

As Children Know

By Jimmy Santiago Baca

Elm branches radiate green heat,
blackbirds stiffly strut across fields.
Beneath bedroom wood floor, I feel earth—
bread in an oven that slowly swells,
simmering my Navajo blanket thread-crust
as white-feathered and corn-tasseled
Corn Dancers rise in a line, follow my calf,
vanish in a rumple and surface at my knee-cliff,
chanting. Wearing shagged buffalo headgear,
Buffalo Dancer chases Deer Woman across
Sleeping Leg mountain. Branches of wild rose
trees rattle seeds. Deer Woman fades into hills
of beige background. Red Bird
of my heart thrashes wildly after her.
What a stupid man I have been!
How good to let imagination go,
step over worrisome events,

those hacked logs
tumbled about
in the driveway.

Let decisions go!

Let them blow
like school children's papers
against the fence,
rattling in the afternoon wind.

This Red Bird
of my heart thrashes within the tidy appearance
I offer the world,
topples what I erect, snares what I set free,
dashes what I've put together,
indulges in things left unfinished,
and my world is left, as children know,
left as toys after dark in the sandbox.

Source: Black Mesa Poems (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1989)