



Dạ Nương

By Bewci



## CHAPTER 3



The moment her shadow vanished into the trees, I bolted. My boots pounded over stone, my rifle gripped so tight it might have fused to my bones. My left arm burned, blood dripping warm through the torn sleeve, every jolt of movement setting the claw marks on fire.

The jungle swallowed me whole. Branches whipped against my face; vines snagged at my gear. Every rustle behind me made my gut clench. I kept seeing her teeth in my mind's eye, hearing the shriek she'd let loose when the bullet hit. Any second, I expected her to leap from the shadows, to drag me down into the roots and bones.

Minutes bled into hours. My lungs felt like they were tearing, each breath ragged and raw. Sweat and blood mixed, soaking my fatigues.



I pushed forward anyway, stumbling over roots, sliding down mud slopes, refusing to stop.

At some point, I realized the jungle wasn't as thick. The trees spread wider apart, their canopy breaking to let silver light pour down. My boots sank into softer earth.

Then, suddenly, the forest ended.

I stumbled out into a wide field of tall grass; the stalks swaying in the night breeze. The moon stretched across it, bathing everything in a pale glow. The sudden openness stole my breath. I hadn't realized how claustrophobic the trees had made me until I was free of them.

I dropped to my knees, clutching the rifle against my chest, sucking in air like I'd never breathe again. The grass brushed against my arms, whispering with every sway. My wounds throbbed, but the open sky felt like salvation.

And then I saw them.

Far ahead, at the edge of the field, faint lantern lights flickered. Tiny golden specks against the horizon. I blinked, wiping the sweat from my eyes to make sure they were real. They were. Lanterns. The camp. My camp.





The relief was so intense that my sight became hazy. My brothers in arms, they were close. I wasn't alone in this nightmare anymore.

I laughed under my breath, a broken, trembling laugh, and pressed a bloodied hand over my mouth. Against all odds, I had made it out of that cave, out of the jungle, and here was proof that salvation was only a field away.

But as I rose shakily to my feet, swaying in the moonlight, a chill crawled up my spine. The claw marks on my arm burned sharper, deeper, like fire lacing my veins. My body trembled, basking in the moonlight, sweat slicking my skin. The air felt heavier; the grass swaying in rhythm with my heartbeat.



I forced myself upright, legs trembling, the rifle heavy against my shoulder. Each step forward felt like dragging a mountain, but the sight of those lanterns pulled me onward.

My breath came in slow bursts, steadier now, my body remembering how to hope again. I wasn't alone out here. Maybe I'd stumble into the perimeter, maybe I'd hear the bark of familiar voices, maybe, just maybe, I'd live to see home again.

I sank down onto my haunches, catching my breath, the grass rippling around me like a sea of silver under the moonlight. As the minutes passed, the warmth in my arm began to change. The sting of the scratches dulled, replaced by a strange heat that pulsed in rhythm with my heartbeat. It spread slowly, crawling up my shoulder, down my chest, as though the wound itself was pumping fire into my blood.

*What is this?! What's going on?!*

I shivered, hugging the rifle closer, my gaze flicking back to the lanterns. They seemed farther now. Smaller. Flickering in and out like they were retreating from me.

"No... no, I saw them," I muttered, swallowing hard. "They're there. They're real."

My stomach knotted. The air felt heavier, thicker, every breath harder to take. My skin prickled as though tiny insects crawled beneath it.



Sweat streamed down my face, and my vision blurred. The moon overhead glared brighter and brighter until it hurt to look at.

I doubled over, gripping the earth, my rifle falling into the grass with a muffled thud. Pain wracked through my body, sudden and merciless, like someone had driven hot nails into my bones. My chest tightened, my arm pulsed with fire, and my heart pounded so loud it drowned out everything else.

The curse had found me.

I clenched my teeth, digging my fingers into the damp earth as the fire spread through my veins.

“No... not now, not after all this...” I hissed through ragged breaths, trying to will the pain away. It had to be the exhaustion, the wound, shock catching up to me. That’s what I told myself. If I just held on a little longer, I’d reach the camp, get help, be fine.

But the ache wasn’t fading. It was growing.

My arms, once taut with the strength drilled into me through months of training, felt as though they were withering before my eyes. I flexed my fingers; they trembled like brittle sticks. My chest hollowed with every gasp, muscles shrinking, as though something was feeding on me from the inside. My body was betraying me, shedding weight, becoming something leaner, nimbler... yet stronger.



Sweat poured down my face, stinging my eyes, soaking my fatigues until they clung to my skin like a second hide. The night air that had felt cool minutes ago now burned, every breeze sharp as a knife across my raw nerves.

And then... crack.

The sound jolted through my spine. My back arched violently as my bones shifted beneath the flesh, joints popping, ribs tightening, hips detaching with sickening little snaps that echoed inside my skull. I bit down on my tongue to muffle the scream clawing up my throat, tasting copper.

