

“14 years this June, *mija*. 14 years...” Hector had married Frannie right after they met at a state school. He found her sophisticated. Frannie, short for Francesca, was from Connecticut and had come to the school because she hadn’t been accepted to any Ivies. She was not a great student, but had the smarts of a woman who knew how to get what she wanted. Her family was second-generation Italians. Hector called her the Countess because of her mannerisms and sense of entitlement. Her parents raised her as a little princess. Getting everything she wanted, when she wanted. Despite her father spoiling her, Frannie still had the capacity for love: to give love and receive it. This was in opposition to the way Hector’s mother had raised him. He was the second youngest of seven kids (four boys/ three girls). His family moved from Chihuahua when he was three years old. They missed Mexico but loved America. Hector was studying Biology, he wanted to matriculate to Pre-Med and Frannie was a Communications major. She was now a broadcast journalist- a reporter on the ten o’clock local news. “Frannie Panebianco-Rodriguez reporting to you live from the site of tonight’s warehouse fire”. Hector was a family practice man. He had been in the same practice for six years now. It was steady and not without gratifying elements.

*Cervical mediastinoscopy.* That’s the procedure Frannie had that summer. They had wanted to biopsy her lymph nodes to determine the extent of the spread of the cancer. Hector joked that with that little camera they’d see her cold little heart. Hector loved her and with great care he attended her throughout their marriage, bordering on fawning. She loved him

and knew of the pains he took to care for her and show her his love. Normally, she would have laughed about the heart joke but the gravity of her diagnosis weighed her down.

“Lung cancer is the deadliest of cancers” repeating what she had read in a magazine. Frannie had not ever smoked, not once. She did drink wine. “I have lung cancer, Hector”. Hector had cried. Like a baby. She held him and remained strong for a moment or two, impassive and distant. Then the tears came on heavy and hard. They made love and Frannie imagined that she could feel the pain Hector would inhabit if she died. She cried while they kissed and he caressed her body.

He used to tease her about her “raccoon eyes” that she wore for the news. Kohl-eyed, exotic looking, she delivered the news nightly. Now the news delivered the story of her death. “Long-time veteran reporter, Francesca Panebianco-Rodriguez died of lung cancer last night. She will be missed here on Channel 32. Frannie is survived by her husband Hector Rodriguez a family practice doctor at Westville Family Care. Donations can be made in her name to the American Cancer Society. For more information see our website. [brief pause]. Up next, grilling in the winter? We’ll show you how to do it and why you should.” Hector had been strong those last few months and had tried to convince Frannie that she wouldn’t die, that they would be ok, that they would go to Spain on a second honeymoon just as soon as she recovered. He kissed her lightly and often and treated her like a sick child.

Hector went to Spain a month after Frannie’s death. He stayed in Barcelona for two weeks. He sat by the ocean in Barceloneta and ate *lubina* for dinner nearly every night. He slept little and walked the entire city, from Montjuic to Las Ramblas to Parc Guell. He grew dark in the sun and thin from the depression that sucked his appetite

and kept him in a perpetual motion, traversing the city, from sunrise to sunset. His afternoons almost always begin with a bottle of *tinto*, growing drunk before he left the tiny hotel room for his nightly walk. He'd ignore the *putas* who called after him. "*Papi, por favor, ven aqui, déjame chuparte...papi, ven aqui*".

He thought about Frannie and how much she would have loved the salty air of La Barceloneta and how she would have complained about the tiny room before kissing his nose, and saying "I love you, my little Mexican". "*Te quiero mija, mi princesa*" would have been his response.