

BELIEVER

I never ordered a Lib's Patty Melt, never ordered anything,  
not one thing Scattered, Smothered or Covered

for five years. Every night I soaked my shins in a mop bucket of ice water.  
Pat Sajack lit up with egg crates, my mother cracked

plastic blue trays in the kitchen. I was the best runner in Tennessee.  
I believed in miracles. Nightly I fingered the sorrowful mysteries,

my pea-sized prayers to a popsicle-shaped Mary with a crack in her head.  
I'd never seen someone in a coma, never seen a hospital bed

wheeled to the middle of a living room like the bathtub we found one August  
parked in the middle of a tobacco field. I was yelling one night:

*Big Money*, when my best friend asked me this —  
if ever she lie stiff in a coma, I'd promise to pluck out her chin hair.

I believed I caused the storm that scalped the house for a tub.  
I believed I'd never throw my head back in a Lazy Chair

for a frat boy pouring tequila down my throat. Never would I fall in love  
with a woman. I ran repeat negative splits. I believed in Joan Benoit

and the Flying Scotsman. I believed that I would bend over  
one day, that I *could* weed out the twigs

of black hair on someone's swollen face. I believed  
I would never need my own tweezers.

TO THE HIGH SCHOOL PROM QUEEN

There's just one highway. The wind rears up like a circus beetle.  
The setting sun hangs purple tags on the mountains

as if night were for sale too. Las Vegas tilt o' wheels  
its neon legs toward the desert —

humming seamstress of broke down and ritz  
tacking embroidery floss and velvet swag on everything.

You are there, in the Women's Correctional Institute,  
sleeping on a cot in a former storage closet.

Miles away, snow wriggles through dune and pine.  
Pork chops thaw in my sink; potatoes boil on the stove.

You behind a bar-pull of stars, sky-wandering  
and homeless without the concrete hooks of a city.

You on the streets, cash-wadded and meth-loaded.  
You, knocking out someone's teeth.

Dear friend, I have finally stopped trying to kill myself.  
Sometimes the light comes in tiny points,

shark-toothed and smaller than stars;  
sometimes, it sprays over everything.

Every day my scars shrivel up — lids of rain  
in a garbage can. Once I wanted to travel.

Now I'm in love with the way whole Saturdays  
weigh on my back with laminate flooring and wood piling.

My girlfriend and I throw chops on the grill,  
fat floats above the trees. Shaken,

sometimes the stars, the pine needles spiral gracefully.

PRAIRIES

To be continued,  
two things happened.

The oldest daughter went blind.  
The dog turned a circle and died.

There were other things too but by that time,  
I had cried myself to sleep.

I knew a boy who would not turn his head to the left.  
And a dog, who chased his tail like a fish in a bag,

day and night and day and night.  
I worry

until you read to me out loud,  
*the sun rolls over the edge of the world.*

This turns me inside out  
like an orange slice. The meat of my heart fluffed up.

For want of light, the eye will shrivel.  
If you tie up your arm too.

And so again, you read to me in bed:  
*with hands clasped, they ran a little way —*

sisters on a prairie. In New York,  
I followed a blind man whose wrist was tied with string.

For 26 miles, two men ran this way.  
There are people like that and trees hacked to the heartwood

now growing leaves. It is quiet  
when the book slides to the floor.

Italics, references taken from *The Long Winter: The Little House on the Prairie* series by Laura Ingalls Wilder

THANKS FOR A GREAT SEASON SEE YOU IN THE SPRING

Bumper to bumper stars honk from their darkened  
display cooler, that off-shore sky advertising

the dark and frozen shore where I've moved recently,  
despite swearing off moving again,

my apartment among the boarded-up motor hotels  
sitting beside the potluck sea noisily calling

anything corn-colored and vitamin-like into it —  
the sun, the suet-fed, two fishing boats

go missing, the Tast-ee Freeze is for rent,  
the wind drunk-dials absurdly, a kerfuffle

of cats and one folksinger rhyme by the True Value.  
Everywhere, an inward propagation, the sea is

a white forest of lungs, the dunes grope obsessively  
and recapture themselves. I am touched deeply

by the RealFeel. I hold hands with a stranger  
through a wind advisory.