

“THE CASE FOR MARRIAGE”  
 (A Lover's Nightmare Before the Wedding Bells Toll)  
 Song of Solomon 3:1-5

### Introduction

Marriage is one of the greatest things going. In a new book entitled *The Case for Marriage*, Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher argue convincingly, and against conventional wisdom, that married people are “happier, healthier, and better off financially.” Amazing isn’t it. We are now discovering in popular culture what many of us already know. God Knows Best! Yes, even scientific research is now vindicating the Creator’s idea of marriage and the family. For example, when we examine evidence on sex we discover God knows best.

### Sex

- 1) In 1993 it was reported that 68 million Americans had a sexually transmitted disease.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 15.3 million Americans contract a STD annually. One in 4 of the victims are under age 20. Five of the 11 most common reportable infectious diseases in this country in 1998, the last year for which data are available, were STDs. And that doesn’t include the most common STDs, herpes and human papillomavirus (HPV); the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) don’t collect data on these. HPV causes over 90 percent of cancer and pre-cancer of the cervix, which, in turn, is causing the deaths of approximately 5,000 American women yearly. The number of lifetime sex partners is highly correlated with the likelihood of contracting a STD. Studies from the CDC clearly show that, on average, the younger a person is when he or she starts to have sex the more partners he or she is likely to have. Hence, delay sexual activity until marriage and avoid STDs. Furthermore, the likelihood of contracting a STD during marriage is negligible. Thus, more marriage means fewer STDs.<sup>2</sup> And keep this in mind: many STD’s are incurable, others can render you sterile, and some are potentially fatal. It is an amazing reality to think if we would simply do sex God’s way, one man with one woman within the covenant of marriage for life, every single STD would disappear from the planet in one generation.
- 2) We now know sex is more satisfying for those who wait until marriage. A survey of sexuality, which was called the “most authoritative ever” by U. S. News & World Report, conducted jointly by researchers at State University of New York at Stony Brook and the University of Chicago, found that of all sexually active people, the people who reported being the most physically pleased and emotionally satisfied were married couples.<sup>3</sup> One writer put it rather straightforward, “Promoting marriage in America will mean for a lot more happy men and women. Sex in America reported that married sex beats all else. For example: “Married women had much higher rates of usually or always having orgasms, 75 percent, as compared to women who were

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Donovan, “A Prescription of Sexually Transmitted Diseases,” *Issues in Science and Technology*, (1993), 9:4, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Joe S. McIlhaney, “Improve Nation: Boost Marriage,” *Knight Ridder / Tribune News Service* (Sept. 29, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Robert T. Michael, John H. Gagnon and Edward O. Lauman, *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey*, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1994) p. 124.

- never married and not cohabiting, 62 percent.” And, the researchers wrote, “those having the most sex and enjoying it the most are the married people.”<sup>4</sup>
- 3) Not only is sex better in marriage, it is best if you have had only one sexual partner in a lifetime. We now know “physical and emotional satisfaction start to decline when people have had more than one sexual partner.”<sup>5</sup> God knows best about sex. God knows best about marriage.

### Marriage

- 1) We have discovered that married people have healthier unions than couples who live together. Research from Washington State University revealed, “Cohabiting couples compared to married couples have less healthy relationship.”<sup>6</sup>
- 2) Married people are generally better off in all measures of well-being. Researchers at UCLA explained that “Cohabitors experienced significantly more difficulty in [subsequent] marriages with [issues of] adultery, alcohol, drugs and independence than couples who had not cohabited.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, marriages preceded by cohabitation are 50 to 100 percent more likely to break up than those marriages not preceded by cohabitation.<sup>8</sup>
- 3) “Wife beating” should more properly be called “girlfriend beating.” According to the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, “aggression is at least twice as common among cohabitators as it is among married partners.”<sup>9</sup>
- 4) Married people enjoy better physical and mental health. Dr. Robert Coombs, a biobehavioral scientist at UCLA, conducted a review of more than 130 studies on the relationship between well-being and marital status, concluding that “there is an intimate link between the two.” Married people have significantly lower rates of alcoholism, suicide, psychiatric care, and higher rates of self-reported happiness.<sup>10</sup>
- 5) Those in married relationships experienced a lower rate of severe depression than people in any other category.<sup>11</sup> The annual rate of major depression per 100 is as follows:

Married (never divorced)	1.5
Never married	2.4
Divorced once	4.1
Cohabiting	5.1

<sup>4</sup> Joe S. McIlhaney, “Improve Nation: Boost Marriage.”

