Rain slicked the streets like a mirror, reflecting the grey sky and the neon blur of passing cars. Lily hugged her coat tighter, the chill gnawing at her fingers, when she saw him—a silhouette framed by the dim glow of the station. Her heart leapt, a wild bird trapped and fluttering in her chest.

“Dad?” Her voice cracked, a fragile glass breaking against the storm.

He froze, and for a long breath, time tilted on its axis. Then his eyes, those familiar pools of sorrow and warmth, widened. “Lily… is that really you?” His voice trembled, a rope fraying at both ends.

Tears blurred the world into a watercolor smear of lights and shadows. “I… I thought I’d never see you again,” she whispered.

He stepped closer, careful as if approaching a sleeping flame. “I’m so sorry, baby. For all the years, for every silence…”

She shook her head, letting the weight of grief dissolve into rain. “It’s okay. I missed you.”

Their embrace was sudden, a collision of lost time and aching longing. It was the warmth of summer sunlight after a winter too long, the tremor of a bird’s wings held in the palm of a hand. Each second stitched together the ragged holes left by absence, each heartbeat sewing new patterns into old scars.

“I kept every letter,” she murmured, letting her fingers trace his coat as if she could touch his past through the fabric.

He laughed softly, a brittle sound that splintered into the night, and his thumb brushed away a bead of rain along her cheek. “I read them all in my mind,” he said, voice tight, “imagining your laugh, imagining you growing… without me there.”

The city buzzed around them, but inside this small cocoon of shared warmth, the rain softened to a gentle sigh. The streetlights became halos, the storm a whisper, and the years apart melted like morning frost under sunlight.

“I’m home now,” he breathed, resting his forehead against hers.

“And I’m here,” she replied, her voice a soft echo of hope. “Never leaving again.”

And in that fragile, trembling connection, time exhaled, leaving only the pulse of reunion—two hearts rediscovering the rhythm they had lost.