my mother’s family founded liberia (or so she likes to tell me)

    i tried to tell the women that were braiding my hair
they weren’t doing it right, but how can you tell that to
    someone who’s a true african? not some water-washed
bull black girl who don’t know her culture
    (i’m trying but i can’t seem to figure how it’s mine).
    i wanted to tell the women, who spoke in thickness,

    that i’m a tender headed kind of girl, that my
    roots don’t dig so deep, my edges are well worn and gentle
    like their ancestors. i wanted to tell the women, who spoke
in thickness, that that baby shouldn’t be so close to the
    flame. take his lips from the burnt end of the braid. here’s
the thing: baby black boys don’t know what the hell we’re

    saying, only partial to mama’s coo. amongst these women
both bellies are ripe and fermenting. the husband comes
    from the bedroom to judge the width of my nose

    and i look at the little boy, this little black boy like
    his big black father and i don’t want him to end up like the rest,
scarred. i wanted to tell them to peel back my scalp;

    i will show you who i really am:
my black back downed and nickeled,
    please teach me how to weave my chalk born bone.