

## TOMATO SOUP

by Mary Ann Cain

1.

Usually on snowy days  
with grilled cheese wedged against bowls,  
Mom always pushing the dairy.  
I rejected her milk when I learned  
for myself how to cut the can, let the tiny blade  
pierce the seam until a jagged circle  
dropped, edged with thickened  
Campbell's, only Campbell's.  
Sweet and acidic, that soup  
played on my favorite tastes, not Mom's  
milk meant to enrich my young bones. I craved  
my own bite. I learned to twist and listen  
for clicks that signaled the gas  
flame. I bent for the copper-  
bottomed pot I always scoured,  
to smooth pale red globs  
as the water, just water, one can, heated.  
Later, I leapt to frying—the actual  
act, never really grilled—  
Wonder bread, Fleischman's, and Kraft  
singles, what the household held,  
but I found my own ways  
to make the meld.

2.

In the infusion room, I expected comfort  
in Campbell's, wheeled in on trays and plastic  
cloches. I had never looked a free meal  
in the face of not being free. Now,  
a year's gone by. I still recoil,  
remembering the chill, that soup,  
the queasy steam. I ate to calm  
the chemo laying waste to my gut.  
This old comfort even now recalls only sickness.

3.

Today, this snowy day, a storm outside  
burdens the power lines, threatens to cut  
off all heat and light. As the fire  
hydrant out front disappears  
under a drift I call back  
Campbell's both ways, Mom's

and my own. I reclaim the calm  
of hot red hearts, the first meals  
after tummy troubles, the slow cold  
of hope, that steal me back  
to when I learned to taste and ache  
and feed myself  
on my own.