Silence hung in the room, a shocked, horrified silence, punctuated only by the rhythmic pulse of the heart monitor by the bedside. Over her hanging jaw, Twilight’s eyes were slowly filling with tears. “No…” she gasped under her breath. “No, it can’t be true.”

“I’m afraid it is.”

“No…” Twilight stepped back, recoiling from the news. “No!” She turned and ran from the room, ran from the stares and faces of her loved ones. In the hall, she spun in place, growling. She swung her hooves at empty air, venting her frustrated anger as the emotional onslaught hit her. Shallow sobs soon gave way to larger, choking tears, and Twilight slumped against the wall in the empty corridor. Her muffled crying seemed far too loud in the quiet hallway, with no other sound but the almost inaudible murmur of voices from the nurses’ station around the corner.

*Dying…*

The word itself was like a knife in her gut, and made even worse knowing that one of her loved ones was affected. Twilight doubled over, clutching herself. *I can’t lose her,* her mind screamed, *I can’t lose my mother…*

She didn’t look up when she felt the hoof on her shoulder; she just instinctively leaned over, curling against the chest of her husband. He stroked her mane gently and silently urged to let it all out, though Twilight needed little motivation. For what felt like an age, the unicorn simply lay against her mate and drained her pain and fear into his tan coat.

When she finally stilled, Caramel offered her a paper cup of water, which she gratefully accepted.

“Are you okay?” he asked, keeping his voice low.

Twilight sighed. “It’s not fair,” she muttered.

“No, it really isn’t.” Caramel leaned down and kissed his wife’s cheek. “Think you can go back in there? Your exit was a bit, um, abrupt.”

She chuckled and took a deep breath. “Yeah.”

Her parents watched her enter, their expressions colored with pity. Shining Armor and Cadance watched her with a deep, resigned sadness. Twilight could barely bring herself to meet anypony’s gaze as she walked slowly in and made her way over to her mother’s bedside, standing up to place her hooves on the edge.

“I—I’m sorry, everypony” she said quietly. “That was a bit uncalled for.”

On the Spartan bed, almost as pallid as the sheets that covered her, Twilight Velvet put a hoof out to cover her daughter’s. “It’s okay, dear. It—it’s not easy news for any of us to accept.”

“I-I just don’t know if I can…” Her violet eyes blazed with a pained intensity. “I’m going to find a way to heal you, mom.”

Her mother’s face creased in a smile that her eyes didn’t reflect. “Dear, it’s not something that you can fix.”

“I *can*, I know it. Just—just hang on for a while so I can find out how, okay?”

“Twilight,” Night Light’s voice rumbled quietly from across the bed, “even the Princesses couldn’t do anything for us.”

“I can do things that Celestia can’t!” she insisted petulantly. “I’ve got the talent. I know I can find something. I *have* to. I can’t lose you…”

At the foot of the bed, Cadance began crying softly against Shining’s shoulder, but Twilight could scarcely hear it. Her pulse was pounding in her ears, and she felt like she was being trapped in the tiny room.

Twilight’s mother squeezed her hoof. “Twilight, it’s not a question of if; it’s just when.”

The look in her mother’s eyes, the firm set of her father’s jaw, even the resigned sorrow of her own brother—all the pieces fell into place in Twilight’s head. The unicorn could almost feel her heart shatter as the realization settled on her.

“You—dad… How long have you both known you were sick?”

Velvet’s eyes watered as she swallowed. “Months, dear.”

“Months…” Twilight shook her head, unwilling to give in to the despair inside her. “And you never told me.”

“Twily,” her father intervened, “don’t blame your mother. We found out it was terminal months ago. We spoke to doctors, we visited specialists—we even talked to Celestia.” He shook his head sadly. “There truly was nothing to be done, so your mother decided to live out the life she had left. She didn’t want to concern you or Shining until it was time to do so.”

“Why shouldn’t we have known?” Twilight protested.

“What could you have done? You were starting a family and Shining was on the other side of the world. Worrying would have done nothing, so we let you have peace for as long as we were able.”

The fluttering fear in Twilight’s chest turned leaden and plummeted into her gut. Her jaw hung, waiting for the right words, but nothing would come to the mare. Her resigned depression settled over her shoulders like a cloak, weighing her down in body and spirit.

“So there really is nothing I can do…” she whispered.

Twilight’s mother tugged on her hoof, pulling her firmly into her forehooves, hugging her fiercely. “It’s okay,” she muttered into her daughter’s mane.

“But—but this is all backwards!” Twilight protested. “Why are you comforting *me*?”

Velvet smiled. “Dear, it’s not so bad. Honestly, it isn’t,” she added at Twilight’s skeptical expression. “I’ve had my time, and it’s been amazing.” She patted the side of the bed, and Twilight hopped up to her mother’s side like she did as a foal. “All I had to do was spend the last few months thinking about all the good things I’ve been through and gotten to experience.”

Twilight sighed and curled up against her mother’s side as Velvet scanned the faces around her bed with a warm smile. “I got to see my foals grow up—and more than that, become heroes and leaders. I got to see both of my foals get married, and I got to spend some time with my amazing grandfoals.” Both Twilight and Shining Armor looked up at their mother, their expressions tearful and proud at the same time.

“And then, I got to welcome two amazing ponies into my family, too.” Cadance and Caramel both blushed at her words, rather overcome with emotion themselves.

Velvet paused, taking her mate’s hoof in her own and looking lovingly up at Night Light. “And best of all, I got to spend thirty-six amazing years with this stallion. And the last few months with him have been absolutely wonderful.” She looked back down to her daughter. “So, Twilight, it’s not all that bad if I have to leave. I’ve been blessed beyond reason, and I’m not afraid anymore.”

Twilight sniffed and wiped a hoof across her eyes. “But, what about me?” she whispered.

“You’re a strong mare, Twilight. You’re a great mother, a fine wife, and you’ve done more in your life than I could have ever hoped to. It’s okay to miss me, but you’ll do just fine.”

Twilight hugged her mother thankfully, and climbed back down to take refuge in her mate’s strength instead. The night stretched on as their group vigil continued, and amid mingled laughter and sorrow, Twilight Velvet slowly slipped away. The peaceful smile never once left her face.

The ride back home was mostly silent, as though all the words and sounds around Twilight were as muted and muffled as her thoughts.