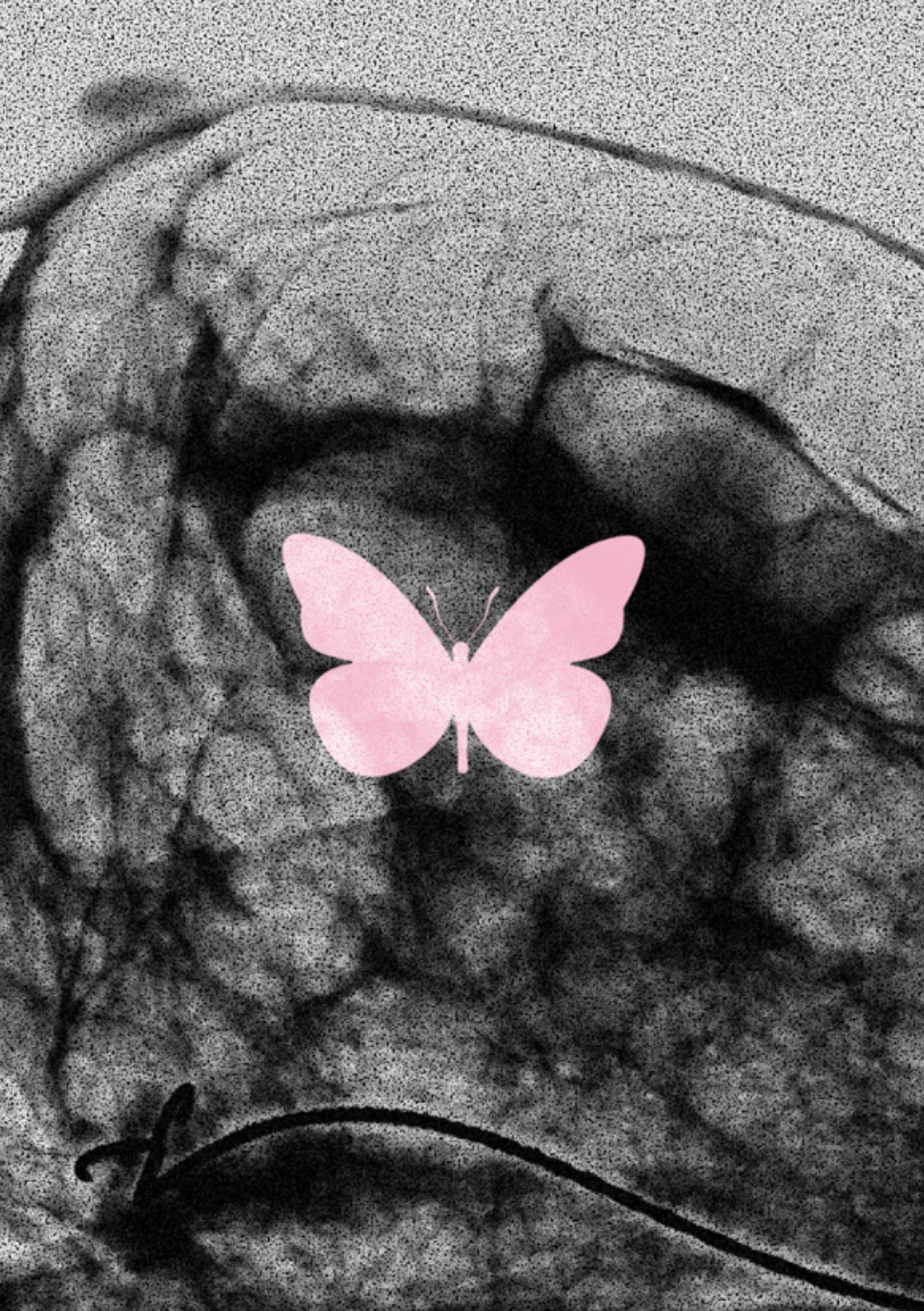




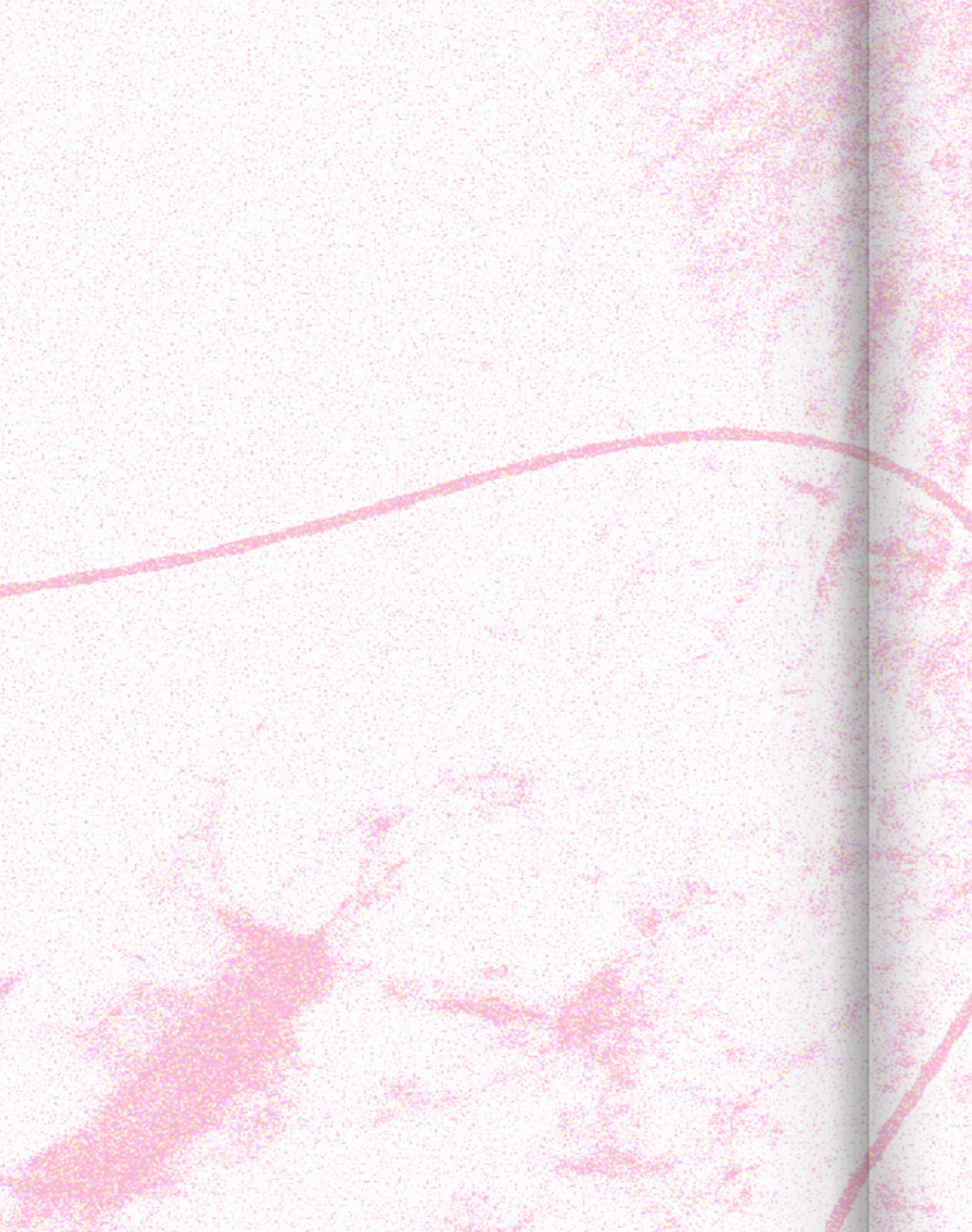
Verónica Pascual

The Butterfly's Transformation





**Dedicated to the women who
are going through it,
who have been through it and
overcame it,
and who have transcended in
their struggle.**



Fear? Why are we afraid?

Because they tell you that you are going to undergo a test. Fear of the procedure itself, especially if it is aggressive or invasive. Fear while we wait for the results. Fear of knowing the results.

Perhaps none of these fears exist —or perhaps they do...

There will be joy if everything has gone well. If not, we feel panic about what is going to happen, about something bad occurring and bringing our existence to an end. To this general feeling we may also add the physical and emotional suffering.

Illnesses, traumatic experiences, or even near-death experiences bring you closer than ever to life. You analyze; you value what is truly important. You choose. You appreciate. You prioritize being yourself. You see how fleeting life is.