<sup>5</sup> Michael *et al*, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Jan E. Stets (1993), “The Link Between Past and Present Intimate Relationship,” *Journal of Family Issues*, 114, p. 251.

<sup>7</sup> Michael D. Newcomb and P. M. Bentler (1980), “Assessment of Personality and Demographic Aspects of Cohabitation and Marital Success,” *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 44, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> William Axinn and Arland Thorton (1992), “The Relationship Between Cohabitation and Divorce: Selectivity or Casual Influence?” *Demography*, 29, p. 358.

<sup>9</sup> Jan E. Stets (1991), “Cohabiting and Marital Aggression: The Role of Isolation,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, pp. 669-670.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Coombs (1991), “Marital Status and Personal Well-Being: A Literature Review,” *Family Relations*, 40, pp. 97-102.

<sup>11</sup> Lee Robins and Darrel Regier, *Psychiatric Disorders in America: The Epidemiologic Catchment Area Study* (New York: Free Press, 1991), p. 72.

Divorced twice 5.8

The most careful recent study of the mental health of the married and unmarried looked at a nationwide sample of nearly 13,000 people. Married women were about 33% more likely than unmarried to rate their emotional health as “excellent.” Unmarried women were more than twice as likely as married women to rate their emotional health as “poor.”

- 6) Researchers at the University of Massachusetts say married people experience less disease, morbidity and disability than do those who are divorced or separated. Their explanation: “One of the most consistent observations in health research is that the married enjoy better health than those of other [relational] statuses.”<sup>12</sup> One study concerning men in particular revealed that 9 out of 10 men married at 48 will still be alive at 65, while only 6 out of 10 single men will be.
- 7) Men and women are at much greater risk of being assaulted if they are not married, reported the U.S. Department of Justice in 1994.<sup>13</sup> The rates per 1,000 for general aggravated assaults against:

<u>Males</u>	
Married	5.5
Divorced or separated	13.6
Never married	23.4

<u>Females</u>	
Married	3.1
Divorced or separated	9.1
Never married	11.9

God knows best about marriage. God knows best about children.

### Children

- 1) The best environment to raise children is in a home with a daddy and a mother who are married to each other. On average, children do better in all areas when raised by two married parents who live together. The most authoritative work done in this area is by Dr. Sara McLanahan of Princeton University. In *Growing Up With a Single Parent*, she explains, “Children who grow up in a household with only one biological

<sup>12</sup> Catherine K. Relssman and Naomi Gerstel (1985), “Marital Dissolution and Health: Do Males or Females Have Greater Risk?” *Social Science and Medicine*, 20, p. 627.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. “Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1992,” NCJ-145125, March 1994, p. 31.

parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up...with both of their biological parents, regardless of the parents' race or educational background."<sup>14</sup> Adolescents who have lived apart from one of their parents during some period of childhood are:

- A. twice as likely to drop out of high school.
- B. twice as likely to have a child before age 20.
- C. one-and-a-half times as likely to be idle—out of school and out of work—in their late twenties."<sup>15</sup>

A study conducted at the University of Utah said that parental divorce hurts young children because it often leaves them in the care of highly stressed and irritable mothers.<sup>16</sup>

- 2) Children without fathers more often have lowered academic performance, more cognitive and intellectual deficits, increased adjustment problems, and higher risks for psychosexual development problems."<sup>17</sup> Violent children are 11 times more likely not to live with their fathers and 6 times more likely to have parents who are not married. Children not living with both biological parents are 4 times as likely to be suspended or expelled from school.<sup>18</sup> The Heritage Foundation noted in June, 2000, "A million children a year see their parents divorce. Only 42 percent of teens aged 14 – 18 live in a "first family," an intact, two-parent married family. Children of divorce experience "anger, fear, sadness, worry, rejection, conflicting loyalties, lowered self-confidence, heightened anxiety, loneliness, more depressed moods, more suicidal thoughts," says the Heritage report, "The Effects of Divorce on America" by Dr. Patrick Fagan and Robert Rector. Compared to kids in intact homes children of divorce face startling risks. They are: 12 times more liable to be incarcerated as juveniles; 14 times more prone to be physically abused by a single mother, and 33 time more at risk if she cohabits; 3 times more apt to get pregnant, and males commit suicide at 6-fold higher rates." The report also notes that "many children of divorce become dysfunctional adults: "Even 30 years after the divorce, negative long-term effects were clearly present in the income, health and behavior of many of the grown offspring." They have more failed romantic relationships, a greater number of sexual partners, are 2 – 3 times as apt to cohabit, are less trusting of fiancées, less giving to them and are twice as likely to divorce. When both are from divorced homes their risk of divorce is as much as 620 percent higher in early years of marriage. Thus the "marital instability of one generation is passed on to the next."<sup>19</sup> Dr. David Popenoe, a noted family scholar from Rutgers University, explains that there can be no serious debate over this issue: "I know of few other bodies of data in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side of the issue. On the whole, for children, two-

