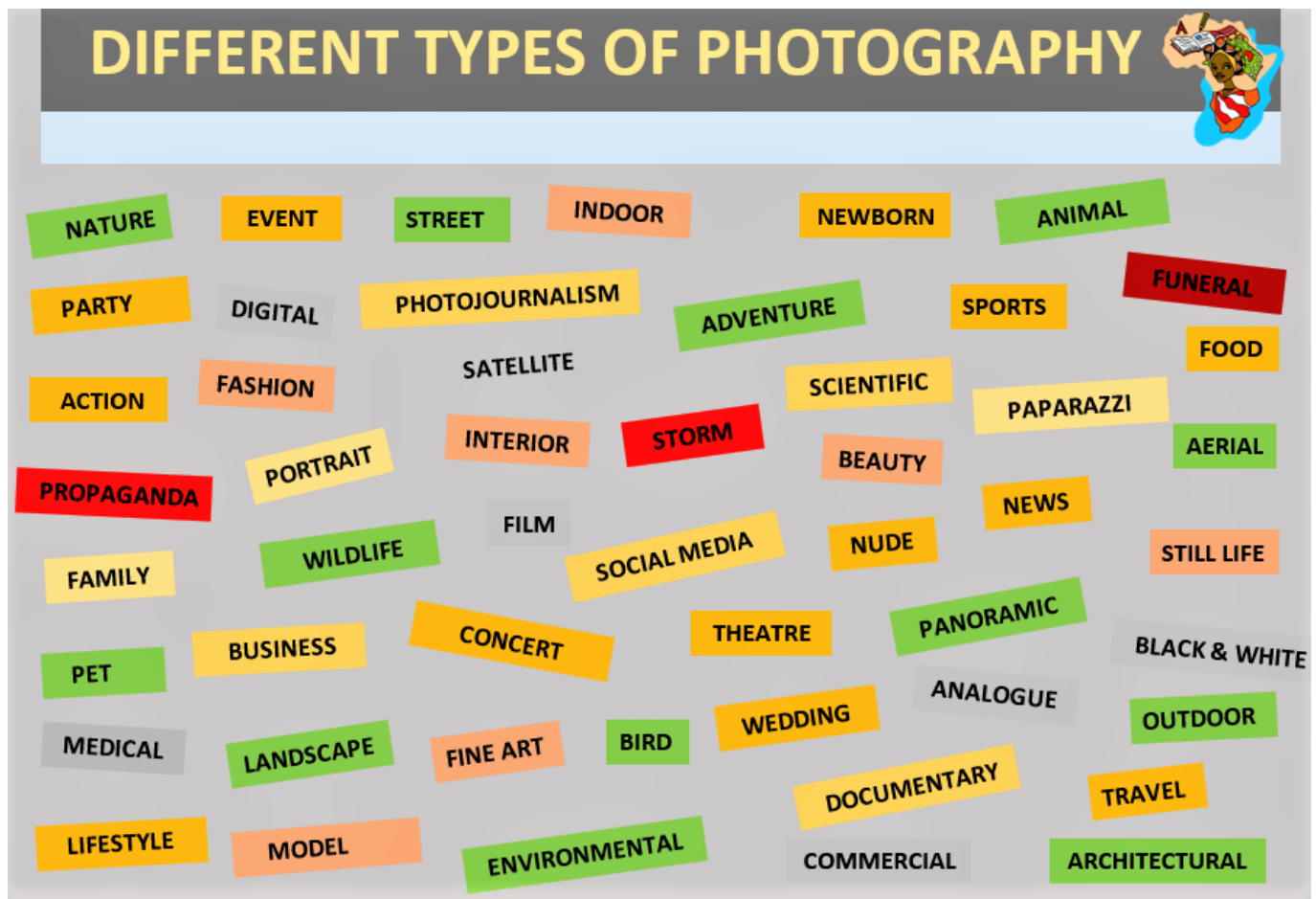


Short Story: Picture Perfect

Level: B1-B2



Anger and fear are a lovely couple, so they say. They walk hand in hand. You can easily spot them because they like to be seen and felt. She just ignores them. There are a hundred things one can do during the day and catering to the whims of this duet is something that is not on her to-do list.

