

MELISSA BARRETT

The Sears, 1973

Repose of fog, static wreathing leaden
blocks of downtown, the skyline dribbles
halfway up a husky-necked corvine tank:
black onyx, glass slats pierce the grisaille
of Chicago, midmorning.

Months beyond the topping out, beyond
Watergate and black hole theory, the city
demurs, still raises its eyes for the source
of such shadow: entire avenues knuckle
under glacial chill,

midtown walks now more terse, more
crouched. The American Dream staked
this titan—one hundred ten stories
staggering after the screech in sales, the
blurt into heaven

so clouds divide: dirk of ash spotted with
rhinestone sweat. All this from catalogs
of saddles and wallpaper swatches, from
three years of railing a hole wide as a grave-
yard (and as dug up)

into South Wacker. Till one tar stalk finally
distends: Graham's prediction of the '80s,
the '90s, etc.—the glossed hearse blacker
than gravity, spate of steel and aluminum
skin that rises with

the confidence of the elected, oil-slicked
javelin ramming right into heaven as if only
to announce the vacancy. More wind
from Chicago, we hear New Yorkers spit,
and Porkopolites roll

their eyes, pour every blue chip onto their
Reds. The workers the worst: declaring
offices cold, oppressive, and the lobby
a curdling mire. True, the wind would slice
windows at their centers,

and pedestrians were lost in the pother
of a fallen girder. Beyond a certain floor
you can see the toilet water tremor, hear
the coffee slosh. Only a few brownbaggers
dot the nine-barreled

base at lunch, but scores of tourists pad in,
cameras bumping their chests like second hearts.
It's their twenty minutes on deck (guessing at
Michigan, waving to an uncle in Lansing)
that make the renovations

worth it, the ghosted lower levels okay.
So Illinois floods with coruscating excess.
So we bow our heads under the wave
of it, thinking excess to be inaccessible,
but of course it is—

That's capitalism: records always broken,
trophies gleaming and rusting almost at once;
this record's wraith fluting along the highest
fused beam, tapping along to the antennal
ruby blink.