**Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.**

In my 17 years of living, I’d never seen a man unclothed.

Until last week, that is. Running through the streets of New York City. People don’t do that back home in Indonesia. In movies, New York is the Big Apple, the city that never sleeps, the city of dreams. But turn your head away from the skyscrapers and towards the streets, and it is nothing of the sort. At least, that’s what I thought.

It is for this reason that my family worried for my NYU-bound sister Kelly, who would have to live in NY alone. Covid gave rise to an increase in hate crimes towards Asians. My grandparents begged her to move to a different state, as our ears had long been saturated by news about the dangers of the city.

In the past decade or so, my parents always paired me up with Kelly in almost every activity. From a piano lesson to a ballet class; we moved from one school to another together. While I was comfortable taking on new challenges with my sister, often I didn’t feel excited as I never really chose those activities myself. Mom said, this way we could take care of one another while learning.

This time, I thought it would be the same. I thought they were going to ask me to follow her, but they didn’t. It was different. My parents said nothing, but I still had the impression that they were secretly hoping for me to come and offer to accompany my sister. I also thought I could simply follow her, having a new opportunity, a new life, and a fresh start in my final years as a teenager. If I could join my sister, if we were together, her move to NYC would be less of a danger and more of an adventure. But somehow, I just couldn’t volunteer to go with Kelly.

In my last two years in high school, I was beginning to make a difference in my community-- I was fundraising to help disadvantaged children get the education and vaccines they needed and creating a shelter for stray animals. My friends needed me, I was their rock during times of need, and they would come to me for suggestion. So, I was torn to leave my works behind. I was torn to come forward and offer my company. I had personal goals that I wanted to see through to the end.

On the other hand, Kelly’s my sister. My sister, who had always been there for me through thick and thin since the beginning of time, lending me her shoulders to cry on and having my back whenever I needed it. Blood is said to be thicker than water. Also, I couldn’t imagine Kelly—eighteen, female, and foreign—walking down the streets of New York and getting assaulted out of nowhere. Just thinking about it gives me shivers. If that happened and I wasn’t there for her, I could never forgive myself.

I lost sleep. I tossed around in my bed. After much deliberation, I mustered my courage. I told my parents, “I will go with her. I’ll go to high school in New York.”

I realized that life is not all about me. I refrained from choosing my desires over taking on family responsibility. At first, I perceived this as a sacrifice. Every night, I lay awake in bed. "What if I've made a big mistake?" However, the more I thought about it, the more I recognized something crucial: while it's necessary to follow my heart, responsibilities and commitments must take precedence.

Our first few weeks as independent teenagers, we were lost. Constantly exhausted, unsure of the world, we faced and will face more naked men and suspicious puddles. Bouts of homesickness. Waves of culture shock. However, my shock is fading with time. The effects of my decision, however, will not.

So will I regret it?

Never.