

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.

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Born in Santa Fe of Chicano and Apache descent, Jimmy Santiago Baca was abandoned by his parents and at thirteen ran away from the orphanage where his grandmother put him. He was convicted on drug charges in 1973 and spent five years in prison. There he learned to read and began writing poetry. His verse novel, *Martin and Meditations on the South Valley*, received the American Book Award in 1989. In addition to seven books of poetry, he has published memoirs, essays, stories, and a movie screenplay—*Bound by Honor*, released in 1993.

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