

Silver  
by Hannah Joyner

Last year, we celebrated our wedding anniversary in the hospital’s neurosurgery wing. David was recovering from a craniotomy, and we were awaiting results from a biopsy the doctors already knew would be bad news. I suspected our twenty-third anniversary might very well be our last: living a year after diagnosis with glioblastoma is roughly the average.

Starting with our first celebration, David has always given presents based on traditional themes—paper the first year, cotton the next. After the first year, I thought following the list was sweet but a little corny. By our fifth anniversary, I loved it. He was so committed to his tradition that the night before his brain surgery, David ordered a Moroccan tray and tea glasses from his hospital bed.

At first, I didn’t allow myself to hope that David would still be doing well on our twenty-fourth anniversary, but the day has now arrived. This unexpected year together has been a beautiful gift of time—one that feels important to celebrate. The wrapping paper around the minuscule package David hands me first is bright and cheerful, but I can’t imagine how something so small can meet this year’s theme of musical instruments. Of course, it does: since I am a person who only appreciates instruments in the hands of others, David gives me a tiny guitar charm strung on a chain, along with a beautiful tear-shaped pendant. I immediately ask him to clasp it around my neck.

After I open the first box, David presents me with a second—this one wrapped in silver paper. It is a present for our twenty-fifth anniversary. He tells me he has been thinking about our silver anniversary for so many years that he couldn’t risk not being able to give me something.

He offers me a choice: put the unopened box away in hopes that we can open it together next year, or open it now when we know we can be together.

The chance of David surviving until our next anniversary is substantially lower than the odds we faced as we looked to this year. I choose to open the box. Through my tears, I see a stunning antique filigree necklace from Yemen. David explains that the necklace is a “hirz,” made by Jewish silversmiths to be worn by Muslim and Bedouin new brides.

When I was standing under the huppah all those years ago, and then in the room where we observed yichud (the few minutes a Jewish bride and groom spend alone together between a wedding and the reception), I couldn't stop smiling. David, on the other hand, couldn't stop crying. He assured me his tears were signs of intense joy. My tears tonight are more complicated. I am distraught when I think about the fact that this may be our last anniversary celebration. My assumption that we had decades left together has completely evaporated. But just like David's tears twenty-four years ago, my tears now are also tears of deep love and joy.

David pulls up a playlist of songs we've long loved. We start slow dancing, with David pivoting on the foot whose movements have been slowed by his brain tumor. When “Brown Eyed Girl” comes on, we immediately break into our old replacement lines: “Four-Eyed Girl” and “Four-Eyed Boy”--lyrics we've sung to each other since we first met. My husband holds me tightly, both for balance and from love.

Next to the box wrapped in silver paper is a thumb drive: David has digitized the video recording of our marriage ceremony. I have often played through memories of our wedding, but we haven't been able to watch the old VHS tape for years. One night soon, a night I am sure will be filled with many more tears from both of us, we will make a little stacked cake, frost it with

white icing and flowers, and relive some of those sparkling early days together when all still lay before us.