



Martha, 61 Chicago, IL

Stage 4 Breast Cancer

Hey 2015 Martha,

These early days of our diagnosis are indescribably numbing. There's so much to learn when you're thrown into this world, words like "metastatic" and "palliative," new routines that bring you to the hospital, week after week. I'm going to give you a heads-up right now, when you see the word "re-staging" on your CT paperwork, it doesn't mean that your radiologist made a mistake and you're not stage 4. It just means you are having another scan to see what that stage 4 cancer is doing. You don't get to go down the stages, is all I'm saying.

Don't let it break you.

I know it's hard. There are days when the enormous losses shut out everything else. Those unending "lasts" – New Year's, first day of school, budding trees – marking endings instead of beginnings.

But for you, it doesn't stay that way because as you learn to name all the lasts and losses, you also start to name joy, beauty, resilience, gratitude. Until, one day, while standing behind a booth at the Farmer's Market, the world goes silent as you realize this

month, this day, marks three and half years with stage 4 breast cancer. The guardrails that have kept life in check fall away.

I want you to know that this will happen. You will stop measuring your life by treatments, blood tests, scans, and appointments, increments of time so small it feels like your life is being cut short even as you are living it. Cancer doesn't get to steal everything about you. The world is full, the moments are yours to hold. One day, maybe even today, you'll walk back into our big, hopeful, riotous world, give thanks for it, and then give life everything you have.

Love,

Martha