Death, in our culture, is something distant, it's bad, it's sad, it's a fact that is hidden, something that stays far away. It's better not to be aware of it. It's better not to think about it. It's better to live in the illusion of immortality, of the endless, of what seems infinite and will never happen. The truth is that it's the outcome of every human being, and we should have been aware of it from the beginning, but we rarely keep it in mind.

There should be a kind of preparation for one of the most important moments of our lives. Perhaps the fear of the unknown is what keeps it at a distance. "It will come eventually; it doesn't concern me right now." And yet, where —and when— is that moment for each of us?

INTRODUCTION

— What is this?
— That's what I'm wondering...
— This is something new. Have you noticed anything?
— Not really... only a very intense pain last week.
I thought it might be related to the previous biopsy,
eight months ago.

It was supposed to be a routine check-up —a
follow-up appointment. But no, it wasn't.
The doctors' faces don't lie. When something
isn't right, you can tell —especially when you
have known them for years. They suspect
malignancy... cancer.
A new biopsy will confirm it —or rule it out.

I am in shock, trying to hold myself
together, as best I can.

THE DIAGNOSIS

Today, April 23rd, 2019, I learned the result
of my breast biopsy.

I went to the hospital, to the nephrology
department. I went up to the ward and Ana
García gave me the news.

It was very hard for both of us. With her
were María Montero and Teresa García,
also nephrologists, like Ana. I was deeply
grateful for their presence — their
warmth, their hugs and kisses.

When I arrived home, all I could feel was a
piercing coldness, fragile, like a sheet of
ice that could shatter at any moment. No
words were needed. A few tears came to
my eyes, and my partner gave me a long,
warm embrace.

When I was able to, I told him that the
results were not good.
Everything felt so strange — I don't know
whether it was real or not.



UNCERTAINTY

I begin to rethink my whole life. I didn't know what was going to happen to me. I didn't know whether I was going to live or die. I didn't know what lies ahead. Will it be chemo? I didn't even know how much time I had left. No one does — but in this case, death feels closer.

This was teaching me new things: to feel the love of the people around me, to see everything —and everyone— in a much more human way.

I can see beyond the body. I could see souls.



OUR WEDDING — MAY 3RD, 2019

Today we celebrated our civil wedding at the City Hall in Cádiz. It was beautiful and deeply moving. Our parents and siblings were there, as well as my “nephrology family.” I was so happy that they were all with me, accompanying me in such an important moment.

This time, my tears were only tears of deep gratitude.

Tomorrow we will celebrate another small wedding at a beach bar.



FINDINGS

It has been an accumulation of emotions, both highs and lows. The day before the wedding, at 9:00 p.m., learning about the presence of an intramammary lymph node and the possibility of liver metastases was an extremely painful blow. I couldn't stop crying. Getting married with that kind of news was very hard.

Fortunately, on the Monday after the wedding they ruled out the liver metastases — they were simple cysts.

I felt a great sense of relief and joy — although everything is happening little by little... It is good news, but I still don't know what is going to happen.



