

Photo Op

by Barry R. Taylor

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Characters: Erin, a senior student at a private school, a sardonic leader
Isabel, another student, bubbly and enthusiastic
Nina, another student, an innocent

Scene: A small park near the school. Mid-afternoon, after classes have ended.

[**Cue 1:** stage black]

[**Cue 2:** lights up, exterior, cloudy day in early autumn. A storm has just passed.]

[Enter Erin, Isabel, and Nina, together. They are all dressed in the school uniform. All are carrying cell phones, somewhere. Isabel has a serious camera around her neck.]

Erin: I thought that class would never end. Mr. Freeman is soooo boring.

Isabel: Hey look, it stopped raining.

Nina: He's just serious.

Erin: You can be serious without being boring

Isabel: Oh, look at the rain drops on the flowers. I'm going to get some of those. [She takes out her camera and begins taking pictures, carefully composing close-up shots.]

Nina: He cares about the students. I think he's nice.

Isabel: Who's nice?

Erin: Mr. Freeman, loser. Pay attention.

Isabel: I don't like him. He's always preaching about morals and telling us how to behave. Like a priest or something.

Erin: Maybe he was a priest. Maybe he got defrocked for loving a nun and had to leave the priesthood.

Nina: You are so rude!

Erin: Isabel, will you put away that camera for a minute! School's out for chrissakes.

Isabel: I need some more good shots for senior photography class. I think I'll do my project on flowers.

Erin: Lame! Everybody shoots flowers.

Nina: I haven't even started my project yet.

Erin: I think I'll do mine on something weird and artsy. Like, purple things, or triangles. Maybe mud puddles. Mr. Cooper loves that sort of stuff.

Isabel: Yeah, he's always on about pictures asking questions.

Erin: [quoting] "A good photograph is a provocation. It raises more questions than it answers."

[The other girls laugh]

Nina: Seriously, what does he mean by that? He repeats it all the time.

Erin: Oh, he means . . . something like . . . a good picture should make the viewer stop and think about, well, whatever is in the picture. Instead of just looking at it. If it's a picture of people on the street, you should think: Who are those people? Where are they going? Stuff like that.

Isabel: And if it's a portrait, you should be wondering: What is this guy thinking? What was he doing when the picture was taken? Why is he looking over there?

Nina: Oh, I get it. I think. But what about, like, mud puddles?

Erin: Mud puddles are tough.

Isabel: Maybe you can pretend mud puddles are an allegory of the human condition.

Erin: The what? You made that up.

Isabel: No I didn't! Mrs. Johnson talked about it in English class.

Nina: I don't even know what that means. I think I'll do mine on Benny.

Erin: Who's Benny?

Nina: My pet rabbit. He's really cute.

Erin: Lame as a three-legged dog! Who wants to look at a bunch of pics of a rabbit?

Isabel: Say, anybody want to go for a McFlurry?

Nina: I would!

Erin: Sure, why not. But I'd better text my mom. She doesn't like it when I'm late.
[She pulls out a phone and sends a quick text.]

Nina: Maybe I'll go for smarties this time. Getting tired of oreos.

Isabel: Oreos are the best!

[All three girls' phones ping. They pull them out, study the screens.]

Erin: Oh. My. God. What is this?

Isabel: Nina, is that – that's you! Ohmygod.

Nina: [horrified] Oh god oh god oh god what has he done! That's private! Nobody was supposed to see it! He promised!

Erin: Who promised?

Isabel: Nina, what have you done! You can see like, *everything*. [she squints at the phone] Well, almost everything. It's kinda dark.

Nina: Oh god what am I going to do? He sent it to everybody!

Erin: Who did? Who sent it?

Nina: Hal Halton. Oh god. My life is over.

Erin: You sent a selfie to Hal? What for? And . . . like this?

Isabel: Who's Hal Halton? Is he that tall guy with the curly hair? Always laughing?

Erin: That's him. Jackass.

Isabel: Didn't you go out with him last year, Erin?

