

PETER FALK BREAKDOWN as daughter tries to take control of his estate

Legendary star slipping in and out of reality

COLOMBO" star Peter Falk broke down in tears when he learned that his daughter claimed in court documents that he's suffering from Alzheimer's disease and needs her as his guardian to make sure his money and property are protected.

The sad family crisis developed after the 81-year-old actor's youngest daughter claimed in court documents that he's suffering from Alzheimer's disease and needs her as his guardian to make sure his money and property are protected.

Catherine Falk, 38, says her father "requires full-time custodial care for his health and safety" and that she's worried he "can easily be deceived into transferring away property," according to documents filed in Los Angeles. The court battle clearly targets Peter's wife Shera, say sources, who has been married to the star for more than 30 years. But a close family friend insists that Shera is a tireless caregiver who is not after his money.

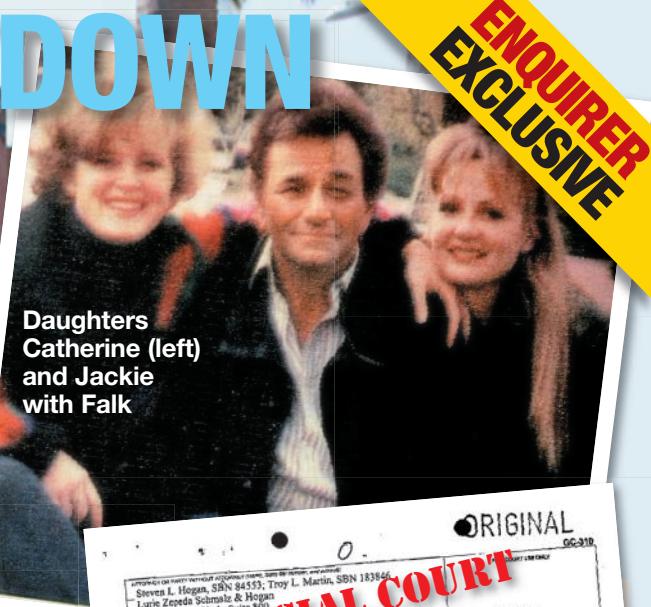
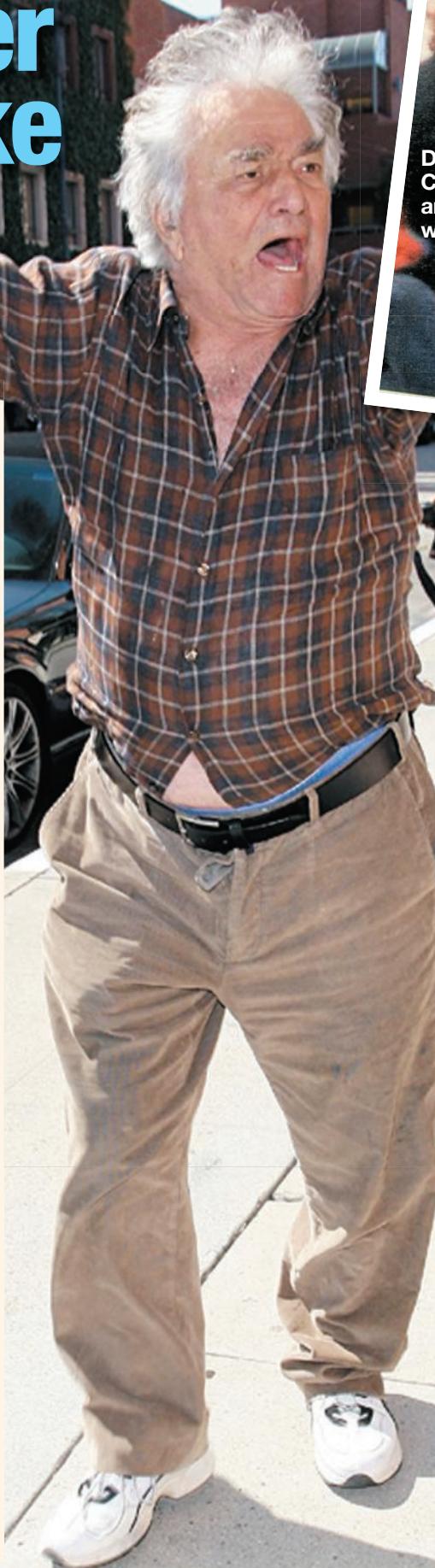
"Shera cares for Peter 24/7, and after 31 years, she obviously has his best interests at heart," the friend told The ENQUIRER.

"IT'S ABSURD TO THINK PETER NEEDS TO BE protected from her. He's at no risk of being taken advantage of by her. Catherine filing these papers did more harm to Peter than any physical or mental illness could ever do. Sometimes he gets so upset about the court battle that Shera says she's afraid he'll stroke out."

Catherine, who has a 42-year-old sister, is worried about her inheritance and fears Peter will leave everything to his wife, according to the family friend. "But Peter made his will years ago, and whatever the girls will get, they will get," the source said.



The actor with wife Shera



Daughters Catherine (left) and Jackie with Falk



Shera has told friends that Peter does not suffer from Alzheimer's but rather from a different form of dementia. However, those close to the star say that he is still often lucid, and he clearly understood Catherine's attempt to take control of his affairs.

"When Peter learned what Catherine did, he felt betrayed. He began to sob uncontrollably," said the source. "Peter goes in and out of reality, but he knows exactly what Catherine is up to, and he's hurt and terribly angry."

In the 1970s and '80s, Falk was recognized by millions for his role as the rumpled, raincoat-clad detective who always outwitted the villain. Up until recently, Peter worked regularly in both movies and television.

But today Peter mostly spends his days in his Beverly Hills home, rarely going out, and being cared for by Shera, according to the source.

"Peter sits around watching old reruns of 'Columbo' and other TV shows and movies he starred in. He likes to see himself young and vibrant."

Added another family friend: "Some days are very good for Peter and there's no confusion. Other days are dreadful and he becomes very childlike. He'll sit for hours with a bright-eyed, questioning, innocent look and want to know what's in store for the day – maybe lunch or dinner with friends. Something exciting, he hopes."

"One very difficult day he disappeared briefly, but he was quickly found in one of the garages on the property looking for his old beat-up 1959 Peugeot convertible that he drove in the Columbo TV series."

by ROBIN MIZRAHI
rmizrahi@nationalenquirer.com

and ALAN SMITH



Falk as "Columbo"