

I polish shoes

I took his shoes to polish, quickly
every step he takes in them
imagined as someone else's last
on TV, I reach for pixels of compassion
in the world, an apron and black wax,

in a country, bombed
where shoes lay about
telling their blood tales
amongst bricks and glass,
from feet that cannot be washed in oils
crucifying our histories
Jesus, barefoot walks amongst the debris

their sandaled feet are cut
brave, treading what might be
roads to refuge, trauma trains
chug full of their killing dreams
reaching borders in their nightmare blasts
living thoughts of futures
hopes and grief

this war, this week, wailing walls
how long will this last? I polish
use all my energy
for these are shoes upon shoes
I want to clean.

—Tish Ince