



# The Echo of Us

Ariana Vanmaanen



Ariana and Brycen sit across from each other in their favorite corner cafe, but the air between them feels heavy and still. The steam from their untouched coffee rises like a curtain, masking the words they are both afraid to say. Outside, the autumn leaves begin to fall, mirroring the quiet cooling of their hearts.



They take a walk through the city park where they first met, yet today the path feels miles wide. While the sun shines on the vibrant flower beds, Ariana keeps her hands deep in her pockets, avoiding the familiar touch of Brycen's hand. The silence between them is no longer comfortable; it is a wall they cannot climb.



Under the shade of a large oak tree, they finally stop walking and look at each other with tired eyes. Brycen starts to speak, his voice trembling slightly as he acknowledges the distance that has grown between them over the months. Ariana listens, her heart aching with the realization that some things cannot be fixed with just an apology.



For a fleeting moment, Ariana remembers a golden afternoon at the beach when their laughter drowned out the sound of the waves. In that memory, Brycen was her whole world, and the future seemed like a bright, endless horizon. She blinks back tears, knowing that version of them now exists only in the soft glow of the past.



Back in their shared apartment, the flickering light of a single candle casts long, dancing shadows across the walls. Ariana looks at a framed photo of them on the mantel, realizing that the people in the picture are strangers to who they are now. The weight of the decision settles in her chest, heavy but undeniable.



Brycen stands by the window watching the rain streak down the glass, reflecting on how they both changed in ways they didn't expect. He understands now that loving someone sometimes means letting them go so they can find the light again. The house feels larger and colder than it ever has before.



The sound of packing tape echoes through the quiet rooms as Ariana carefully places her books into a cardboard box. Each item she packs is a fragment of a life they built together, now being tucked away to make room for something new. Brycen watches from the doorway, his silhouette framed by the fading evening light.



They stand at the threshold of the front door, the finality of the moment hanging in the air like a bated breath. There are no more arguments or tears, only a soft, mutual respect for the time they shared. They share one last, lingering look before Ariana steps out into the cool night air.



A week later, Brycen sits on the same park bench, watching the sunrise paint the sky in shades of pink and gold. The loneliness is still there, but it is slowly being replaced by a sense of peace and clarity. He breathes in the fresh morning air, feeling the first stirrings of a new chapter beginning.



In a sun-drenched new studio, Ariana picks up a paintbrush and begins to cover a blank canvas with bold, vibrant colors. The pain of the ending has transformed into the inspiration for a new beginning, full of self-discovery and hope. She smiles to herself, knowing that while one story has ended, her own journey is just starting.