



Dạ Nương

By Bewci



CHAPTER 2



The cave's mouth gaped like a beast's; the stone teeth jagged with moss and damp. Just inside, the air was thick with the reek of rot and something sour, like meat left to die in the sun. The moonlight reached only a few feet past the entrance, laying a pale silver carpet across the dirt floor before surrendering to darkness. Beyond that... nothing. The depths were unknown, a black throat leading down into secrets I wasn't sure I wanted to learn.

Bao squatted by the wall and pointed deeper. "Stay. I get wood. Make fire." His voice was flat, unreadable. Without another word, he slipped out, his figure melting into the jungle.



I stayed where I was, leaning against the cold stone, rifle across my knees. The silence was deafening, broken only by the dripping of water somewhere in the cave's belly. I tried to steady my breath, but the stench clung to me like a second skin, making each inhale a labour.

Minutes stretched. Then an hour. Bao didn't return.

My thoughts spiralled faster than I could stop them. What if Bao wasn't who he said he was? What if he were Viet Cong, leading me like a hog to slaughter? Maybe right now, he was out there, whispering to his comrades, telling them where I sat like a fool in the dark. Or worse—what if he wasn't a soldier anymore, just a madman who lived in the jungle too long? A freak who'd bring me back to his cave and carve me up for meat.

I clenched my jaw, fingers tightening on the M16. *No, no, don't think like that, Jones. Keep it together. Survive.*

But the longer he took, the more every possibility festered. Escape. I had to escape. Even if it meant running blind through the jungle, I'd take my chances.

And then — movement.

A silhouette emerged at the cave's mouth, framed in the thin veil of moonlight. My breath caught, heart slamming against my ribs. Bao? Enemy? My rifle lifted an inch, my whole body taut with fear.



But as the figure stepped closer, I froze.

It wasn't Bao.



It was a woman.

She walked with the grace of drifting mist, her bare feet making no sound on the stone. Moonlight kissed her skin, turning it into alabaster, soft and glowing like it was carved from the moon itself. Long black hair tumbled down her back in thick, inky waves, swaying like a curtain of midnight with every step.



She was... unreal.

Her form was full, voluptuous, the beauty you didn't see in real life, only in statues hidden in temples, in paintings made to praise goddesses. Her breasts rose and fell with each breath, generous and perfect, tipped with the faintest shadow of rose. Inviting and wide, her hips swayed like a pendulum that seemed to command the eyes to follow. Her waist narrowed just enough to make her silhouette divine, an hourglass sculpted by a jealous artisan.

And her face. God, her face. Sharp yet delicate, cheekbones catching the moonlight, lips full and red as crushed hibiscus. Her eyes... I couldn't see them fully yet, but they glimmered dark, catching shards of silver from the night.

I couldn't move. Couldn't think.

She wasn't just a woman. She was beauty incarnate. The beauty that frightened you, because it didn't seem human at all.

At first, I thought maybe I was hallucinating. Fever. Exhaustion. My mind conjured phantoms from hunger and fear. But then she stepped closer, and the air itself seemed to change. Warmer, sweeter, tinged with something floral, like a jungle orchid blooming only at night.

I lowered my rifle a little, but my heart was still hammering.



“You—” My voice cracked dry in my throat. “Who... who the hell are you?”

The woman stopped just a few paces away, moonlight draping over her bare shoulders like silk. Her lips curled into the faintest smile. “No fear, soldier,” she whispered, her voice laced with an accent I couldn’t quite place. Vietnamese, but smoother, musical, like water running over stone. “I live nearby. The jungle... is my home.”

My eyes flickered down over the swell of her breasts, the smooth plane of her stomach, the curve of her thighs glistening with the faintest sheen of sweat. God, she’s naked. Why is she naked?

I swallowed hard, jerking my gaze back up to her eyes. “You... you walk around like that? Out here?”

The woman tilted her head, her long black hair tumbling like a curtain as she spoke in halting, broken English, her voice soft but trembling with practiced sorrow.

“Soldiers... they come. Burn my house. Take food... take clothes... all gone. I run, hide. Only me left.”

Her dark eyes glistened, locking onto his.

“No cloth. No family. No home. Only jungle... and you.”



She moved a step closer, lowering her gaze with a glimmer of eagerness behind it. I should've looked away. I should've remembered Mary. Sweet Mary Umbridge back home in Ohio, with her auburn curls and the shy way she smiled when I said something dumb. Mary, who wrote me letters that smelled faintly of lavender. Mary, who said she'd wait.

But this woman, this vision, pulled at me like gravity itself.

“Don't—” I tried to laugh, but it came out rough, nervous. “Don't you know there's a war going on? Walking around like that's... hell, it's dangerous.”

She stepped closer, her bare feet silent on the stone, until I could feel the heat radiating from her skin. “War always,” she whispered. “But here, only you. Only me.” Her eyes locked on mine, dark pools reflecting the moon. “You are alone. I see it in you. You need... comfort.”

Her hand lifted, brushing her hair back over one shoulder, baring the perfect slope of her collarbone, the full weight of her breasts rising and falling just inches away. My throat went dry. I wanted to tell her no, to push her back, to cling to Mary's face in my mind. But my eyes betrayed me, roaming down her body again, drinking in every line, every soft shadow.