<sup>14</sup> Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up With a Single Parent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Family in America* (Feb. 2000), 2 nr.

<sup>17</sup> George Rekers, "Research on the Essential Characteristics of the Father's Role for Family Well-Being." Testimony before the Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. House of Representatives, 99<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, February 25, 1986, pp. 59-60.

<sup>18</sup> *Business Daily*, 11-12-97.

<sup>19</sup> Mike McManus, "Heritage Foundation Calls for Political Leadership on Marriage," *Ethics & Religion* (June 22, 2000: Column #982).

parent families are preferable...If our prevailing views on family structure hinged solely on scholarly evidence, the current debate never would have arisen in the first place.”<sup>20</sup>

Further, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania said: “most studies show that children in stepfamilies do not do better than children in single-parent families; indeed, many indicate that, on average, children in remarriages do worse.”<sup>21</sup> It is disturbing to note that stepfamilies are the second-fastest growing family structure in America. The fastest is created by out-of-wedlock births.<sup>22</sup>

- 3) Even the death of a parent is not as devastating to a child as losing one by divorce or desertion. Why? Single-parent families created by the death of a spouse have a natural protective mechanism distinguishing them from other single-parent families. Dr. James Egan, a child psychiatrist at Children’s Hospital in Washington, D.C., provocatively asserts, “A dead father is a more effective father than a missing father.”<sup>23</sup> When a father (or mother) dies, he still maintains a place of authority, influence and moral leadership in the home. Parents who have departed due to death usually leave positive reputations. Their pictures remain on the wall, they are talked about positively, and negative behavior on the part of a child can be corrected with a simple reminder: “Would your dad (or mom) approve of that kind of behavior?” If the father has abandoned the child or was never identified, the answer to that question is either “Who cares?” or, even worse, “Who?”

In an article entitled “How Kids Mourn,” Newsweek reported, “The death of a parent can have devastating psychological consequences, including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, underachievement and aggression. But so can a lot of other things, and losing a parent [by death] is actually less devastating than divorce. We know that children tend to do better after a parental death than a divorce,” says sociologist Andrew Cherlin of Johns Hopkins, “and that’s a stunning statistic, because you’d think death would be harder.”<sup>24</sup> Actually there is nothing stunning about this at all. When a child, big or small, loses a parent by death their mind reasons something like this: “if my daddy could be here he would be here. But he’s dead and so he can’t.” On the other hand if a child loses a parent by desertion or divorce, their mind reasons differently saying: “if my daddy wanted to be here he would be here. I guess he doesn’t want to be here and ... it must be my fault.” This is the devastating fallout on children wounded by a divorce, a wound we now know often follows them into adulthood.<sup>25</sup>

And now as the 1990’s close out and a new millennium dawns, additional new research has come forth that makes the argument for marriage with even greater

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<sup>20</sup> David Popenoe, “The Controversial Truth,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1992, A-21.

<sup>21</sup> Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., “History and Current Status of Divorce in the United States,” *The Future of Children*, 4, no. 1 (Center for the Future of Children, Spring 1994), p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), p. 307.

<sup>23</sup> James Egan, M.D., “When Fathers Are Absent.” Address given at the National Summit on Fatherhood, sponsored by the National Fatherhood Initiative: Dallas, October 27, 1994.

<sup>24</sup> “How Kids Mourn,” *Newsweek*, (September 22, 1997), 58.

