



Vivas to Those Who Have Failed: Poems

Martín Espada

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Award-winning poet Martín Espada gives voice to the spirit of endurance in the face of loss.

In this powerful new collection of poems, Martín Espada articulates the transcendent vision of another, possible world. He invokes the words of Whitman in “Vivas to Those Who Have Failed,” a cycle of sonnets about the Paterson Silk Strike and the immigrant laborers who envisioned an eight-hour workday. At the heart of this volume is a series of ten poems about the death of the poet’s father. “El Morivivi” uses the metaphor of a plant that grows in Puerto Rico to celebrate the many lives of Frank Espada, community organizer, civil rights activist, and documentary photographer, from a jailhouse in Mississippi to the streets of Brooklyn. The son lyrically imagines his father’s return to a bay in Puerto Rico: “May the water glow blue as a hyacinth in your hands.” Other poems confront collective grief in the wake of the killings at the Sandy Hook Elementary School and police violence against people of color: “Heal the Cracks in the Bell of the World” urges us to “melt the bullets into bells.” Yet the poet also revels in the absurd, recalling his dubious career as a Shakespearean “actor,” finding madness and tenderness in the crowd at Fenway Park. In exquisitely wrought images, Espada’s poems show us the faces of Whitman’s “numberless unknown heroes.”

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