In the Closet of the Steel Museum

Beyond the hall of photographs, the inscriptions shining gold, the closet door unlocked, I discovered

the modern workers’ equipment: five hoagie shaped sweepers all with dislodged handles like torpedoes,

there was an arsenal of window cleaner, and an ant motel in the corner. As Heather and I slipped inside,

I thought of my grandfather’s broken watch. His refusal to take it off, even in the light of criticism.

The first time he brought me here, he invested hours explaining the production of steel. His wristwatch shined like a beacon to my boredom. All I wanted then was to be out strumming my alternative
tuned guitar under the pine trees, dreaming of easy nymphets with lilac perfume and black lipstick.

My grandfather ended his story by demonstrating how he dipped his fist into a bucket of hot water on the day U.S. Steel shut down forever. He held his branded arm under until the second hand on his watch stopped. His face flushed red; I understood this not as salient anger but as a lack of oxygen, an eroticism for the strange landscape of life lived. At that moment I dipped my hand under her skirt, pulling her body up against mine, her lips to my lips. I could smell her black hair, not like lilacs at all, but like burnt waffles, the kind he and I made when nine inch snow boxed us inside the apartment complex.
And here we were, crammed like a bookmark into an encyclopedia of the real thing. I thrust and held my breath until climax. Sharing her long into glow of after hours, the light dimmed, and I scurried out the front door as the security officer bellowed after me. For him the nightshift was just beginning. For us both, it ended a lifetime ago.

In the cold dark, I remember that night, as steam climbing out sewer grates, as a rash of thought in a depression of flesh.