The ground swayed beneath me. My helmet. Christ, it felt like a vice around my head. Pressure built inside it, pushing, swelling. I clawed at the strap, but the buckle slipped in my slick hands. The pressure grew unbearable, as though my skull itself were trying to split open. I slammed my hand against the side of my helmet, desperate for relief.

“God! Make it stop!” I roared. The helmet shot off my head as if the very pressure inside had detonated. The steel clattered against the rocks and spun away into the grass. My head snapped back with the release.

Massive, flowing waves of strands unfurled, falling onto my back and caressing my cheeks. At first, I thought it to be grass, caught on me as I rolled in the field. But no. The strands were thick, smelled of sweat... and they were coming from me. My hair. Not the close-cut blonde



hair I had since enlistment. No, it was black, gleaming under the moonlight like polished obsidian from a realm of fantasy.



It was growing long. Too long. Falling past my back, heavy against my neck. Each second it grew heavier still, as though someone was pulling silk threads out of my scalp by the handful.

The realization sent me into full panic. “What’s happening to me?!” I screamed into the night, voice cracking, chest heaving.

My cries carried across the empty field, swallowed by the wind. Lanterns on the horizon blurred in my vision, swaying like cruel mirages, as the curse twisted me deeper into its grip.



“No... no, this isn’t me!” I shrieked, clutching fistfuls of the dark locks, trying to tear them away. But they clung, rooted, alive. Each tug sent lances of pain shooting into my skull.

Then, with a sharp ping, one of my shirt buttons snapped free. I froze, staring down as the fabric pulled unnaturally tight across my chest. A hollow ache radiated through my torso, followed by a pressure; swelling, pushing outward, reshaping.

I gasped, the sound broken and high-pitched, as something new swelled into the space that had never been there before: soft mounds rising, straining against the fabric. Cleavage gleamed pale under the moonlight, slick with sweat. My hands hovered over them, trembling, as though afraid to touch proof of my undoing.

The agony twisted into heat like an inferno whip beneath my skin. The jungle sounds faded, replaced by the rush of my blood in my ears, the frantic hammering of my heart. I clawed at the earth, rolling onto my side, teeth bared as the metamorphosis wrenched me deeper into its grip.

“God! Help me! Make it stop!” My voice cracked. Thinner, higher, alien to my own ears.

Every breath felt like it fed the flames consuming me. Heat pooled low in my belly, a molten weight that spread into my hips, down my thighs. I arched in the grass, writhing as the surrounding field blurred. My vision doubled, then sharpened with unnatural clarity.





The swaying lantern lights seemed brighter, their glow pricking my eyes like needles.

My body convulsed again. Another button popped loose, fabric tearing somewhat as my frame narrowed and curved beneath it. My sweat-soaked fatigues clung in obscene ways, the contours of someone, something else's body emerging where mine had once been.

And still the heat rose until I could hardly think. All I could do was scream and moan into the night, hair cascading against my face, begging for mercy. My voice shrilled with terror as the curse tore me further away from the man I had been.



Another sharp ping!

The sound was deafening in my ears, though it was only a button snapping free and skittering into the grass. My eyes fell down, wide, and the sight made my stomach knot in awe and revulsion.

My chest had... swollen. Not muscle, not the broad plate I had carried into battle, but twin mounds of fatty breasts pushing forward, taut beneath the stretched khaki. They heaved with every laboured breath, obscene and impossible, filling the shirt until the fabric trembled with the strain.

“No... no, Christ no...” The words broke out of me in a voice too soft, too quivering.

I couldn't stop staring. Each desperate inhale sent them rising higher, flesh quivering under the confinement. A sickly shiver coursed through me, pulsing from the scratches on my arm to the very tips of the supple weights hanging onto my chest.

I clawed at the shirt, frantic, tugging at the fabric with both hands as if I could press the swelling down, force it back inside. My fingers fumbled at the torn edges, yanking in blind desperation. The fabric gave, ripping down the front. And then, freedom.

They fell forward, heavy, warm, slick with sweat. Full, round, massive, swayed with the motion of my trembling body, their weight tugging at my shoulders, their movement alien to me. They shimmered pale



under the moonlight, the faint sheen of perspiration highlighting every curve, every unnatural perfection of their form.

“Oh... God...” The sound that left me was somewhere between a moan and a sob. My eyes darted down, transfixed against my will. I tried to cover them, clutching at myself, but my own hands felt clumsy, weak. The flesh yielded beneath my palms, soft and pliant, nothing like the hardened body I’d known. The sensation shot through me, dizzying, a strange mix of horror and something darker, something I couldn’t name.

My body was no longer just betraying me. It was seducing me into its betrayal.



“Mary... forgive me,” I whispered into the night, my voice quaking, higher still, threaded with a kind of music that had never belonged to me.

But even as I said it, my gaze stayed fixed downward, on the impossible weight heaving from my chest, flesh that trembled with a life of its own. And in my heart, awe battled terror, and both were losing.