BREASTS

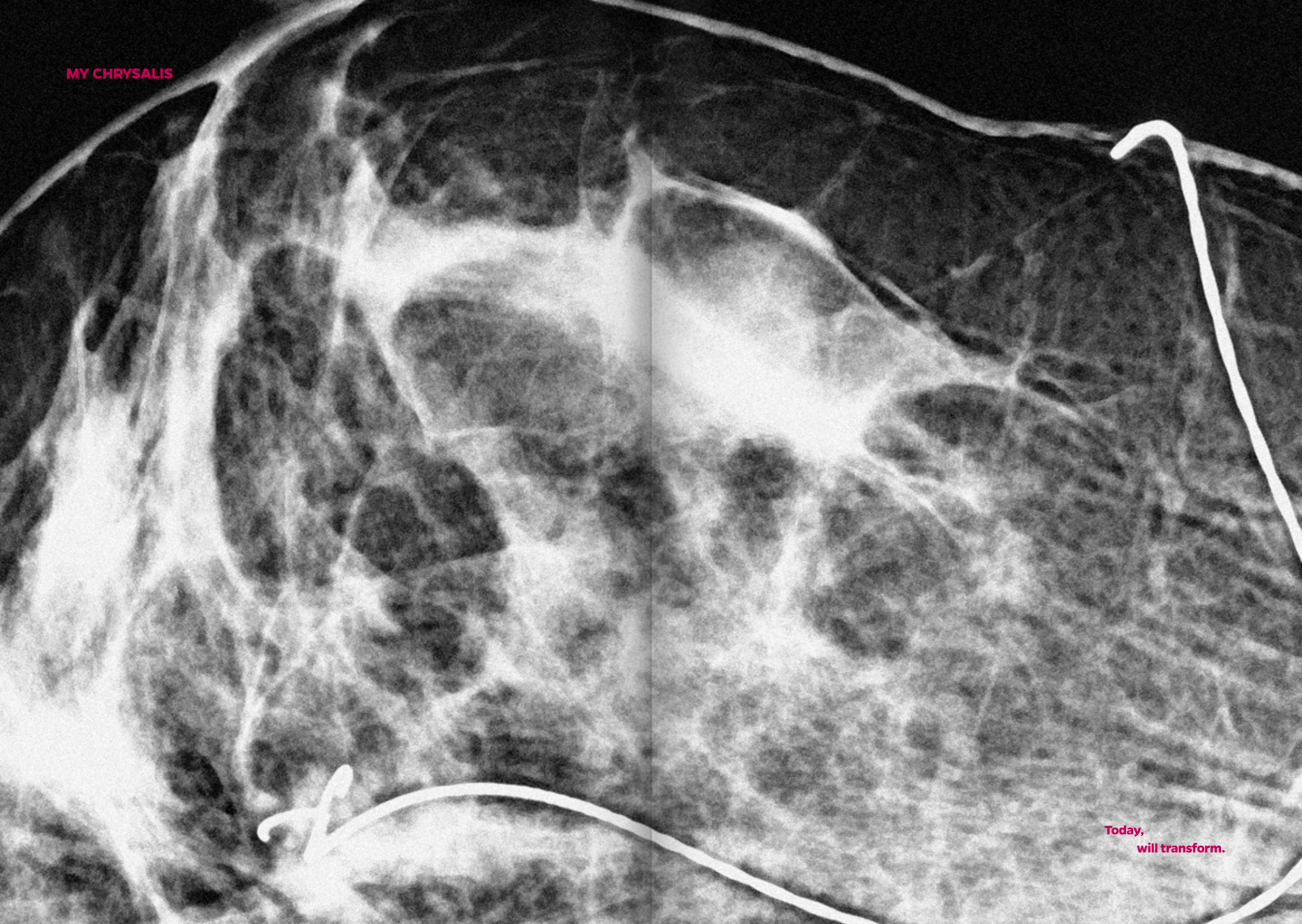
My breast.

What if they change shape?

**Maybe I will never see them again the way
they are today.**

**Tomorrow, May 21st, 2019,
is the operation.**

MY CHRYSALIS



Today,
will transform.

Pasoual Perez, Veronica
33A 10H/F,AN131

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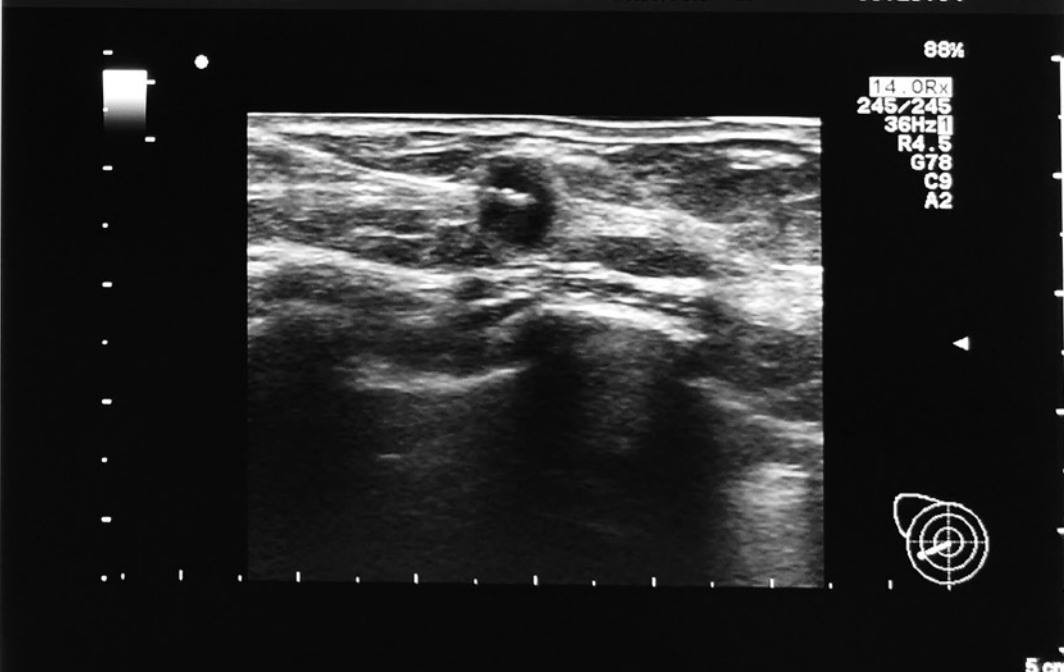
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COME

