

YEARS AGO I WAS FLYING FROM MIAMI, Florida, to Washington, DC, and back every weekday for work. My husband, Tom, always stayed up to hear my key in the lock. He would lift me off my feet, hugging me so tight I could hardly breathe. "Welcome home," he'd say, "*mi vida, mi reina, mi amor*" — my life, my queen, my love.

One night, shortly after his sixty-fourth birthday, I came home to a darkened house. He was sitting on the bed without a shirt. His skin was a greenish yellow, and the whites of his eyes were golden.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"I don't know," he whispered.

The diagnosis was inoperable pancreatic cancer. At most he had six months to live.

Despite Tom's illness my employer refused to change my hectic schedule. No longer able to stay up and wait for me, Tom instead placed votive candles in every window, and on the kitchen counter, and in the dining and living rooms, guiding me to the glow of more candles in our bedroom. His body was wasting away in the bed, but his loving spirit still welcomed me home.

He lit those candles faithfully until a few days before his death.

It has been fifteen years since Tom died: the same number of years we were married. At night, when I come home, I sometimes think I see a candle glowing through the darkened window, and my heartbeat quickens. But it is only the moonlight shining on the windowpane.

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