

Allison Hedge Coke

CUT TO THE SCALP

Suffocating, like a full silo of grain,
like buffalo robes layered one upon another,
like the thickest moss covering; I choke up,
each time your glances extend
sideways and back, up and down,
sewing my head in a tight knot,

even tighter than corn rows, those which
rose from indigenous hair long before 1492,
from here, where corn originated. Remember.
Back when warriors cut traditional
hair to the scalp on one side,
leaving the other full and long; when workers
wore fertile corn rows, or protective lightning braids.

Today, my hair hangs unbraided, unprotected,
and you, here you are, verbally
needling my skull with pointed ease.
A tailor of insults,
inserting a black bandanna
star-speckled red, in my head.
Poking, tucking in darts and arrows,
returning secrets revealed in more intimate times.
Stitching wounds with weapons.

"No one could love you."

"I bet you got beat a dozen times for your mouth."

"You deserve to be beat."

Fashioning patterns from membrane.
Splitting my cranium.
The stabbing should hurt
but I'm counting to myself each jab.

Your screams are so like hers, my mother's,
delusionary, insane, demands
like Double Head's. And me, far off in my own head now,
creeping away and out of my shell,
I lift off. My ghost slides the same baseboards
she made me clean with toothbrushes,
up the same walls you now drive my cheekbones through,
cheap sheetrock, painted eggshell white,
over and over, layers and coats, through
times and places, through divisions however slated:

plain cliff wall grey lined with lunar swirls,
driven by mallets into stone, it escapes
my ghost escapes, my people welcome me home.
*There is a place inside us all where nothing can hurt anymore.
There is a place, a peace of mind. There is a lifting.*