

## MARY TRAFFORD

### Recurrence

*Occasionally, breast cancer can return after primary treatment. There are three types of recurrent breast cancer: local recurrence; regional recurrence; and distant recurrence.*

—From “Imaginis,” The Women’s Health Resource, found at <[www.imaginis.com/breast-health/breast-cancer-recurrence](http://www.imaginis.com/breast-health/breast-cancer-recurrence)>

Recurrence:

something happens again,  
has happened before,  
has come back.  
Full circle, round

of surgery, chemotherapy,  
radiation. Recovery?

Time will tell.

One month  
and your hair grows back.  
One year  
and you detoxify,  
begin to feel less drag-ass tired,  
even start to relax  
feel *normal*  
is a word you might try on again.  
Five years  
and you’re out of the woods.  
So they say.

But it’s the shadows  
that scare you,  
the hint of more to come:  
white shadows on  
x-rays, CT scans, MRIs;  
tiny pea-shaped shadow  
on a mammogram.

And you know:  
more time is never enough.

#### 1. Local

The memory remains:  
phantom breast still has roots,  
tender tendrils curling into flesh:  
hold fast,  
await perfect combination:  
time, light, something dark,

something  
left behind.

*Not recurrence, per se,  
but a failure of primary treatment.*

Not so reassuring, now:

incision knit together, a tight, white scar;  
radiation burns healed, flat skin like paper;  
long, lingering fear, fatigue, fear washed away;  
you start to feel whole again.

But it’s time to  
go back,  
do it over again,  
only this time,  
do it better:  
resolve to make  
this one  
the last.

#### 2. Regional

This time, it’s not about the breast,  
gone anyway.

It’s about a spreading stain,  
deepest red wine spilled  
and spreading, chest-high.

*More serious,*

for it can touch cherished places:

sweeping arc of rib,  
subtle curve of clavicle,  
solid shield of sternum,  
most of all

the pectoralis: strong, broad muscles  
you use to hug, to hunker down,  
to clasp arms round yourself,  
to weep.

#### 3. Distant

Christened with its own name:

*Metastasis — transfer of disease  
from one part of the body  
to another.*

Sounds so benign, even sweet,  
like sharing, or borrowing a cup of sugar,  
a favour traded between neighbours.  
But metastasis means “spread,”  
and your life spreads out behind you,  
so little to sprinkle ahead,  
to mark the way,  
so little to ease the going,