it is Ed's initial decision that sets the ultimate game of cards in motion. Introducing Ed as the victim of situation when the action commences, the story explores the rise of a hero battling his circumstances. Ed's sincere payback is witnessed when the Ace of Hearts gives him a chance to explore the darkest parts of their lives.

Ed meets Ritchie on a late night and asks him to pursue his passion leaving his idleness. He makes him realize "Doing nothing is addictive. The more we do nothing, the more we want to do nothing...When you do first get up, everything feels stiff and tired, but as you continue to force yourself to move your energy comes back." (Meyer, 39) When Ed drives Marv crazy pointing out his parsimony he reveals with hesitation that he is saving money for his baby daughter who is born out of wedlock with Suzanne, who was once his neighbor. Touched by Marv's pathetic anecdote Ed encourages Marv to visit Suzanne immediately. After a bitter quarrel with Suzanne's father the young couple reunite. Later he meets Audrey at her house one early morning and dances with her

for three minutes with a hope that she might love him back and it does win her love. Ed's deep understanding of his friends is the key factor that enables him to induce them to work on solving the issue at hand. Moreover, all of them needed mental and moral support which he offers to the fullest. His attempt to help his friends stimulates them in turn to take a definite decision in their lives to solve their respective problems.

Ed's recurring encounters in supporting his friends to take an appropriate decision encourages the readers to do the same. This striking decision of Ed to maintain his friendship with his flawed friends inspires in the readers the value of retaining the already created relationships in life. This earnest resolution to stay close with them and facilitate them to prefer the right option in their lives reflects the audacity that decision making skill offers. By catering to the needs of others Ed was arranging his steps to solve his own problems in life which is later revealed by the narrator. Thus, Zusak accomplishes in emphasizing problem solving as an inevitable element to hold bonds together.

The author's choice of including a variety of families that lack love, life, money, parental support, and partner's companionship reflects the harsh reality that needs a solution. Family is the small unit that builds up a society and each of this fragmented unit in the story needs to be restored and Ed's interference does this in a swift phase. And the patch work does not follow the same pattern as the problems differ from family to family. In honesty, he adds,

It's funny how when you watch people from a long distance, it all seems voiceless. It's like watching a silent

movie. You guess what people say. You watch their mouths move and imagine the sounds of their feet hitting the ground. You wonder what they're talking about and, even more so, what they might be thinking. (Zusak, 79)

To justify this, a few families that Ed comes across are listed.

The first family has a drunkard who abuses his wife daily. This domestic violence disrupts peace in the family and Ed feels helpless every time he witnesses this. As he continues to be inactive to deliver the woman and her daughter from this drunkard a gun is sent to him by his taskmaster. That night he threatens the drunkard with the gun which makes him confess his faults and repent. But this was not the intended meaning of the presence of the gun. Even though it's obvious to Ed from the beginning that the gun was delivered to kill the drunkard, he decides against that cold blooded deed and this gives the sinner a chance to repent in his life. Ed's decision not only saves a man but also solves the problem of domestic violence in that family. Ed's decision was not bold but was sensible and wise enough to make the man realize his folly and repent accordingly. On closer observation Ed's development as a character is chiseled out by situation.

Angie, a single parent's struggle in bringing up her loveable children often goes unnoticed. When Ed discovers this, he buys an ice cream for her to show her that she is acknowledged and appreciated. This incident in the story has less number of dialogues shared between them but means a lot to Angie. And Ed's intervention offers solution to the mother who needed encouragement psychologically. Zusak's portrayal

of showcasing psychological aspects of problem makes the readers aware of the non tangible problems that clouds reality.

Apart from peeping into other family's problems and sympathizing with them to find a solution, Zusak introduces Ed to his own family's issue that needed to be settled. Though this strains the nerves of Ed, the moment of facing his mother on her date offers Ed with an opportunity to purge her hatred towards her husband. And this becomes a unique experience to Ed as this has his family member involved in the game.

When his final card appears in the mailbox carrying his name and address Ed is taken aback. Soon he finds the mastermind of this game of cards interacting with him in his house. When the taskmaster reveals his identity, he hands over a folder to Ed that has the records of all the adventures that Ed had done. The confused Ed Kennedy stays in his house for many days thinking about all that has happened. One afternoon Audrey comes home inviting him to stay with her in her house for the better thus solving both of their problems. The character Ed reveals everything to her while the narrator Ed points out the true potential that the readers have, in being a helping hand to the people in distress and need. The novel ends with the realization of Ed that reads,

If a guy like you can stand and do what you did, then maybe everyone can. Maybe everyone can live beyond what they're capable of.

And that's when I realize.

In a sweet, cruel, beautiful moment of clarity, I smile, watch a crack in the cement, and speak to Audrey and the sleeping Doorman. I tell them what I'm telling you:

I'm not the messenger at all.

I'm the message. (Zusak, 399, 400)

Zusak proves in this novel what D. H. Lawrence affirms in his essay, *Why the Novel Matters* regarding the purpose of a novel by embedding problem solving skill and decision-making skill as an unavoidable factor not only in work space but also in family and among friends to maintain harmonious relationships. In Lawrence's words,

In life, there is right and wrong, good and bad, all the time. But what is right in one case is wrong in another...Right and wrong is an instinct: but an instinct of the whole consciousness in a man, bodily, mental, spiritual at once. And only in the novel are all things given life full play...when we realize that life itself, and not for inert safety, is the reason for living.

When a man is pushed into any arduous situation he is driven by stress which can either be eustress or distress. But it is based on the stimulus of any of these stresses that a person acts or reacts to handle a situation. Ed's decision is enhanced by eustress that results in many life altering incidents including his own. Moreover, the narrator Ed's testimony of dealing situations draws him far from being and becoming a victim of situation.

And so, Zusak's novel *The Messenger* (2002) is instrumental in multiple ways to interact with the young adult reader about a variety of skills that are needed to live a purposeful filled life. Ed, the victim of situation, in the first chapter evolves into a character that victimizes situations using his doughty decisions. Ed's decision to start working out an

Ace in the first place simultaneously impacts the others who feared taking decisions in their lives. With his initiation, the boldness to take decision spreads courage in others like a chain reaction highlighting the messenger's resolution to solve problems. Thus, Markus implants in his readers the invaluable skills of problem solving and decision making that can crack myriad tribulations both in private and official spaces to lead a pleasant life.

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