

Kindling; Writings on the Body

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Patients

Why do they call us "the patient"

We are not patient. We endure.

The anxious tedium of public hospital

waiting rooms, because waiting

is the punishment of the poor;

interminable buses to inconvenient places

where we count up our cash, calculating

whether we can take a cab home

instead of riding our exhaustion;

the angry contempt of specialists, taught to believe

any pain they cannot explain is insubordinate,

deliberate, offensive.

We are not patient. We are denied.

Not medically necessary, they say, not proven.

Feel free to appeal. We are experts at appealing,

so, we begin again, gathering documents, faxing releases,

collecting letters and signatures,

giving our numbers, all our numbers,

to dozens of indifferent, underpaid clerks,

stacking up evidence for the hearing, where we will declare
as civilly as we can to the affronted panels
that is necessary that we breathe,
sleep, digest, be eased of pain, have medicines
and therapies and machines,
and that we will not be required to beg.

While I am waiting, I am using my pen,
steadily altering words.

Where the card says "medically indigent"

I cross it out and write *indignant*.

Where my records say "chemically sensitive"

I write *chemically assaulted, chemically wounded,*
chemically outraged. On the form listing risk factors

for cancer, I write in my candidates; agribusiness, air fresheners, dry cleaning, river
water, farm life,

bathing, drinking, eating, vinyl, cosmetics, plastic, greed.

I am making an intricate graffiti poem
out of mountains of unnecessary paperwork.

Where the doctor has written "disheveled"

I write *untamed*.

Where it says "refused treatment", I write

refused to be lied to.

Where it says safe, side effects minimal

I say *prove it. What do you mean minimal?*

What do you mean by side? I write

unmarketed effects unmentionable.

Where it asks, authorization, I write *inherent,*

authorized from birth.

Are you the patient? she asks, ready to transfer my call.

I say *only with my own sweet, brave body.*

I say, *Not today, no. I have no patience left.*

I am the person who is healing, I say,

in spite of everything.

I will have to put you on hold she says. Yes,

hold me I say. That would be good.