

What Happens In A Bed

by Patti Hall

Eight days before her 50th birthday they were married in their soft new pajamas, holding hands on his bed in the hospital. The pastor and witnesses wore protective hospital gowns and gloves; the patient was in isolation once again. A special dispensation from the head doctor allowed the bride to wed without protection. (Pun intended).

The bride's aunt and the couple's neighbor came the day before on a ring and pajama-driven mission. On the big day the pastor and his wife brought more pre-owned wedding rings to choose from. No flowers were allowed. No rice-tossing, no wedding music or little flower girl. No wedding dress or tux. No wedding cake either, although a nurse brought them cake on their 1-month anniversary. Frankly, they wouldn't have chosen a big-event kind of wedding anyway. But a garden wedding might have been nice; by this time of year, their neglected back yard was surely exploding in blooms.

The pastor and his wife (a witness) were dear friends who had traveled 6 hours across the mountains with only 3 days notice. The other witness was from the bride's new circle of caregivers who lived in the hospital with their stricken family members. This witness had a 20-year-old son who was having life-threatening challenges while waiting for a heart transplant. Later she would lead the pastor to her son's room for a blessing.

The bride simply had to marry the guy after his sweet middle-of-the-night proposal, on knees that were so swollen that they could barely bend; they laughed and cried as he grabbed her waist and she helped him up off the floor, back onto his hospital bed.

This scene reminded both of them of a night in their own bed several years before, where they got to laughing so hard that they both ended up on the floor. Humor was a big part of who they were as individuals and defined them as a couple.

After their friends left, after the certificate was signed, he was set up with the postponed blood transfusion, as the new wife slipped back into her protective garb. Later that night she unfolded her cot and moved it next to his bed; they slept in wedded bliss holding hands between the beds.

Her birthday began just past midnight 8 days after the storybook wedding. She woke to him singing "Happy Birthday" in his whispery-raspy voice, and ending in the words, "...and many more with ME!"

His optimistic song and the effort he made to sing it were her best gifts ever. Her birthday passed by at the bottom of a long list of medical priorities that day, but her thoughts kept drifting back to his gift. If she closes her eyes and allows herself, she can still hear it today.

Seven weeks later, 11 days before his own birthday, the new bride became a widow. Preparing him for the next step on his journey, eyes filled with tears, she lovingly bathed and dressed his body on their own bed at home. He had been Captain of the volunteer fire department and 2 of his men helped her. Later, the new widow's mother sat in a chair next to the bed, humming soothing words and watching her daughter frantically cover up his body as it cooled.

The pastor and his wife would be heading back across the mountains soon.