<sup>25</sup> See the major work on this by Judith Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*.

force. As noted earlier, in their blockbuster, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*, authors Linda Waite, a professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, and Maggie Gallagher, director of the Marriage Project at the Institute for American Values in New York, reveal married women living with their husbands are much less likely to be victims of domestic violence and even violence from strangers than are their single, separated, divorced or cohabiting sisters. For most women, marriage is a safe haven. Marriage changes the relationship of the marriage partners for the good, giving them a stake in the well-being of each other and the family in a way other forms of “partnership” cannot. The public promise of marriage “changes the way you think about yourself and your beloved; it changes the way you act and think about the future; and it changes how other people and other institutions treat you as well.” An extensive survey of the data on marriage shows that married people, in general, are significantly healthier, both physically and mentally, than their non-married peers: They are far more affluent, even when living on only one income; women are safer, and men, even from backgrounds at “high-risk” for violence, are far less likely to commit crime; they report more satisfying sex lives than their single peers, even those who are cohabiting; and overall they are significantly happier than folks in any other kind of relationship “arrangement.”<sup>26</sup>

God knows best. The evidence is absolutely overwhelming and indisputable. He knows best about sex, marriage and children. And yet... we can still have doubts, worries, anxieties and questions as we approach this divinely ordained institution. Fear can almost paralyze us. How can I know? How can I be sure this is the right person? Has the “case for marriage” received a positive verdict in my own heart? Let me encourage you to keep in mind four things as you attempt to settle this issue.

**I. Marriage is the right place to enjoy sexual passion. (3:1-2)**

A Barna Update (4-26-00; p. 1) reported that “the goals that most adults identify as their top priorities in life are healthy living, possessing a high level of integrity, and keeping one marriage partner for life.” These are good and admirable goals, things we hope, and maybe even dream, will come true.

Many Bible scholars believe this portion of Holy Scripture is a dream Shulamith had one night shortly before her marriage to Solomon. It was not a pleasant dream at first. In fact it was more like a nightmare. Still, in the midst of it we learn something of the passionate love she possessed for Solomon. We also receive counsel concerning passion and its relationship to marriage.

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<sup>26</sup> Betsy Hart, “Both Sexes Thrive in Marriage,” *Scripps Howard News Service*, (October 6, 2000).

1. Satisfy yourself this is the right mate. (3:1)

Her desire and passion for Solomon was an all night affair and it was intense. She was completely consumed with him in her thoughts. In her bed where he would soon join her she longed to have him now. It is interesting to note the themes of “seeking” and “finding” occur four times in these verses. The word translated “sought” (NKJV) or “looked” (NIV) can also mean to desire, yearn, or long for. There is a feverishness in the word. There is passion. She was certain in her heart (“I looked for the one my heart loves,” NIV). He was the right man for her.

2. Save yourself for the right moment. (3:1-2)

She looked for or sought him, but, she did not find him. She arose and, at night, went into and about the city, something dangerous and inappropriate for a young woman in the Middle East. So great was her desire for Solomon that she abandoned proper decorum and went in search for “the one my heart loves” (NIV). Still, she did not find him. Why? The answer is simple: he’s not there. Yet! She has saved herself for her wedding night. In so doing, she has honored both God and her husband. Sex, as we have noted, is God’s good gift and one to be enjoyed, but only in marriage. Hebrews 13:4 teaches us the marriage bed is undefiled. It is a place where God says enjoy the pleasures of sexual passion and do so fully. He is not there now in her bed or even at her side, but he will be soon. She has saved herself for the right moment. Understandably she wants that moment to be now and she misses him not being with her. This is the passion God wants us to have for one another in marriage. It will be an indication you have found the right person. Marriage is the right place to enjoy sexual passion.

**II.** Marriage is the right place to examine potential problems. (3:3)

In her dream Shulamith meets the watchmen of the city as she searches for Solomon. The significance of the watchmen in her dream is not all together clear. They could represent nothing important at all. On the other hand they could represent persons of authority and importance, persons of wisdom and counsel who could lend valuable assistance. These are men who “go about the city” (NKJV). They are wise in the ways of the street. They have observed the habits of humanity. They have seen things. They know... Interestingly they find her and she questions them, “Have you seen the one my heart loves?” (NIV) Two lessons can be learned from this simple encounter.

1. Pursue your spouse with healthy abandonment.

She again calls Solomon “the one I love” (NKJV). She is not ashamed for anyone, even strangers, to know how she feels. She loves him and is looking for him. She misses him and needs him. Her anxiety at his absence is normal and to be expected. As time goes on after they are married, it will be a healthy sign in their relationship that they miss each other when they are apart, but that a security has developed in the

relationship that puts fear and anxieties to rest. That there would ever be a day they would enjoy being apart would be a telltale sign that their marriage was in serious trouble.