“You shouldn't...” I muttered weakly, though my voice betrayed me, softer than steel, closer to a plea than a protest.



Her smile was patient, knowing, almost tender. “But you look at me, soldier. Like thirsty man look at river.”

Her words struck deep. I clenched my fists against my thighs, fighting myself. Mary’s face flashed before me, then faded under the glow of this woman’s skin. My stomach churned, guilt twisting with hunger, with need.

God, what’s happening to me? Why can’t I look away?

She leaned in just a little, her breath warm against my ear. “Let me be your river, Tom.”

My name. How the hell did she know my name?!

Her lips brushed mine, feather-light at first, and I should’ve pulled away. I knew I should have. But I leaned into her warmth, the scent of her skin drowning out every reason in my head. Her kisses were like



rainwater and honey, each one igniting a heat I'd suppressed for months.

She moved closer, straddling me with a fluid grace, her thighs pressing firm against my hips. My rifle slipped to the ground as her hands slid along my chest, tracing the worn fabric of my uniform, coaxing me into surrender.

Her mouth found my neck, slow, deliberate, each kiss lingering just a heartbeat longer than the last. A shiver raced through me, my pulse pounding against her lips. My head tipped back, breath ragged, the cave spinning into nothing but her warmth, her touch, her weight on me.

For a moment, I forgot I was in Vietnam, the ambush, the gunfire, the blood. Forgot Mary's letters tucked in my pack. All that existed was the press of her body and the sound of my heartbeat.

But then something caught my eye.

Just beyond her shoulder, half-hidden in shadow, a pale shape glimmered in the moonlight. I blinked, struggling to focus. My chest rose and fell under her kisses as my eyes adjusted. The shape sharpened. A hollow eye socket. The curve of a jaw.

A skull.



My breath caught. I forced my eyes wider, searching past the first. Another gleam of white. Another skull. And there—an arm bone, splintered and cracked, resting against a jagged rock like discarded kindling.

My blood ran cold.

The more I looked, the more I saw. Bones scattered across the cave floor, tucked in corners, half-buried under stone. Legs, ribs, hands curled like claws, frozen in agony. The stench I'd noticed earlier—the sour, cloying rot — it all made sense now.

Yet her lips still pressed against my throat. Her hair spilled like black silk over my face, hiding me in her dark world. My hands clenched against the stone beneath me, torn between pulling her closer and throwing her off.

Jesus Christ. What the hell is this place? Who is she?

My stomach twisted, dread clawing up my throat. I wanted to scream, to shove her away, but my body was betraying me, sinking deeper into her enchantment even as my mind shrieked in horror.

And in the flicker of moonlight against her hair, I swore I saw her smile widen, teeth sharper than before.



Panic jolted through me like lightning. I shoved her off with both arms, scrambling backward on the cold stone. She hit the ground on all fours, but when her head snapped up, the woman I'd kissed was gone.



Her lips had peeled back to reveal jagged teeth that gleamed like broken glass in the moonlight. Her nails stretched into blackened talons, curving cruelly as she flexed them, scraping against the rock with a sound that made my skin crawl.

I lunged for my rifle, heart hammering, and swung it up just as she launched at me with a guttural snarl.



Click. Nothing.

“Damn it!” I hissed, tugging at the trigger, but the gun jammed in my hands again.

She collided with me, jaws snapping shut around the steel barrel of the M16. The screech of her teeth grinding against metal filled the cave as she bit down with monstrous force. I felt the weapon bend, a dent forming where her mouth clamped down. Her breath washed over me — hot, rotten, thick with copper.

Her face was inches from mine, eyes glowing with a sickly hunger. She growled low and primal, saliva dripping onto my cheek. I strained to keep the rifle between us, muscles burning, my boots skidding against the cave floor as she pressed down harder.

Then, her claws flashed.

A scream tore from my throat as her nails ripped through the fabric of my sleeve, carving three deep, burning trails across my left arm. Blood ran hot down to my wrist, and pain seared through me like fire.

“No! Get off!” I bellowed, summoning everything I had left.

With a roar, I drove my knee up and shoved with all my strength, kicking her square in the stomach. She flew back, tumbling over the rocky floor, hissing like some wild animal.



I scrambled to my feet, hands fumbling with the rifle's action. My chest heaved, ears ringing, heart slamming against my ribs.

The gun clicked back into place. I raised it, breath ragged, and pulled the trigger.

The blast thundered in the cave. The bullet struck her square in the shoulder, jerking her body sideways. She let out a scream that wasn't human. A guttural wail rattled the walls, echoing into the dark nothingness of the cave. Her silhouette twisted in agony, then snapped toward me, eyes blazing with hatred.

But she didn't charge again.

Instead, clutching her wound, she whirled around and bolted into the darkness of the jungle; her scream fading into the night.

I stood frozen, rifle still raised, sweat and blood mixing down my arm. The stench of rot still clung to me, the shadows full of bones. And for the first time since the ambush, I wished I had died with my unit.

