

Martín Espada

### **Imagine the Angels of Bread**

This is the year that squatters evict landlords,  
gazing like admirals from the rail  
of the roofdeck  
or levitating hands in praise  
of steam in the shower;  
this is the year  
that shawled refugees deport judges,  
who stare at the floor  
and their swollen feet  
as files are stamped  
with their destination;  
this is the year that police revolvers,  
stove-hot, blister the fingers  
of raging cops,  
and nightsticks splinter  
in their palms;  
this is the year  
that darkskinned men  
lynched a century ago  
return to sip coffee quietly  
with the apologizing descendants  
of their executioners.

This is the year that those  
who swim the border's undertow  
and shiver in boxcars  
are greeted with trumpets and drums  
at the first railroad crossing  
on the other side;  
this is the year that the hands  
pulling tomatoes from the vine  
uproot the deed to the earth that sprouts the vine,  
the hands canning tomatoes  
are named in the will  
that owns the bedlam of the cannery;

this is the year that the eyes  
stinging from the poison that purifies toilets  
awaken at last to the sight  
of a rooster-loud hillside,  
pilgrimage of immigrant birth;  
this is the year that cockroaches  
become extinct, that no doctor  
finds a roach embedded  
in the ear of an infant;  
this is the year that the food stamps  
of adolescent mothers  
are auctioned like gold doubloons,  
and no coin is given to buy machetes  
for the next bouquet of severed heads  
in coffee plantation country.

If the abolition of slave-manacles  
began as a vision of hands without manacles,  
then this is the year;  
if the shutdown of extermination camps  
began as imagination of a land  
without barbed wire or the crematorium,  
then this is the year;  
if every rebellion begins with the idea  
that conquerors on horseback  
are not many-legged gods, that they too drown  
if plunged in the river,  
then this is the year.

So may every humiliated mouth,  
teeth like desecrated headstones,  
fill with the angels of bread.