

Forget Me Not

Joan has been married to Roy for 60 years. They have three children and seven grandchildren. While their marriage had its ups and downs, Joan and Roy loved each other, and remained deeply committed to each other throughout this time. Roy, unfortunately, has developed Alzheimer's. While Joan and the rest of his family provided care for him for a number of years, Roy's Alzheimer's has progressed to the point where he no longer recognizes them. Due to the severity of Roy's condition, Joan placed him in a nursing home. Roy settled into his new home, and is well cared for. Joan visits him regularly, but Roy rarely recognizes her. These visits are often emotionally difficult for her. Even when Roy is having a good day, and is relatively lucid, she is forced to confront the way in which their relationship has irrevocably changed.

Through the painful process, Joan encountered an old friend of hers, Dennis. Dennis has been supportive of Joan and her family throughout this time. Dennis, after a few months, confessed his love for Joan, and Joan has started to realize her feelings for him as well. Joan, however, feels conflicted. She still loves her husband, and feels as though she still owes it to him to remain faithful. Even though Joan recognizes that their marriage will never be the same, divorce feels out of the question. In her mind, this would be like abandoning Roy. She feels guilty for developing feelings for Dennis because of the marriage vows she made to Roy.

Her children think she should proceed to date Dennis because Roy would not know and it could give her a better, happier life. Some of her siblings and in-laws, however, do not feel the same way. They argue that Roy is still her husband and deserves to be treated as such until his death. They feel it would be disrespectful to Roy if she dated another man, and Roy has done nothing to deserve that disrespect.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What moral obligations, if any, does Joan have to Roy at this point? What are these obligations based on?
2. What are some morally relevant ways in which dementia might change the nature of personal relationships?
3. Is it disrespectful to Roy for Joan to engage in a romantic relationship with Dennis?