— Don't leave me. I'm scared — really
scared. What if I don't come back?

— If you die, I'll kill you.
— Then I wouldn't be here anymore.
— I know...



ELEVATOR

I'm going to the operating room.

Once inside:

- I'm scared.
- Think of beautiful things.
- Okay.
- The anesthesia is starting to take effect now.
- A photo... a pho...

I was already unconscious.



If I had died, my last words would have been those — “a photo.”
They were deeply meaningful to me.

I CAME BACK

**“Have I died?” (The first question I asked —
although I don’t remember it.)**

**“I’m back! I’m back!”
(I couldn’t stop repeating it — my first
memories after the anesthesia.)**

**Everything was black at first. Little by
little, color began to appear and I started
to recognize where I was. I was in the
recovery room at the hospital — a place I
had so often visited to see patients.**

**What an immense joy — I was alive!
I just wanted to run. I came out of
surgery full of energy. I’m sure the
anesthesia and painkillers had a lot to
do with it.**

NIGHT

Long hours in the hospital. Time stands still.



THE ROOM

My bed.



THE PILL

Hormone therapy. Tamoxifen.

One pill a day, for five years.

It looks at me, and I look
at it.

— How frightening.
And the side effects? There are
so many.

Should I take it?
Will something happen to me?
Tick, tock... tick, tock...
Alright — I'll take it.



MY PERIOD

I love my menstrual cycle — my connection with it, and its connection with me. It doesn't bother me, although sometimes the emotional changes feel as if they're going to drive me crazy.

This is my farewell — my personal tribute to it. My blood flows and disappears with the water in the shower, just as it will leave my body during the years of treatment with tamoxifen.

I am going to miss it very much.

I AM HERE

Today is the first radiotherapy session.

