



What is Slavery?

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*When I was just a little girl,
I asked my mother, "What will I be?
Will I be pretty? Will I be rich?"
Here's what she said to me:*

*"Que sera, sera
Whatever will be, will be;
The future's not ours to see.
Que sera, sera – what will be, will be."*

I am one of the luckiest children in the world; I am free. I am free to speak my mind, to make choices about my future, and, thanks to my education, these choices can be informed. I don't have to believe everything I read – in fact, not only am I free to question what is presented to me on the news, but I can also question the values offered by my teachers and parents, and by the society in which I live.

Not everyone has the luxury of dreaming that *whatever will be, will be*. If I consider slavery to be the opposite of the freedom that I enjoy, we can see that millions of children world-wide are enslaved. And, because of slavery, the future of those children is too often bleak, and that future is, indeed, *ours to see*, although it is not always theirs to shape. According to UNICEF statistics, an estimated 1.2 million children are trafficked every year, with two million victims of sexual exploitation. Is this *what will be*?

The one million children in prison or other forms of detention are not free. They cannot make the same choices that I can about their futures, and have even less control over the present. Slavery is a question of rights; what we need rather than what we want. The safety that all children need is not being provided to the approximately 180 million children who are engaged in dangerous forms of child labour. They are enslaved.

The question is, how does my future connect with theirs? Can freedom and slavery be reconciled? In a shared world, we have a shared future. My choices, which I am free to make, can affect the futures of those millions of children around the world who are enslaved. Two hundred years ago, in Britain, it was the free man who had power, and could therefore abolish transatlantic slave trade. As Nelson Mandela says at the end of 'The Long Walk to Freedom', I have the "freedom to be free", so today, I can either turn a blind eye, continuing to sing that *que sera, sera*, or I can choose to make a positive contribution to the world, and to make this choice with my eyes wide open.

Slavery cannot be ignored: I can speak out for those children who are not given a chance to, because I have that "freedom to be free", and to make choices. To criticise my government and its role in today's slave trade of trafficking and sweatshops; shopping for groceries, I am faced with the choice to buy Fairtrade; clothes-shopping, I do not have to support Primark, Tesco and Asda, who use child labour in the manufacture of their clothes. The future *is* mine to see, and I have a clear decision to make: will I be part of the problem, or the solution?

Que sera, sera? I don't think so.

