

Ellen Doré Watson

ALL WE HAVE

Behind the wall teeth—tearing what we think of as ours into a tidy
soft place out of the weather—while we fancy ourselves on top
of the weather, define the variable as speed. Behind one variable
another, awaiting only a new ingredient: the nickel we placed
on the arm of the turntable to keep the needle in its groove

or the sudden slippage of a last speck of dust or care that sets
the balloon to lifting. Behind lifting, behind balloons,
behind speed is breath, is choice, whether or not our hands
know it, a tool, whether or not we use it, like a thumb.

Behind the thumb all of evolution, which sometimes seems to have
reversed direction, while we scramble to stay on top
of money, behind which we won't go, for there is nothing. Somebody's
nothing permits my something, enormous in other latitudes
or three houses down but to me—presto—obliterated

by sums and sums of things belonging to others. Behind the other
always a self, behind which many selves, surely
one or two of them redeemable, the color of mercy. Behind color
more than can ever reasonably fit, hunks and bulges

of rage and assumption, race-colored spectacles. Behind the specter
of race or spectrum, joy and joy, bright and insubstantial
as stain. Behind stain history, familiar as an old shoe, whether lived in
or forgotten, made of pigment or plant or dirt or time.

Behind time the mouse's industry, cache of seed and young

in torn cotton behind the wall. And behind every wall unwall,
unweapon, behind every singular plural: a spectrum
of lifting to safety, nesting out of the weather behind a wall built
of all we have, when all we have is the we.