Charlotte and I knew a couple where the husband traveled a lot, often out of the country. I remember on one occasion seeing the wife and asking if her husband was away on business again, to which she said, “Yes.” I said, “It must be hard his being gone so much.” To my surprise she said no, actually she enjoyed it when he was away. That allowed her to do what she wanted without worrying about him. Charlotte and I were not surprised that a short time later they separated, and eventually they divorced. Pursuing your spouse with a healthy abandonment is to be a lifelong adventure.

## 2. Pursue your spouse with helpful advice.

Shulamith’s asking for help in finding Solomon again reminds us that questions, lots of questions, before marriage, is a wise and good thing. We should ask questions of others and of each other. It is impossible to know too much. We have already addressed an extensive number of questions couples should work through in preparing for marriage. Let’s add a few more.

For many years Dr. Howard Hendricks taught at Dallas Theological Seminary. During that time he compiled a list he entitled: “30 Questions Most Frequently Asked by Young Couples Looking Forward to Marriage.” Let’s look at these ourselves and see what young and inquiring minds want to know when marriage is on their mind.

### “Thirty Questions Most Frequently Asked by Young Couples Looking Forward to Marriage”

1. Where should a couple stop in petting before marriage?
2. Is jealousy part of love for your mate?
3. Who should control the purse strings?
4. When both are working, is the wife’s money hers or both’s? If both work, who should support the family while (if) the husband continues his schooling?
5. Is there any reason why the wife should not support the family while the husband continues his schooling?
6. Should the husband help with housework?
7. Should couples have a will drawn up soon after marriage?
8. Should a young couple carry insurance?
9. What are the effects of frequent business travel or unusual working hours on marital happiness?
10. To what extent should we discuss our pasts?
11. Is it true that people are not really “in love” until after they have been married for some years?



12. When we differ, how can we work out a happy adjustment?
13. Is it true that quarrels are never necessary?
14. If we come from divided families, can we profit by our parent's mistakes?
15. When we belong to two quite different churches how do we work out our differences and what about children?
16. How can a couple keep in-laws in their place, but still make them feel loved and necessary?
17. What if he feels she does not give enough and she feels he does not give enough, they talk about it and still feel this way, what is suggested?
18. How soon after marriage should a couple plan to have children?
19. When considering having children, should the decision be primarily economic?
20. Are contraceptives safe to use? Do they lead to cancer or sterility?
21. What part does each partner have in the love play preceding and during intercourse?
22. Is every couple able to have satisfactory intercourse?
23. Is it harmful or wrong to have intercourse during menstruation?
24. Is there danger of constantly arousing sexual desires and not fulfilling this desire, in both male and female?
25. How does a woman know when she reaches a climax?
26. Do women undergo emotional changes during pregnancy and menstrual periods?
27. How important is it for couples to know their RH factor?
28. Are regular times for prayer important?
29. Are there occasions in marriage when divorce seems a reasonable and even proper solution?
30. If we find difficulties arising in our marriage what immediate steps should we take?

### III. Marriage is the right place to experience natural protection. (3:4)

Shulamith's persistence pays off as is often the case when it comes to romance. The watchmen leave and suddenly there Solomon is, the one she loves. Notice two things she does that would let him know of her love and that we would do well to emulate.

#### 1. Hold on to him.

"She held him and would not let him go." She had found her man and she was not about to lose him again. She feels protected and secure and I suspect he felt the same.

#### 2. Honor him.

She took him back to her maternal home, a place that would also feel safe and secure. She is certain he is the man with whom she wishes to spend the rest of her life. There is no indication of resistance on Solomon's part. He loves her and desires her as

much as she does him. He is honored by her attention and her intentions. This is indeed the woman for him as well. In sickness and in health, for better or for worse, 'til death do us part, they will be there for each other.

**IV. Marriage is the right place to exercise spiritual patience. (3:5)**

Marriage is as much you being the right person as finding the right person. When you are the right person you can wait on God and trust both His plan and His timing. When you are the right person you are ready for God to bring the other right person into your life.

For the second time in the Song (cf. 2:7) we hear the refrain calling us to patience, to wait. The refrain is in the form of an oath, a vow. Though the vow is made by the gazelles or the does, I believe ultimately it is to the Creator of these beautiful and active animals that Shulamith looks. What is her counsel? In a sense we come full circle back to verse 1.

