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Freewrite: Rubber Band  
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“Girls, you may *not* leave your hair down. Put it up.”

It was unfair. An outright injustice. I can remember my elementary school gym teacher standing over us and leering at the girls’ hair, eyeing the sheer volume and length of it all—flowing down our backs and frizzing along our hairlines and clouding our faces. She had her own hair perpetually tied up, and to somehow punish us for not thinking to do so before her class, she held out a plastic container of standard Officemax rubber bands. We had to reach in, grab a clammy piece of latex, and entwine it in the mass on our heads. But the worst part was getting them out. They would get stuck, often coming out with angry strands of our being, and more than once our eyes moistened with frustration and sharp pain as we pulled the rubber bands out along with considerable amounts of our hair.

Why were we so punished for the things we could not help? It was stressful, anticipating the moment when we had to tame and refine ourselves for the workout to follow. Until the unintelligible time came when the workout wasn’t just gym class, but every time I stepped outside of my house. Ashamed of the tangly, unruly mess of blackness that sat atop my head, I tried braiding, crimping, bobby pins, headbands, clips, oils, gels, creams— everything and anything that promised to tame it. My frantic attempts became part of getting ready every morning, and soon enough I wore the fear of judgement, along with all my clothes and hair accessories, to school. I was afraid of being gawked at or pointed out. I sought ways to alter my appearance with increasing desperation, until eventually, I enjoyed a small, fleeting hallelujah moment when my mom bought a flat iron. I remember the first time I used it; firmly stretching

out my long, sinusoidal curls, I pressed the clamp-like device to my hair and watched as the waves diffused into shiny, sleek straightness. I suppressed a long-awaited sigh of satisfaction: this was what everyone wanted, wasn't it? Finally, my ritual of self-consciousness could stop! I ran outside, excited that I no longer had to *care*, and went out for the day. When I came back, beaming at the weight that was seemingly lifted off my shoulders, I rushed to the bathroom mirror, where I was met with the ghastly return of my natural hair. The frizz stood on end, daring me to restrain it.

It did not take me long to realize that within a few hours, or at most a few days, my normal hair would emerge, no matter what I did to it. My hair was a statement within itself, obtrusively demanding of me to try harder, to push further to compromise its nature, but I could not. I could not fight with who I was. Maybe my hair was especially resilient, or maybe life just had a tendency to disrupt it, but either way, I could not change it. Maybe the fibers of our being that we cannot control are not meant to contain us or hold us back.

My hair makes sure I know some things aren't meant to be restrained.