



# The Adventures of Cancer Bitch

*S. L. Wisenberg*

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## **The Adventures of Cancer Bitch** S. L. Wisenberg

Wisenberg may have lost a breast, but she retained her humor, outrage, and skepticism toward common wisdom and most institutions. While following the prescribed protocols at the place she called Fancy Hospital, Wisenberg is unsparing in her descriptions of the fumbings of new doctors, her own awkward announcement to her students, and the mounds of unrecyclable plastic left at a survivors' walk. Combining the personal with the political, she shares her research on the money spent on pink ribbons instead of preventing pollution, and the disparity in medical care between the insured and the uninsured. When chemotherapy made her bald, she decorated her head with henna swirls in front and an antiwar protest in back. During treatment, she also recorded the dailiness of life in Chicago as she rode the L, taught while one-breasted, and attended High Holiday services and a Passover seder.

Wisenberg's writing has been compared to a mix of Leon Wieseltier and Fran Lebowitz, and in this book, she has Wieseltier's erudition and Lebowitz's self-deprecating cleverness: "If anybody ever offers you the choice between suffering and depression, take the suffering. And I don't mean physical suffering. I mean emotional suffering. I am hereby endorsing psychic suffering over depression."

From *The Adventures of Cancer Bitch*:

I found that when you invite people to a pre-mastectomy party, they show up. Even those with small children. The kids were so young that they didn't notice that most of the food had nipples. . . . I talked to everyone—about what I'm not sure. Probably about my surgery. Everyone told me how well I looked. I felt giddy. I was going to go under, but not yet; I was going to be cut, but not yet; I was going to be bald, but not yet. As my friend who had bladder cancer says: The thing about cancer is you feel great until they start treating you for it.

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