**Through the Lens**

The old camera sat between them on the park bench, its cracked lens catching the late afternoon light. Dust clung to its metal edges, soft and stubborn — like a memory that refused to fade.

“Still carrying that thing around?” Maya asked, brushing crumbs from her jeans.

Liam glanced at it, then at her. “Habit,” he said. “You never know when something’s worth remembering.”

Maya’s laugh was short, brittle. “Guess we just have different definitions of that now.” She picked at a splinter on the bench, eyes fixed on the ducks slicing the pond into ripples.

Liam turned the camera in his hands. The crack in the glass spread like lightning, distorting his reflection. “I tried to fix it once,” he said quietly. “Didn’t work. Every photo came out warped.”

“Maybe stop taking pictures of things that are already broken,” she muttered.

He looked up. “That supposed to mean something?”

She shrugged. “You’re the one who likes metaphors.”

Wind swept through the park, stirring the scent of wet leaves and distance. Somewhere, a child laughed — sharp and brief, like the snap of a shutter.

“I still have the photo,” he said finally. “The one from graduation. You, me, the river.”

Her fingers paused on the splinter. “You kept that?”

“Yeah. Thought about throwing it away. But the light was good that day.”

She smiled — not warmly, but as if acknowledging a ghost. “You always cared more about the light than the people in it.”

Silence. A magpie darted across the grass, its reflection rippling in the pond.

Liam pressed the shutter button. It clicked, hollow. “Guess the film’s still empty,” he murmured.

“Or maybe it’s just run out,” she said. Her voice was soft, almost kind. She stood, brushing dirt from her hands. “Take care of yourself, Liam.”

He didn’t look up. “You too.”

Maya hesitated, then placed a single yellow leaf on the camera before walking away. It stuck for a moment, trembling, before the breeze lifted it and carried it toward the water.

Liam watched it drift, the cracked lens catching the last shard of sunlight — a small, fractured glow that refused to die.