

MELISSA BARRETT

Glimpsing Wrangel from the Pack

*I might better keep these pages unwritten, leaving a blank properly
to represent the utter blank of this Arctic Expedition.*

—George W. DeLong, 1879

Hail mauling the deck. *Jeannette* a clutch
of broken notes pitched

against a sky, lit by ice.

By aurora red so sinister, the whole
ship wrapped in its gauze,

a city on fire.

We were prism-led before the pack.
Now our days are dull. Dull

and bludgeoning, the snow

robing every spar and rope, snow
neither one thing nor the other.

Jail gray. Gales broiling.

We tilt northwest, past Wrangel.
The top of the world

scalped—razor cut

and some mornings extravagantly clear.
We move in every direction

we never meant to.

So clear, my voice booms.
So clear, why don't you hear me.