Winter 1995

mostly it echoes in manhattan, montana

Rande Mack
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sacajawea holds a t-bone steak bone like a dowsing rod
she points it at every out of state plate on main street
buy her a drink and she’ll remember this town for
you —
without houses, without streets, without a whisper

she’ll pull history around by its leash
and uncork some vintage weather
and if the moon is right she might
howl profanely in a distant language

her face is the map most men begin with
her eyes are flickering back porch lights
her smile is swizzled into a neon cocktail
her nostrils flare at the mention of motion

her laughter skips down alleys past
the lurching limos of buffalo shadows
she winks at the squinting cowboys
washing the color right off their trucks

she’s seen the smudges auctions leave on a soul
she hoards memories others would pay to forget
the sound of the only payphone in town
ringing can bring tears to her eyes

sacajawea is devoted to lottery tickets and tulips
and sky speckling redtails circling the minimart
she can spot a hardass in a room full of hallelujahs
and has yet to meet a god she wouldn't trade for green potatoes

she has picked strawberries with every minister's son
but the furry undertaste of huckleberries
clings like a jumper to her taste buds
vague satisfactions nibble away at the night

she sings allegiance to the shaggy breeze
as it gargles the coals of her cooking fire
her voice is a sidewalk heaved with roots and frost
her words rollerskate up and down the block

she cuts through groomed dark yards
past tall backboards and short windmills
under clothes lines and out of focus
on her way from one hiatus to another

the urgent scent of her smoky hair
wakes volunteer firemen nestled in craters of sleep
they sniff their clocks before turning back
to dream the old blue worship of lips and hips

under the flagpole sacajawea empties mice from her pockets
for the unblinking owls scarecrowed on the school rooftops
they were once warrior uncles vanishing in and out of the bulging morning light, revenge grim in their eyes

in front of the auto garage in the splotchy dawn she fills her canteen from the fountain and follows the road to the river
she bathes in bridge shadow and studies
the faces on a page she tore from a book

each day a different page where once
any face might have twisted the silence shut—
sacajawea screams at every west bound train that doesn’t
stop here
a boxcar could cure her insomnia on its way to the sea