Today, she is going to a place where she is most likely to meet them — the shopping mall. Such encounters are unpleasant. They take the joy out of her experience.

However, time is teaching her to tame these two savages. Their grip is loosening and she dreams of the day when she will be completely out of their grasp.

She arrives at the first shop. It does not take too long for them to show up. They are dressed in their normal gear: a stiff pair of black trousers, a stiffer shirt with a pointed collar

and solemn headgear. Their dark boots are shiny. They smile as if they are about to be photographed. A curt 'hello' follows and she feels their eyes boring into her whole being.

She is followed, as usual.

Fear settles in before it is replaced by anger. She recognises them and politely asks them to leave. They want to stay. They are here to stay, they insist. Their company is not welcome; she knows this because her body tells her so.

It is the heart that gives the first warning. It beats so wildly she thinks that she might faint. The sweat is another tell-tale sign that the two monsters have gained momentary access to her soul. A pounding headache follows and nausea threatens to turn her into a walking volcano.

Rage.

She knows she has to endure this, over and over again. But, she knows that time is her ally. It heals all wounds and repairs even the most broken of souls.

Time.

She pins her hopes on this constant law of nature.

It is what helps her to cope as anger and fear stay close to her heels, disturbing her peace, curtailing her freedom, stealing her life.

Soon, time proves to be loyal, as usual. Her ordeal is over. A Breath of relief.

Sigh.

She has paid for her goods and fetched them jealously; she has thanked the personnel with a 'thank you' and a mechanical smile; she has checked that there is no stray object in her bag that will betray her when leaving the shop.

She is escorted out, half-surreptitiously, half-ostentatiously — she doesn't know if they are doing it out of goodwill or out of malice. Bad intentions. She settles for the latter. They are doing this to unsettle her, to remind her that she will always look suspicious, no matter how she looks, no matter how she talks, no matter how much money is gracing her wallet. This is borrowed land, they say. She must never feel too comfortable. She must not settle down and should be kept on her toes.

Four shops. Four escorts. Four moments when she is intensely scrutinised. Four moments when her body is subjected to unnecessary emotional pressure. Four moments when she takes the decision never to go back to that particular shop.

Courage.

It is courage that brings her back.

It is courage that tells her to take out her camera in the fifth shop.

Anger and fear are a lovely couple. They walk hand in hand. They are inseparable and most of all they like to be flattered.

As usual, they follow her as soon as she enters the shop. She smiles at them as if she is about to be photographed. They do not smile back at her. She stops and examines an object. They stop and hide behind a shelf. She walks towards them and stands next to them. They fidget with the handbags. She walks away. They stay where they are.

Her camera is still in her hand. She looks for the perfect spot to take a selfie. She makes sure that the background is pretty. Above all, she ensures that anger and fear are caught in the frame. Their faces are far, of course, because she does not want their ugliness to be etched in her mind forever.

The lighting is perfect.

Click. Click. Click. Click. Click.

Five photographs.

In the first photo, fear has a look of surprise and anger is panicking. In the second photo, fear is starting to disappear. In the third one, she is laughing and anger is long gone. In the fourth picture, fear and anger are nowhere to be seen and not even a single shadow of them remains. In the last photograph, her face is serene.

Power.

There are excellent bargains in the shop. She finds a pair of black stiletto boots. They will look lovely on her. They are picture perfect. Her sister might want some. They will come back the following week. Surely, they will.

She pays for the shoes and leaves.

It's been a good day.

Anger and fear have broken up, so they say. They walk separately, hands in their pockets. They shun the spotlight so you hardly see them nowadays. She does not miss them at all.

They are a distant memory.

Indescribable bliss.

HOW TO DESCRIBE A PHOTOGRAPH

At the top

In the top left-hand corner

In the top right-hand corner

In the background

On the left

In the middle

On the right

In the foreground

In the bottom left-hand corner

In the bottom right-hand corner

At the bottom



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