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Liberation

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Thien-Di Do *Liberation*

My Dad used to say:

A true Vietnamese girl always wears her hair long.
It's a sign of her femininity, of her grace, of her innocence.
It's a sable mink that keeps her gentle and hidden—
reserved and mysterious.

Being an Americanized daughter
I longed to be like her . . .
that true Vietnamese girl . . .
Daddy's Vietnamese girl.

I grew my hair long,
But I didn't feel feminine or graceful or innocent.

So I grew it longer
and let it fall mysteriously about my face—
shiny gentle black cornsilk hiding my face—
keeping me reserved, keeping me shy, keeping me sheltered.

Shiny black cornsilk
—the tarred hempen ropes descending from my head—
Strangled me until I suffocated.

Until nothing was left within me,
And only precious hair without me,
Remindful of what I should be
for my Dad.

So I cut my hair . . .
and listened as each
of the weighted idealized strands
thudded against the floor. . .

And the simple lightness was
giving me hope . . .
giving me confidence . . .
giving me strength . . .

To be my own
true Vietnamese girl.