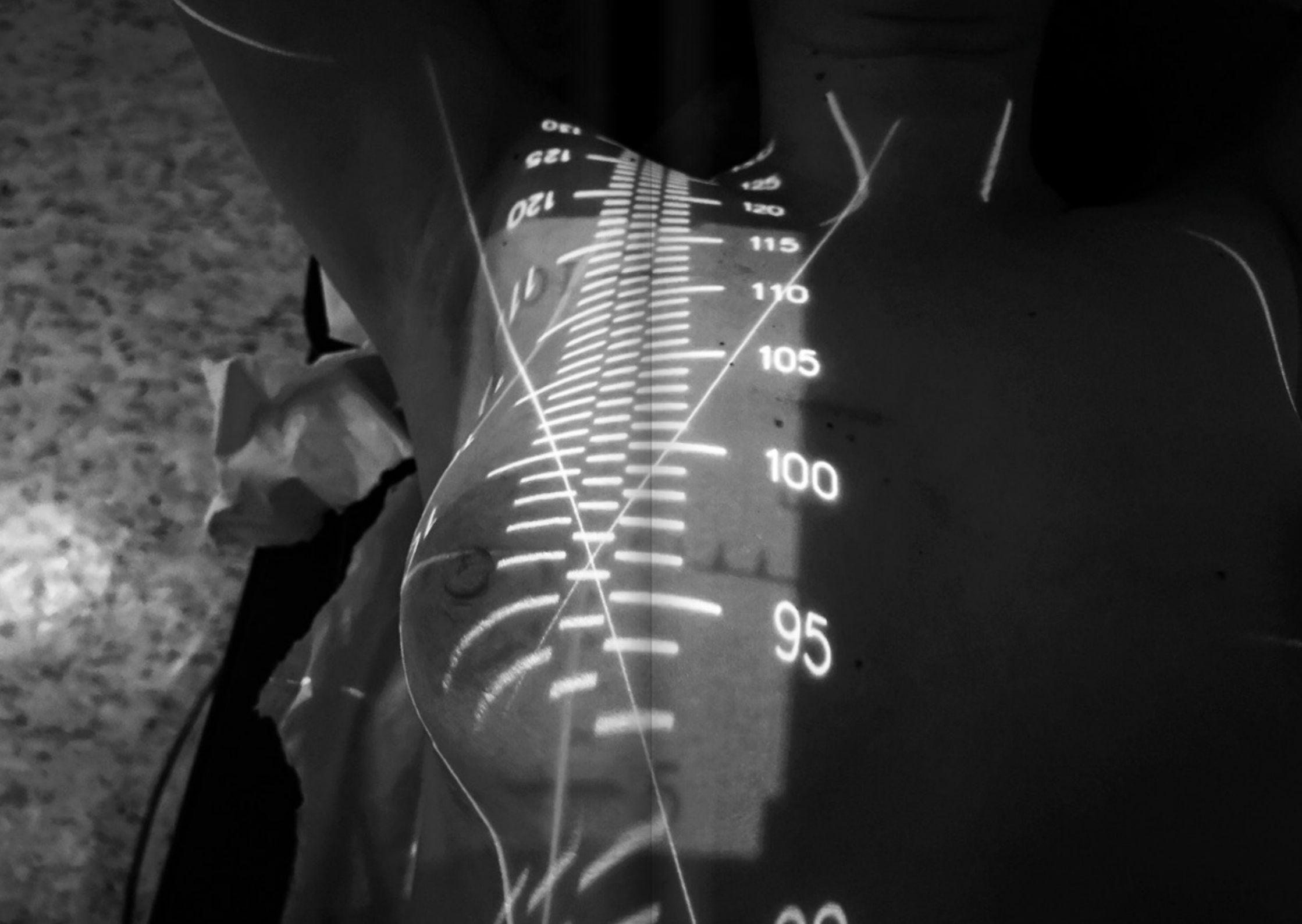
- Uff... I'm scared. Let's see what happens...
- I'm here, with you. Everything will be fine.
- It's my time. It's my number.



RADIOTHERAPY

Radiotherapy.
15 sessions.
5 days a week, Monday to Friday,
for 3 weeks.

They feel endless.



BLACK

**I have lived one of the
darkest days of my life.**

**My mind was my prison, my torment,
my anguish, my despair, my loss of
meaning, the emptiness, the nothingness,
death, darkness, again the nothingness, the
tears, the bitterness.**

**The blackest of black that exists. It was
incredibly hard.**



**Tamoxifen may have a lot to do with it,
although I believe that this was already
inside me — and what it did was intensify it
to unimaginable, exponential, terrifying, and
deeply destructive levels.**

**On top of this came the effects of
radiotherapy. It is like having the
emotional swings of the menstrual
cycle taken to an exponential
extreme.**

TO THE BIN!

The feeling of relief and joy I felt every time I went into the changing room and saw gowns in the bin was incredible. It was a celebration that it was all over for those people — goodbye to radiotherapy. I wished it were my gown.

Today, at last, it is my gown. Into the bin! Goodbye! There you will stay! The gown goes in, it leaves me — and with it, radiotherapy. What a huge sense of liberation.

I am tired from the effects of radiotherapy, but happy.

