## Martín Espada

## **City of Glass**

For Pablo Neruda and Matilde Urrutia La Chascona, Santiago de Chile

The poet's house was a city of glass: cranberry glass, milk glass, carnival glass, red and green goblets row after row, black luster of wine in bottles, ships in bottles, zoo of bottles, rooster, horse, monkey, fish, heartbeat of clocks tapping against crystal, windows illuminated by the white Andes, observatory of glass over Santiago.

When the poet died, they brought his coffin to the city of glass. There was no door: the door was a thousand daggers, beyond the door an ancient world in ruins, glass now arrowheads, axes, pottery shards, dust. There were no windows: fingers of air reached for glass like a missing lover's face. There was no zoo: the bottles were half-moons and quarter-moons, horse and monkey eviscerated with every clock, with every lamp. Bootprints spun in a lunatic tango across the floor.

The poet's widow said, We will not sweep the glass. His wake is here. Reporters, photographers, intellectuals, ambassadors stepped across the glass cracking like a frozen lake, and soldiers too, who sacked the city of glass, returned to speak for their general, three days of official mourning announced at the end of the third day.

In Chile, a river of glass bubbled, cooled, hardened, and rose in sheets, only to crash and rise again.

One day, years later, the soldiers wheeled around to find themselves in a city of glass.

Their rifles turned to carnival glass; bullets dissolved, glittering, in their hands.

From the poet's zoo they heard monkeys cry; from the poet's observatory they heard poem after poem like a call to prayer.

The general's tongue burned with slivers invisible to the eye. The general's tongue was the color of cranberry glass.