Solstice

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The sad light of winter afternoon
leans against the Sears store in its parking lot,
the great, yellow cube of butter moving
blandly under the clouds, the green script of Sears
written on the sky sometime in the fifties,
the people coming and going, their arms
full of merchandise from Sears, the Sears
employees, or associates as they are now called,
neatly dressed and friendly, moving with confidence
amid lawn and garden products, housewares
and Sears lingerie, hefting Sears all-weather
radials and tidying up piles of good-quality,
reasonably priced work shirts and slacks,
their movements across the ancient linoleum
seemingly effortless, although I know
from experience that their feet are aching,
that their eyes stray wistfully to the big
industrial face of the yellowed Waltham
as they think of their next break, of slipping
behind the scenes into the associate lounge
for ten minutes to have a Coke and some chips
from the vending machine, maybe a smoke
if they haven’t quit already, tilting
a chair back, putting up their feet, dropping
their chins and letting the mind go blank
in the company of two or three other
tired associates of Sears, sharing stories,
making restful sounds, almost falling asleep
to the hum and whir of this great, nationwide
retail engine that is fading now, downsizing,
shuddering like a dreaming dinosaur
in the last light of the millennium
but where, nonetheless, for now
the associates doze, nametags pinned
to their chests, safe in the huge heart of Sears.