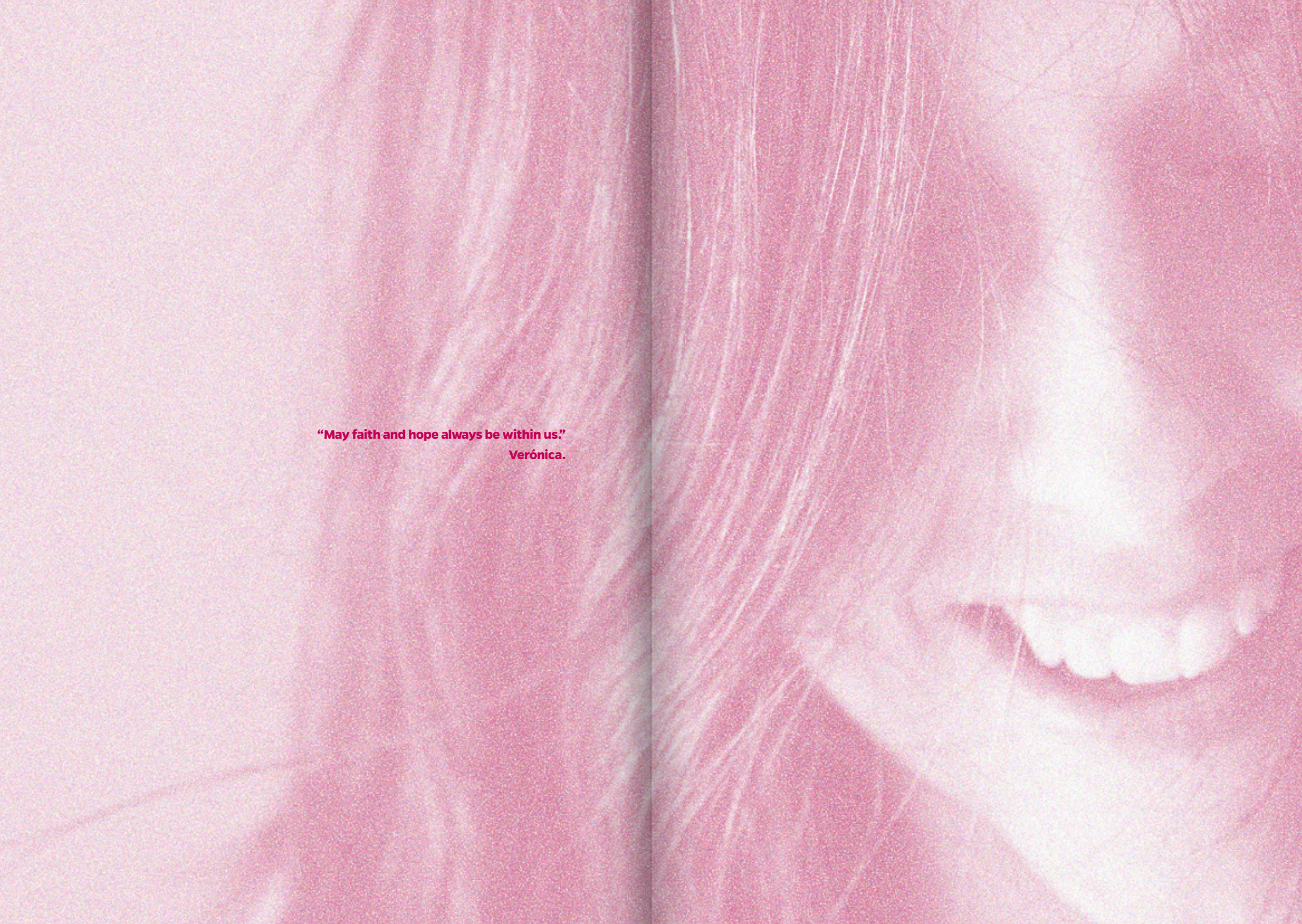


ME

**The days go by and I am gradually starting
to feel better.**

**Everything is slowly drifting into the
distance, as if it had all been a bad dream.**





**“May faith and hope always be within us.”
Verónica.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents, who have been by my side since the day I was born, and to my brother. Thank you for always being there.

To my nephrology family. Thank you for helping me grow, both personally and professionally. Thank you for giving me the camera that has opened new doors in my life.

To the entire Breast Unit of HUPM in Cádiz, for the wonderful team of people you are. My special thanks to Dr. Diego Alejandro Utor, the surgeon who operated on me, and to Dr. Rafael Reina, radiologist and exceptional physician. Thank you for cheering me up every time I saw you, and for reassuring me with your ultrasounds.

To Lola Marín, radiology technician, for carrying out my mammograms with such love and care.

To Ricardo García Carrión, radiotherapy technician, for brightening my days during treatment, believing in my project, and encouraging me to continue.

To Consol Fuentes, for all your emotional release sessions.

To Waco, for having seen my photographs even before they existed — always.

My thanks also to all the people who have crossed my path and helped me without even knowing it... I know it.

Thanks to the illness itself, which gave rise to a project — my project — and allowed me to find the authenticity and truth I was searching for.

My special thanks to Walter Astrada and Daniel Casares Román for helping me make this project a reality.



**“May the butterflies fly
high and free.”**



