



The chipped ceramic mug warmed Liam's hands, the lukewarm coffee doing little to soothe the churning in his stomach. Across the small, cluttered table in their favourite café, Maya nervously tapped a pen against the worn surface of a notebook, its pages filled with frantic scribbles - sketches, to be precise, her usual pre-panic ritual. Between them sat a drawing - a simple circle, bisected by a stark black line. It was Liam's contribution to their pre-graduation ritual, a symbolic representation of the choices they faced.

Liam and Maya had been inseparable since their first year of art school, their friendship forged in shared late-night studio sessions fueled by caffeine and mutual frustration. Now, on the precipice of graduation, the comfortable familiarity felt strained, replaced by a nervous energy that vibrated in the air like a hum. The circle represented their lives, intertwined and harmonious for years, while the black line, stark and uncompromising, symbolized the impending separation.

After graduation, Maya was heading to New York, a long-held dream. A prestigious gallery had offered her a coveted internship, a launchpad for her already impressive career. Liam, however, was staying put, unsure of his next step, his ambitions still hazy, undefined by a clear trajectory. The black line was the chasm opening between them, a geographical distance reflecting a growing emotional one.

"It's beautiful, Liam," Maya said softly, her voice barely above a whisper. She traced the line with

her finger, her gaze lost somewhere in the distance. "It captures it perfectly. The... the division."

Liam nodded, a lump forming in his throat. He hadn't expected his simple drawing to evoke such a profound response. He'd always been the pragmatic one, the steady hand anchoring Maya's often-reckless creativity. But this time, his own fear felt overwhelming. He was afraid of failing, of not measuring up to Maya's dazzling success. He was afraid of losing her.

"I'm terrified, Maya," he finally admitted, the words heavy with unspoken anxieties. "Of not being good enough, of not finding my path, of... losing you."

Maya finally looked up, her usually bright eyes clouded with a hint of melancholy. "Me too," she confessed, a rare crack in her outwardly confident facade. "The city scares me."