

## *Is hair who I am?*

My mom never straightened my hair. I'd scream,  
waller, and wail. She didn't like to brush it  
either, she'd say, "You don't do this  
for your sister?"

because my sister brushed it from the ends  
up wet, gently so it didn't pull  
and break.

The wallering and wailing  
had my mom scheduling to cut it  
short, like my brother's.

"What a cute little boy," strangers would say  
at the diner on Sunday.

My short, curly hair, wild. My brother's hand-me-downs  
covering, head to toe down to  
his old, red striped sneakers.

I wallered and wailed until my mom bought me pink  
bows, ribbons, and headbands,

I planted the bows in my hair, right up front  
hoping the people wouldn't call me  
"boy."

Wishing, at the diner on Sunday, someone would notice.  
No one ever did. The bows got buried by the short,

bushy, wild.  
bows devoured.

The Jewish grandmother's guilt always tried to  
brush it, set it, make it  
tame.

The proper slur is  
Jew 'fro.

I envied the girls with straight hair, cute  
little haircuts, the styles  
they could shine.

at thirteen my mom deemed me capable  
of brushing my hair,  
I grew it as long  
as I could.

hid the rat's nest at my nape, hoping  
she wouldn't notice.

I hated the boy's haircut and the lady  
who cut it, she threatened to slice  
my ear off, when I couldn't sit still.

I rarely cut it now. When I do, I always grow  
it back as fast as it will let me.

I've never hated or loved,  
my hair.

“Your hair is beautiful,” strangers, as they reach  
for it. I try to dodge unknown fingers outstretched,  
hopes of raking through  
the mass on my head

Gracious deflecting, but  
less than accepting, “Oh, I had a good wash day”  
“This is day four,” “Pssht, it’s wild today,  
must be humid”

Jew ’fro, I think, tucking it into my hoodie  
wondering, is hair who I am?

### **Waller**

*Verb. The word originated from farmers who used the term to describe the pigs  
“wallering” in the mud and their own shit.*