I collapsed into the grass, chest heaving, sweat soaking through what tatters of my uniform still clung to me. My body trembled like a dying animal. Every inch of me burned, bones aching as if someone were prying them apart with iron hooks.

*Why me?*

The question looped in my head, louder than the blood pounding in my ears.

*Was it Bao? That ragged man who seemed too eager to “help”? Had he led me into some trap? Or was it her, that woman, that thing in the cave, her kiss still burning on my neck, her eyes still shining like black mirrors in my mind?*

*Or was it something worse, something nameless, something in the air, the jungle itself cursing me for trespassing where I didn’t belong?*

I wanted to scream, but even my voice betrayed me now, high and unsteady, cracking with each sob.

My fingers clawed at the dirt. I wanted it to swallow me whole. To bury me before whatever this was could finish its cruel work. Better the earth than the shame of becoming... whatever I was becoming.

And then —

A sound.



Faint, carried by the night wind. Boots against the grass. Voices, muffled but clear enough to twist my gut.

I lifted my head, squinting through the blur of tears. Lantern light; flickering, bobbing, cutting through the darkness at the horizon.

My heart jolted in my chest. My men. The camp. They'd heard me. They were coming.

Hope struck like a spark in dry tinder. I couldn't give up, not yet. If I could reach them, explain, hold on just a little longer, maybe, just maybe, I'd be saved.

I forced my legs under me, wobbling like a newborn foal. My hair swung heavy and unfamiliar against my shoulders, sticking to my skin. I pressed a trembling hand against my chest, feeling the swell that should not be there, but I shoved it aside. Not now. Later. Just move.

But the moon had no mercy. The heat hit me, again.

My skin prickled all over, then crawled, as if a million unseen insects scuttled beneath it. I clawed at my wounded arm in panic, only to watch in horror as the pale, sunburnt skin I had always known peeled away. There were no claw marks, no blood. It was something... new. Smooth. Gleaming faintly under the moon. My fair, white skin gave way to a golden-brown wheatish tone, supple and warm as if sculpted fresh.





“No... God, no...!” My voice cracked again—higher now, melodic in its panic.

The heat surged upward, gripping my skull like a vice. My jaw clenched, bones shifting, grinding, reshaping. I screamed, clutching at my face. My cheekbones rose beneath my fingertips, sharp and elegant where they had once been flat. My nose slimmed, narrowed, as if someone were chiselling it while I still lived.

I could feel it happening. The erosion of myself. My lips swelled, fuller, softer. My lashes lengthening, brushing against my cheeks as tears streamed down. My face, Tom Jones’s face, slipping away, being redrawn into something strange, beautiful, terrifying.

“No, this... this isn’t me!” I pressed both palms against my cheeks, as if I could hold them in place, as if I could stop the changes through sheer will. But all I felt was the smooth, unfamiliar softness that had replaced me.

And then came the final blow.



A deep, grinding crack ran up my spine, folding me forward in agony. I screamed, clutching at the air. My torso shifted, my ribs narrowed, waist cinching in with a sickening squeeze that stole the breath from my lungs.

“No—no, not again—please, not now!”

Heat spread low in my belly, unbearable, primal, like fire licking up

from inside. My thighs cramped, shuddering as muscle melted away into pliant softness. The seam of my pants groaned.



Another snap, this one loud. My belt gave way, the leather curling loose as if recoiling in fear. My hips widened with a sound of popping joints, the fabric straining before splitting down the side.

I screamed at it to stop, as if I could



stop whatever was tearing me apart from within. But the pain slid downward, merciless, until it lived only between my legs.

It wasn't pain I knew. Not a blade's slice, nor shrapnel's explosion, nor the scorching impact of a bullet. It was a dismantling, as if an unseen hand was tearing out the last vestige of my identity.

I could feel myself being consumed, rewritten. Every nerve screamed with wrongness. I pressed my thighs together in blind terror, but it was useless. The more I fought it, the more it pulled inward, reshaping. A furnace became a void. Raw, unfamiliar, unbearable.

I dared not look. God help me, I didn't need to look. I knew.

I wept through clenched teeth, shaking. The jungle hadn't just scarred me. It had unmade me, stripped away the last certainty of who I was.

I staggered forward a few paces, one hand clutching my pants, the other outstretched toward those distant lights.

"Help—" My voice cracked again, foreign, desperate. "God... help me..."

Covering myself with the tattered fabric that clung to me, I gasped in utter disbelief. Horror and shame warred with a sickening thread of



pleasure that made my stomach twist as my curious fingers touched the forbidden emptiness between my legs.

I was a woman. With wheat-brown skin gleaming, black hair flowing down her back, lips flushed and parted as she gasped for breath. Eyes wide with terror... and something else.

A hunger.

The soldiers' lanterns were closer now. Their voices carried on the night wind.

But it no longer mattered whether they came to save me, or to kill me.

Tom Jones was gone.

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