

*I must / walk / with the wind and the water, / open windows,
break down doors, / break walls, / illuminate corners...
I can't be with you / today, I must / fulfill my obligation / of light*
—Pablo Neruda, from “Ode to Clarity”

Flying home after the protest

poetry by Partridge Boswell

we taxi past her plane abandoned on the tarmac
its dark portholes staring out like eyes of dead

fish from a dry aquarium, the name of a country
no longer ours stenciled across the fuselage—lifeless

two-dimensional letters, a child's nickname aborted
after too many carelessly invoked and spat it back

as a joke, ignorant of its origin, the fond formation
of vowels, the touch & go struggle to be born.

Lifting into soft bituminous night, shattered crowns
of human light scatter below us, spidering veins along

roads and river valleys, not gold or gaudy gems but
pulsing incandescent hands held in the darkness

from here to the last outpost of feeling, each a cosmos
of meaning keeping vigil over tropes they'll try to steal,

the thousand Vegas they'll try to smother again so we can
rekindle and constellate another and another and another

with the patience learned of loving someone other
than ourselves. Fine. We were punk'd. But was that

the best we could do? Rising to a drone of propellers
the world below falling dim and focused with work

to be done and oaths to be taken, not shirked. Did we
really stand shoulder-to-shoulder arm-in-arm in our own

time and city chanting and singing as one from the womb
of a mother who could not call us home to roost or tell us

winning only leaves you more to lose with nothing to
shine through not even the simplest tune to move you

were loss not also a birth nameless and keening its
own Vivas? And yes, there were real mothers and

children too alongside someone I could've sworn was
you carrying your own sign lettered clear and bold

for all who can read and especially all who won't ever
read this or any other poem if for no other reason than

to avoid the bewildered silence mistaking this
for the end when it's only the beginning.