Erin: That was last year. Which is a millions years ago. Nina what were you thinking! This is awful!

Nina: I – I didn't think anyone would see! He promised! He said it would be our secret.

Erin: Some secret.

Nina: We were like, talking, and texting, you know, and I thought he was going to ask me out –

Isabel: And did he? He's kinda cute

Erin: Isabel! For god's sake.

Isabel: Sorry.

Nina: Anyway he kept telling me I was like, really pretty but too shy to show it and that was too bad and so on like that. He called me his unpolished gem.

Erin: So lame. Just like Hal.

Isabel: I bet he read that somewhere.

Nina: He knew I was in senior photography so he kept bugging me to send him selfies in like, my best date clothes, as if I was an Instagram star. Then he said that was sweet but I was like "a gift still in the wrapping" and so I sent him a couple in, like my underwear, but not really showing anything. Hal really liked those.

Erin: I bet he did! A-hole.

Isabel: Erin!

Nina: He seemed really nice! He made me feel pretty. But then he sort of challenged me. He said if I sent him a nudie he would treasure it like a rare painting and never show it to anyone else. I, I was afraid he would leave if I didn't show him I was brave and you know, confident like those girls he hangs out with. Like you, Erin. I sent him one – just one! And he promised he would keep it a secret!

[Erin and Isabel study the photograph on their phones]

Erin: He sent it to all his friends. And they sent it to everybody. The whole school has seen it. Nina, this picture is beyond shameless. How could you!

Nina: I told you I didn't mean –

Erin: Everything about this is just so wrong.

Nina: How can you say that! You guys are supposed to be my friends!

Isabel: Well, the composition is awful, to start with.

Erin: Totally screwed up.

Nina: What?

Isabel: It's a complete mess. You're sprawled in the middle of your bed, with your clothes scattered everywhere, and what's all that stuff in the background? Is that a vacuum cleaner?

Nina: I didn't think anyone would notice, with –

Erin: And look, you've got like half the frame of the mirror in the picture on one side but not on the other, and there's glare all over your left shoulder. You look like a deer in the headlights.

Isabel: Didn't you put any thought into the set-up? Don't you remember what Mr. Cooper is always saying?

Erin, Isabel: [in unison, quoting] "Do your composure before setting exposure."

Nina: [confused] I – I didn't think any of that mattered. It's a selfie of my –

Erin: We know! It's a selfie of your everything. But that's no excuse for ignoring composition. We've been learning about it all term! You could have at least made your bed.

Isabel: All that stuff all over your room, and like, none of it arranged to draw the eye toward you. It's totally distracting.

Erin: You've got a pair of shoes in the background that are positioned by the rule of thirds. It looks like a picture of shoes with you in the way.

Nina: I was in a hurry! What if my mom came in?

Isabel: You should be ashamed. You know better than this. How many times has Mr. Cooper repeated that line: "The background should always support the subject –

Erin: " – but never try to become the subject." Utterly lame, Nina.

Nina: I'm – sorry?

Isabel: And why are you in such a weird position anyway? All splayed out like a zoology specimen.

Nina: I, uhm, wanted him to see my –

Erin: Well sure, but hellooo, what about the rest of you? Like, arms, legs, hands, feet, boobs, all that?

Isabel: You could have done something interesting with your hair.

Erin: And position your body so it shows the lines and curves of your figure. Don't you remember we spent a whole class on that? This looks like a homage to knees and elbows.

Nina: I, uhm, hadn't thought of that. It was really hard getting in the position to show – and then holding the camera toward the mirror –

Isabel: Nina, don't you know anything? This is supposed to be a glamour shot. But look at that expression on your face. Like someone is standing on your foot.

Erin: Or you're having a spasm. It's completely cringe.

Nina: Well, I was trying to take a really difficult shot. With the mirror and everything! I was concentrating on getting the . . . the framing right.

Isabel: What framing? Half of the mirror and a piece of the wall? There's a – what's that, a teddy bear? – on your dresser that's half in and half out. It looks like it's been dismembered.