**1. Make a commitment to God to wait for the right person.**

We have received good counsel in how we can identify the right person. Be patient. Wait on the Lord. God always gives His best to those who leave the choices with Him.

**2. Make a commitment to God to wait for the right time.**

God's time is always the right time. When we wait and do marriage, sex and romance on his schedule, we discover personally what we should have known all along: **God, indeed, knows best!**

**Conclusion**

I came across a story entitled "Berry Mauve or Muted Wine" that provides a beautiful witness as we make the case for marriage. See if you don't agree.

"Berry Mauve or Muted Wine?"

He found me weeping bitterly in the hospital room. "What's wrong?" Richard asked, knowing we both had reason to cry. In the past 48 hours, I had discovered the lump in my breast was cancerous; the cancer had spread to my lymph nodes; and there was a possible spot on my brain.

I was 32 years old and the mother of three beautiful children. Richard pulled me tight and tried to comfort me. Many had expressed amazement at the peace that had overwhelmed me from the beginning. God was my comfort the moment before I found out I had cancer, and He

remained the same after. But it seemed to Richard that all that had crashed in the few moments he had been out of the room.

He held me tight. “It’s all been too much, hasn’t it, Suz?” he said. “That’s not it,” I cried and held up the hand mirror I had found in the drawer. Richard was puzzled. “I didn’t know it was like this,” I cried. I had found the mirror in the nightstand and was shocked at my reflection. I didn’t even recognize myself. After the surgery, I groaned in my sleep and well-meaning friends had freely pushed the self-dispensing medication to ease what they thought was pain. Unfortunately I was allergic to morphine and had swelled like a sausage. Betadine from the surgery stained my neck, shoulder and chest and it was too soon for a bath.

A tube hung out of my side draining the fluid from the surgical site. My left shoulder and chest was wrapped tightly in gauze where I had lost a portion of my breast. My long, curly hair was matted into one big wad.

What hit me the hardest was that over 100 people had come to see me over the past 48 hours and they had all seen this brown and white, swollen, makeup-less, matted-haired, gray-gowned woman that used to be me. Where had I gone?

Richard left the room. Within moments he came back, his arms laden with small bottles. He pulled pillows out of the closet and dragged a chair over to the sink. He unraveled my IV and tucked the long tube from my side in his shirt pocket. He reached down and picked me up and scooted the IV stand with one foot as he carried me over to the chair. As he sat me down gently on his lap, he cradled my head in his arms over the sink and began to run warm water through my hair. He poured the small bottles he had confiscated from the cart in the hall over my hair and washed and conditioned my long curls. He wrapped my hair in a towel and he carried me, the tube, and IV stand back over to the bed. All of this done so gently that not one stitch was disturbed.

My husband, who has never blow-dried his thick dark hair in his life, took out the blow drier and dried my hair, the whole while entertaining me as he pretended to give beauty tips. He then proceeded, with the experience of watching me for the past 12 years, to fix my hair. I laughed as he bit his lip, more serious than any beauty school student. He bathed my shoulder and neck with a warm washcloth, careful to not disturb the area around the surgery and rubbed lotion into my skin. Then he opened my makeup bag and began to apply makeup. I will never forget the laughter we shared as he tried to apply my mascara and blush. I opened my eyes wide and held my breath as his hands shook as he brushed the mascara on my lashes. He rubbed my cheeks with tissue to blend in the blush.

With the last touch, he held up two lipsticks. “Which one? Berry mauve or muted wine?” he asked. He applied the lipstick like an artist painting on a canvas and then held the little mirror in front of me. I was human again. A little swollen, but I smelled clean, my hair hung softly over my shoulders and I recognized who I was. “What do you think?” he asked. I began to cry again, this time because I was grateful. “No, baby. You’ll mess up my makeup job,” he said and then I burst into laughter.

During that difficult time in our lives, I was given only a 10 – 40% chance of survival over five years. That was nine years ago. I made it through those years with laughter, with God's comfort, and with the help of a man brought into my life named Richard. We will celebrate our 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary this year with our three children - - our twins, who are 17, and our 18 year old daughter. Richard understood what others might have taken for vanity in the midst of tragedy. Everything I had ever taken for granted had been shaken in those hours - - the fact that I would watch my children grow, my health, my future. With one small act of kindness, Richard gave me normalcy.

I will always see that moment as one of the kindest gestures of our marriage.

T. Suzanne Eller  
(Source Unknown)

The case for marriage is made. I'll let you be the judge.