

## Never Ending Love

The sunlight streaming through the blinds mesmerized Wade. His heavy heart threatened to pull him under. The musty smell of the nursing home made his stomach twist. How could he leave his beloved wife here day after day?

“Dad?”

Wade looked up to see his daughter, Shannon, standing in the doorway. Her blonde hair pulled up in a messy bun just like her mama used to wear. Shannon looked so much like Betty there were moments when it took his breath away.

“Hi sweetie.”

“How’s mama doing?”

“About the same.” He reached up and tucked a strand of his wife’s hair behind her ear. “I wish there was something else I could do for her.”

“Oh daddy. You’ve done everything possible.” Shannon’s arms encircled him.

He laid his head into her embrace. “You’re so beautiful. Just like your mama.”

Shannon kissed the top of his head and then leaned down and kissed her mama’s cheek.

“Hi, mama. How’s daddy treating you?”

Silence met his daughter’s question.

He rubbed the back of his neck. “Oh, I’m just sitting here. That’s all I ever do.”

“That’s not true, dad. You have been there every day for mom. You’ve taken her to doctor’s appointments, and held her hand through this whole thing. You’ve been there every step of the way.”

Maybe Shannon was right, but it didn’t feel as if he’d done nearly enough. At least not since...his mind flitted back to that dreadful day.

“Well, Doctor Morris? What’s the diagnosis?” Wade sat and interlaced Betty’s fingers with his.

“Unfortunately, it’s not good news.”

Betty sucked in a breath. “Go ahead, Doctor. Tell us.”

Doctor Morris clasped his hand on the desk. “Betty you have the onset of Dementia.”

Tears pricked Wade’s eyes. He squeezed his wife’s hand. It didn’t matter they were both in their eighties. She still had life to live and he wanted it to be full.

Silence lingered in the office. His gaze met hers as a tear trickled down her cheek. He cleared his throat. “Is there anything we can do?”

“There are a few little tricks that might slow down the progress, but no. There really isn’t anything we can do.”

They had done it all. Every little suggestion. Over two years, the dementia took Betty’s memory. His heart plummeted the day she hadn’t recognized her own children. He held on to the

fact she hadn't forgotten him. But her memories had regressed to when they were teenagers. In her mind, they weren't husband and wife. Soon she wouldn't recognize him at all.

Then it happened. Her stroke.

He blinked as the room came back into focus. There he was, going down memory lane again. He shouldn't do that. What about all the wonderful times they had together? Those were the things he should concentrate on and remember.

He exhaled. His eyes locked onto the shell of his wife.

Wade sat next to Betty and reached out to hold her hand. Her vacant eyes stared at the wall. Was she even in there anymore?

"Betty? Can you hear me?"

Her head turned at the sound of his voice, but her gaze never focused on him.

He let out a long breath. At least she responded to him. He looked down at their hands and rubbed his thumb against her paper-thin skin. Beautiful hands that had taken care of their children. Gentle hands that had caressed his face. And strong hands that had worked alongside him to build their life together. She had cared for him and loved him. Even now, sitting here in the nursing home, she was as beautiful to him today as the day they married sixty years ago.

He brushed a tear from his cheek with knuckle.

"I'm sorry, daddy." Shannon laid her head on his shoulder.

“It’s okay, pumpkin. I know she loves me.” He smoothed his daughter’s hair. “Why don’t you go home and take care of those sweet great grandbabies of mine. I’ll stay here with your mama.”

“Are you sure? I hate to leave.”

“Go, honey. We’ll be fine.”

“All right. I’ll be back tomorrow.” She kissed him on the cheek.

“Let me walk you out.” He stood and tucked her hand in the crook of his arm. They moseyed down the hall together.

When he returned to Betty’s room, he found her head drooping to her chest and eyes wide open.

“Betty?”

No. This can’t be happening. Not yet.

He rushed over and cupped her face. Staring into her hollow eyes, he knew. She was gone. He released her face and laced his fingers with hers.

Pushing the call button on her bed, he continued to hold her cold hand.

The nurse arrived and checked his wife for a pulse. “I’m sorry sir, but she’s gone.” The nurse patted his shoulder. “Why don’t you go to the cafeteria and get something to drink while I clean her up.”

He sucked in a breath. “Thank you. Please take good care of her.”

“You know I will.”

Wade kissed his wife goodbye, and walked toward the door and prayed. “Lord, she’s my everything and I’ve lost her. What will I do without my beloved Betty?” Tears ran down his cheeks. His heart twisted in pain. He grabbed at his chest. A blinding streak of white light shot through his eyes, then black shadows crept in on the edge of his vision. He fell to the floor as the darkness closed in on him until everything went black.

He opened his eyes. His gorgeous wife waved at him and ran toward him. He couldn’t take his eyes off of her. She looked stunning.

She jumped up and threw her arms around him. He braced himself, but his legs held. Strength seeped through his veins. No longer the frail man he’d been moments ago. He picked her up and swung her around.

“Wade. You came. You didn’t leave me.”

“I’m here honey. Always.”

She pulled back and held out her hand.

Wade looked around. “Wait. Where...”

Betty smiled. “Welcome to eternity together, my love.”

He grabbed her hand. “There’s no place I’d rather be.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a NIV      Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.