Nina: You noticed my teddy bear?

Erin: Maybe you should have spent a few minutes on the lighting instead.

Nina: I used the flash!

Isabel: Which totally glared in the mirror! What's that big silver ball supposed to be? Tinkerbelle on steroids?

Erin: Lighting is like, everything! Remember?

Erin, Isabel: [In unison, quoting] “The light on the subject is as important as the subject itself.”

Isabel: Does Mr. Cooper ever say anything without repeating it over and over?

Erin: You could have used a lamp, you know, to throw light over one side, so you'd get all sorts of light and shadow across your body. That would have been interesting.

Isabel: Oh, that would be really cool! You would have to turn sideways maybe, and lift yourself up one elbow, facing the mirror.

Nina: But then you couldn't see –

Erin: The lamp would be behind you, just left of your head, so light falls across your face.

Isabel: That would totally work! You have such an interesting face, Nina. You could gaze into the mirror, and like, invite the viewer to wonder what you're thinking about.

Erin: Exactly! A good photograph always asks questions. This one gives away all the answers.

Nina: It was . . . impulsive. A spur of the moment thing.

Isabel: I'm really embarrassed for you, Nina. Everybody is going to think you can't use a camera at all.

Erin: And you're freaking beautiful, too. This picture is an insult. Like you're punching yourself in the face.

Isabel: It's roadkill, Nina.

Nina: I'm . . . so sorry. I didn't mean to make such a bad shot. I was thinking about –

[Their phones ping]

Erin: What's this now?

Isabel: It's another message from Hal. It's . . . it's an apology.

Nina: He says he didn't mean to send out the picture. He was trying to send a picture – oh for god's sake – of his dog doing a trick –

Erin: – and he didn't check the attachment. What a knucklehead.

Nina: He sent the apology to the whole school. Even the teachers. He seems really upset.

Erin: He's going to catch hell for this.

Isabel: Do you think they'll kick him out?

Erin: No more than he deserves for doing this to Nina. Jerk.

Nina: I think you're still angry because he broke up with you.

Erin: *I broke up with him!*

[Nina's phone pings. She looks at the message.]

Erin: What?

Nina: Another message from Hal. Just to me. Apologizing, again. He deleted the picture. Made all his friends promise to delete it too. He says he wants to –

Isabel: Oh I just had a fabulous idea! Let's all do our photography projects on Nina!

Nina: What?

Erin: A joint project! That's an awesome idea! I can't believe that came from you!

Isabel: It *is* awesome. We can shoot her in different places: in the school, here in the park, at the beach . . .

Erin: Different moods, different clothes . . .

Isabel: Work with the lighting, some pics in sunshine, others on cloudy days . . .

Nina: Guys, wait a minute –

Erin: We'll need all sorts of facial expressions.

Isabel: Yes! To match the setting. Like, brooding under a dark sky, smiling in the sunshine among flowers –

Erin: I know! We can work a theme about the many sides of a young woman.

Isabel: Yes, that rocks! All the different aspects of a full human being.

Erin: I'm sure we can work an allegory on the human condition in there somewhere.

Nina: But, but what about –

Isabel: You can take a bunch of self-portraits!

Erin: Selfies galore! Maybe showing a little less than everything this time. And a lot more thought to composition. Seriously.

Isabel: Your own selfies will show . . . what? How you envision yourself –

Nina: – compared with how the rest of the world sees me. That *is* a great idea!

[The begin to move off stage together]

Isabel: I'm truly excited. This is going to be a super project.

Erin: So much better than triangles.

Nina: Or mud puddles.

Erin: Hard to make mud puddles allegorical.

[They exit while still talking]

Isabel: Can we go for McFlurries now?

Erin: Definitely! We can start with some shots in the McDonald's.

Isabel: Let's go! Nina we're going to make you famous!

[Pause]

Nina: You guys are like the best friends *ever*.

[**Cue 3:** Stage black]