

## Just hair.

(based on *peluda* by Melissa Lozada-Olivia)

Girl. Not girl. Just hair.

Hair you want to get lost in like the comb that can't find its way through the maze

Hair that grows and surrounds you, encompasses you.

Hair that swallows you whole and you are only the braids, or curls, or waves, or hair that shouldn't be there

*because that's not what a lady looks like.*

messy and wild and frizzy and **why don't you put a comb through it**

and disgusting and overgrown and out of control and **don't you ever let me see you walking out of the house looking like that**

and big and in your face and **wow is your hair really like that? how did you get it so curly??**

But free, freer than your mother and her mother

because you are lighter

and sometimes just sometimes it's cute but

only when it's contained and docile, when every curl is in its place and looks like the end of a

ribbon on a present, with wrapping paper made to be seen and shown off, made to try to fit in

every space, but still very clearly sticking out because what's it even for? a birthday? Christmas?

Hanukkah?

i think i can see words on it, but somebody designed it so fuzzy and jumbled up, trying to fit

everything between Kings County and St. James in it that i can't figure it out

*like what are you?*

and sometimes just sometimes it's cute but only when it's soft and touchable and made to be played with by a stranger

because you have to be more fun and free and oh so girly **because well, look at you!**

and sometimes just sometimes it's beautiful to you when you see a picture of your mother with it, your hair, her hair,

stepping off the plane to New York in winter with cowgirl boots and summer clothes, playing and smiling and laughing with her siblings in your grandparent's house, dressed in clothes made with love by your Grandma because *her pickney* always walks out the house looking presentable. and your curls that never sit right, and aren't as neat as they should be become an old friend but it has always been.

it has always been the sunday nights before school sitting on your parents' bed when your mom would comb through it and braid it and you had no clue how the tangles could knit themselves back together in the five minutes after you got out of the bath. *Why can't I get rid of you? Dear God, please find another place to host your family reunions that isn't my head! I don't want to be pulled in five directions tonight sitting and distracting myself with some commercial on tv!*

but then, the last clippy is in and we send away the guests who overstayed their welcome now sitting in a pile next to the comb.

wishing them good-bye, my mom gives me a hug good night.

My hair is braided, loved and protected, and I can sleep sound tonight.