

The following story demonstrates a common yet unfortunate sequence of events. While many families try valiantly to keep loved ones at home in familiar surroundings, doing so is not always possible. Many problems begin when additional outside assistance and services are needed. I wrote this narrative by combing real intimate conversations and circumstances couples had during their transition.

### ***The Last Straw***

My dear sweet-hearted husband had dementia. That damn diagnosis stole his freedom and most of mine too. We spent almost fifty years together, for better or worse, in sickness and health, as each other's sidekick. We worked hard, raised our children, cared for our parents, and planned for our future.

I can remember the day the doctor handed me prescriptions, and he was talking as if my dear sweet-hearted husband wasn't sitting two feet away. We were given a prognosis with no direction and little treatment: a life sentence, no chance of parole. We left the office stunned and in a bit of a panic. Sure, there were concerning signs over the past few years, but starting the new medications made him a different man. I wasn't aware of the possible drug interactions, side effects, or the course of his condition, so all I knew to do was try to control his actions. It was the combination that turned our life upside down and sent us into a tailspin. My dear sweet-hearted husband didn't choose this disease. He never complained and continued working around the house, in the yard, and helping neighbors.

Eventually, it was as if we were joined at the hip, and sometimes he would mistake me for his mother! One night, I woke up out of a dead sleep because he was shaking me, ordering me out of our bed. Barely awake, I started to tell him how ridiculous he was being. We had been sleeping together for fifty years. He didn't believe me. He paced back and forth down the hall for a long time before getting back in bed. The next morning, my daughter called, and I told her what happened. She immediately contacted a couple of in-home care agencies. I spent hours telling our story, answering questions, and reviewing paperwork. I eventually chose one, signed the contract, and paid for the service. Still, every time a caregiver came to the door, my dear sweet-hearted husband sent them packing. I finally gave up, called the agency, and canceled the service. A few weeks later, I tried dropping him off at an adult day center. We were welcomed by a staff member who was

passing out snacks to the participants sitting around a table. After snack time, we were going to make crafts. Pointing, I said, "There's an empty chair, why don't you have a seat." He looked at me as if I had three heads. "Why?" he said. Then we said goodbye, and he hurried us out of the building. We were stuck together from then on.

Not long after that, he was refusing to shower or change his clothes. It was so damn frustrating! He was awake all hours of the night wandering around the house, fiddling with things, and going through papers. He would get irritated when he searched for stuff he most likely gave away or tossed years ago. Our son installed a security alarm on the front door, but my dear sweet-hearted husband still got out in the middle of the night, walked across the highway and through the woods. Thankfully, the police found him late the next day and brought him home. They said he was sitting on a bench feeding the birds. Waving goodbye, he hollered, "Thanks for the ride." He was in a great mood, but I was terrified and exhausted. "You could have been run over!" I snapped. "You, my sweet loving wife, worry too much," he said playfully. That was the last straw. I could no longer deny we needed around-the-clock care.

#### FOUR DAYS LATER:

I tried to convince myself and our children that it was good news when the secured assisted community called to say they had a bed available. They accepted him along with \$8,300 for the deposit and first month's rent. Earlier that year, we hired an elder care attorney who put together a Trust that cost us \$9000. I was forced to make life-changing decisions swiftly and spent ridiculous amounts of money without my dear sweet-hearted husband's consent. In less than a week, we moved him into a secured living community, where he would be safe in the hands of a trained staff 24/7. Now, he lives with a skilled team who can deal with the challenges and growing limitations I could no longer handle myself. I prayed for days ahead to be as peaceful as possible.

I will never forget our last day at home. After loading the car, he slid his arm around my waist, gently stroked my cheek, and asked playfully, "Where should we go?" I took a long deep breath and wrapped my arms around him. Resting my head on his chest, I slowly exhaled. At that moment, nothing else mattered. It was just us; two sidekicks who spent almost fifty years together.