Saving the Best for Last

Bless This Marriage: Wish Fulfilled Despite Illness

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Attending a patient’s wedding was a career first, to say the least. The groom, an older gentleman, and his bride of a similar age had known each other for 35 years—and been in love for the last 10 of those. The couple came to Seattle initially for the surgical management of neurofibromatosis, which unfortunately had transformed into metastatic malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumor. He was admitted to one of the university’s hematology/oncology floors. Unfortunately, no curative interventions were available to this gentleman, and plans were being made to discharge him home. His amazing fiancée was his advocate, friend, companion, and source of humor and levity during this tragic and horrible situation. She made him laugh, held his hand, kissed him, and took care of his personal needs, all while being remarkably put together and kind hearted. It was a sight to see—that selfless commitment and love.

The couple had planned to get married at some point in the future but, when it became apparent that the future was suddenly quite finite, it was their wish to be legally married as soon as possible. Personally, it was an honor to be present at the wedding. Another medical service had sent flowers, and the palliative care team was in attendance to witness the ceremony. In addition, the bride’s adult children were in attendance, one of whom acted as the wedding photographer. The nurses from the hematology/oncology department had gathered signatures on a congratulatory card and purchased a cake and apple cider (and wine glasses, of course) to celebrate the occasion.

The patient, although bed bound, emaciated, and at times slightly disoriented, was fully present during his wedding. He could not wait to kiss his bride, and they held hands the entire time. He wore a clean t-shirt and hospital pants; she wore a lovely blouse and skirt, and a friend had provided her with a simple bouquet. He sat up in bed, while his bride stood next to him, holding his hand. The chaplain came to perform the ceremony, and, as a group, we all said “bless this marriage” at the appropriate time.

The couple then exchanged their vows, which had almost everyone in the room in tears or, at least, misty eyed. Through his slightly labored breaths and clipped sentences, his cachectic and ashen face,