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Her External Heart

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Sacagawea of the Lemhi Shoshone tribe Akaitikka, the Eaters of Salmon, was leading on Horseback Captain Meriwether Lewis, Second Lieutenant William Clark, and thirty-one other members of the Corps of Discovery through the Bitterroot Mountains of the Rockies. Although they followed her through such precarious passages where wild spirits preyed, little did they know that she was lost but for the guide of her baby kept to her back, an External Heart in a cloth Womb, pulsing against the center of her spine and showing her the way. The white men mostly kept their distance, whether out of fear or respect she did not know. Lewis most of all treated her child like an absence, although she was grateful for his potion of snake's rattle which aided her difficult delivery a few months ago. Conversely, Clark gazed upon her baby as though he were a totem, and while she named him Jean-Baptiste, Clark christened him Pompy, the springy sound of the endearment reminding her of *bambi*, the Shoshone word for the head. Perhaps Clark sensed the importance of her son, that he was more than a mere infant, but possessed muscular links to the spirit world. Although she shared a spinal language

with her child, she knew that there was more in his seeing eyes than she could possibly comprehend. For instance, as they were sailing up the Missouri River, she sang a lullaby to Jean-Baptiste about Issa the Wolf, Creator of Spirit and Flesh, Water and Earth, and her baby opened his mouth to attempt his first word. Sacagawea smiled in anticipation, but no word came, or if it did it took the form of a squall that made the captain lose control of the boat and nearly capsize it, the river water dancing between rainbow colors. She reflected on that message of Wrathful Wind, of Epileptic Spectrums, and wondered if it was a warning, that she was making a mistake helping the white men, but she wasn't sure. And before she surprisingly met her long-lost brother Chief Cameahwait in their effort to obtain horses, they had encountered cloud-swarms of mosquitoes that attached to the exposed skin of their bodies like tree splinters, and only the sharpness of blades were successful in removing them, yet Jean-Baptiste remained immaculate, blushing like rose petals. The mosquitoes must have known that his blood was pure wind and that a single sip would have sundered their carapaces in two. And she noticed



that the white men who were closest in proximity to Jean-Baptiste were more likely to develop strange maladies: boils that reflected the surface of the Moon during Suntime, toes that turned into tree roots and bored beneath the earth to drink groundwater, pupils that gluttonously ate light to the point of blindness (or second sight), and the spontaneous defecation of bird eggs (all dashed against rocks by the fearful white man mothers, except for one that hatched to reveal a newborn double, which was hurriedly aborted), among other oddities. The plants and animals spoke to Sacagawea in the language of medicine and sustenance, and she concocted remedies out of gooseberries and camas root, buffalo meat and furs, salmon and trout. But words of witch and sorceress were whispered as eyes speared the back of her head, deflected off her baby's cryptic aura. She didn't blame them for their fear.

Come twilight, their horses trotted onto a left-hand trail, above which the disembodied eyes of owls peppered the limbs of trees like leaves. Some blinked, but most watched with uninterrupted judgement. When one of the white men said, "I've a funny feeling," they heard an echoed screech

enwrapped in rustling, and a white man screamed in pain as he was wrenched upward by silent talons into the tree crown. Brandishing torches, the white men burned and singed the tree trunk, the owl eye leaves, while Sacagawea told them, "No! You mustn't!" and the eaten white man was regurgitated at their feet, unhurt but for talon holes on each side of his shoulders and drenched in digestive tree sap. They galloped at full speed out of that trail and only after they entered a small clearing of darkness did they stop for Sacagawea to treat the white man's wounds and to make camp. By then she could feel their eyes spearing not the back of her head but her External Heart, Jean-Baptiste.

At dawn's break, Clark overslept in his tent and the white men harangued him and hollered obscenities from outside, until Lewis entered to wake him and said, "Judas priest!" After an anxious moment, he exited the tent with a skunk kitten bundled in his arms, his stone face dripping with olive skunk squirt. Words of black magic and witchcraft were not-so-whispered by the white men now, and Lewis handed Sacagawea the bundle while saying, "Do not think we're

unaware of who's doing all of this. Remedy this monstrosity, or it'll be your undoing." She attempted to scrub Clark's woolly head in a nearby stream, but there was no change in his illness. She realized that she must cure the curse by bathing the baby *buhni'atsi* in a transforming waterfall, and she carried it in a cloth womb over her breasts, wondering why Jean-Baptiste had done this. Perhaps he was trying to bring the white men closer to nature, for they had long abandoned her, even while traversing across a valve of her heart.

They followed Sacagawea many paces behind as she led them up and down winding forking paths, vigilant of wild spirits in any and all forms, until at last she heard the liquid flute of Yellowstone River, and when she saw it she kept it at her side until they encountered roaring growling whimpering Yellowstone Falls. She explained to Lewis what it would take to remedy Clark's curse. Slowly, Lewis nodded, his olive-stained eyes unblinking, and then a solemn voting commenced.

Rather than any white man doctor or medicine, the majority, swayed by their awe and fear of her External Heart, ruled in the waterfall's favor. And so, with half their numbers atop the Cliff and the rest, including Sacagawea and Lewis, at the mist-winded bottom, the skunk kitten was pitched by someone in the former group into the rapids and subsequently fell as a black-and-white-striped dot, and thrashing amid the cloud-patched water, limbs reaching, head bulging, tail shrinking, he metamorphosed into a white man once again, his body spared the rock spears and rock tomahawks, finally retrieved by his brethren where the water was calmer. Some of the white men cheered and yippee'd while most were silent, aside from a cicada dispersion of whispers. Spitting up water, Clark stood naked and drip-ridden, stumbling as if awoken mid-dream before Clark's Night Man wrapped him in several wool blankets, and succumbing to exhaustion he rested on all fours like a wilted buffalo. Fear became Sacagawea as she realized the pulses on her spine had ceased, and she reached behind for her External Heart only to find an absence, the cloth womb flattened against her back. She turned around and witnessed Lewis holding high Jean-Baptiste upside-down by his ankle. In his other hand, he brandished an onyx rock and in a hysteric voice said, "Another vote, gentlemen! Who

thinks I should crush the head of evil with this here rock!" The white men stared, motionless as albino pillars. "What say you! Are we all just pawns to this one's Satanic power?" And a red sun glow developed in her baby's stomach as he

squirmed. At first soundless, her child was on the precipice of releasing an anguished wail, and like his first word it was more than that, expressing itself as a light-boom that shrouded the entirety of the Corps of Discovery while Sacagawea dived into the Yellowstone River, protected by a cocoon of water and mist, except her left arm, shoulder, and eye, which was scorched. She emerged from the aquatic cocoon with invisible bird wings upon her back, and she bolted skyward, seeing many different animals roaming the blackened ground below, a disoriented Clark stag, a confused Lewis snake, a stunned Toussaint hog, a freed Night Man nightingale, from horses to hummingbirds, all and each to his own essence. She flew onward, and with her few charred parts she was now able to see and touch the spirit



world in full, while her other eye and the rest of her body remained in chains of flesh, and so she would simultaneously search both worlds for whatever form her child now took, breath or beast, wind or water, Issa the Wolf or his trickster brother Coyote, or All as One.

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