

Some people say that by doing this, I and those close to me are embarking on a dangerous, hurtful war.

I do not see this as a war. For me, this is something that I cannot help but do, because it is an imperative originating from my personal sense of dignity and an urgent demand shaped by my sense of social responsibility.

This is not a story of literary or political partisanship.

This is my story, the story of a woman who was raped and falsely accused.

I do not seek revenge against any individual, for there is no rancor in me that needs retribution.

I am also not asking for absolute justice, because there is no miracle that can make up for my loss and suffering during the past twenty-three years. Twenty-three years, almost half of my life. Nothing can repair the world that was mine before I was raped. The whole, healthy world inside of me seemed to promise a welcoming future. But then I was deprived of that future forever.

But, if we call this a war, then it is a war to protect The Light.

The Light of Truth, of Conscience, of Responsibility, of Love, of Healing.

The Light does not belong to anyone alone, but to every one of us.

I hope to see The Light again in the remaining part of my life, and in the lives of other victims of sexual abuse.

Thank you to all who have had the courage to let The Light rise up in the most natural, purest way.

Dạ Thảo Phương

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### 3. DẠ THẢO PHƯƠNG

*Translated by Vũ Ngọc Kiều Khanh*

The Entire Truth about the Relationship between Me and Lương Ngọc An

Originally posted on Facebook by Dạ Thảo Phương on April 10, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/dathaophuongvn/posts/117032397617240>.

\* Restricted: Readers under 16 require an accompanying parent.

\* I never had an affair or a consensual sexual relationship with Lương Ngọc An.

\* How did Lương Ngọc An rape me?

\* How did Lương Ngọc An manipulate me for such a long time?

I never had any consensual sentimental or sexual relationship with Lương Ngọc An. I affirm this statement and take all responsibility before the law for it.

All the fabrications and rumors about the relationship between me and Lương Ngọc An are far from the truth.

When uncertain, or lacking proof, you should, before claiming anything, imagine your loved ones falling into a situation like mine. Stop making baseless assumptions and stop using cruel words to bully victims whose dignity and emotional well-being have already been harmed by sexual assault.

## SIMPLY A NORMAL COLLEAGUE

In September 1996 I began my job as a reporter and editor at *Văn Nghệ Trẻ* (part of *Văn Nghệ* newspaper, which itself is under the Vietnam Writers' Association).

Lương Ngọc An had started working there a few years before me as a staff member in the administrative department. He was in charge of procurement, driving, and assisting Mr. Trương Vĩnh Tuấn—the deputy editor of the administrative department of *Văn Nghệ*.

At the end of 1998, in addition to working at *Văn Nghệ*, Mr. Trương Vĩnh Tuấn also worked at *Văn Nghệ Trẻ* as a content manager. Lương Ngọc An then moved to *Văn Nghệ Trẻ* to be a reporter.

At that time, my responsibilities at *Văn Nghệ Trẻ* included the arts and culture section. I often stayed late at the office after attending art and cultural events, completing interviews, or finishing writing. The music composers Phú Quang, Phó Đức Phương, and Anh Quân and the singer Mỹ Linh all sat for interviews at night with me in the editorial office. Working late was a requirement of my work. Other staff at *Văn Nghệ* stayed late at the office like me.

At that time, Lương Ngọc An often stayed at the office after working hours, roaming around, using the work phone, and talking for long periods using the communication resources at the office (the Internet and cellphones were not common at the time and were expensive). Occasionally, Lương Ngọc An sat in the same editing room with me. Sometimes other coworkers were there, but at other times it was only me.

Everybody knew that Lương Ngọc An was married; he was also in a relationship with a reporter at another newspaper (I knew her too). “No idea where to go after work,” he would say. He didn’t want to go home to his wife, and he couldn’t always see his mistress because she spent evenings with her family.

Lương Ngọc An seemed bitter about his situation and compared it with mine: “I have a crappy education and a shaky job. When I get home and hear all the complaints, it gives me a headache. Unlike you, who won the first prize at the national poetry contest at a very young age, obtained a formal education, have a nurturing family and a good job. What a life!” He described himself as a person who had experience with people from all walks of life, while calling me a “flower in a glass cabinet.”

I realized Lương Ngọc An’s personality and way of life were different from mine. Though I didn’t hold a high opinion of him, I was friendly and polite to him, just like any other coworker.

On two or three occasions after I finished my work, Lương Ngọc An asked me to join him and his group of photojournalist friends. I accepted the invitation because this was a good opportunity for me, a young reporter, to build my network. For the sake of convenience, I went with Lương Ngọc An on his motorbike because he had a big, fast one, while mine was a small Honda Cub; plus, I wasn’t good at navigating at night. At that time, Lương Ngọc An behaved properly. He and I were not close, and he did not express any sexual feelings.

Socializing together was absolutely normal for reporters. I (as well as other female coworkers) had ridden with male coworkers, including Nguyễn Quang Thiệu, Nguyễn Thành Phong, Phạm Ngọc Tiến, and others, in a carefree way. Making an assumption about somebody’s relationship after they went out together on the same motorbike a few times is an old-fashioned and closed-minded way of thinking.

## BEATEN, RAPED

On one occasion in July 1999, after I completed my work, Lương Ngọc An lamented “life sucks” and asked me “to accompany him to help him be less sad.” I agreed. He drove me to a small roadside stand on a street near the Thăng Long bridge. His behavior was still normal at that point.

On the way to my home, in the Hoàng Quốc Việt area, Lương Ngọc An told me that he was light-headed and stopped in front of a row of motels. He rubbed his forehead and said he had a headache, and that made me worried. “Let’s go in here to rest,” he insisted, grabbing my hand to take me to the motel. I said assertively: “No, I won’t go. You are tired, you go. I will go home by myself.” He frowned: “It is dark now, I don’t feel good about letting you go home by yourself. I have a headache, I could fall when walking. You’d leave me alone when I have a bad headache? Come inside, rest a little bit. I won’t do anything to you. I treat you as a sister at work, I would never do anything to you.”

Still doubting his illness but unsure if he was in any danger, I refused. But he was determined not to let me go. We struggled in front of the motel. Employees peered out, passers-by looked on. Going out with Lương Ngọc An had been normal to me, but at that moment, when a lot of people noticed us, I realized that this was not something that my parents would ever accept.

I became overwhelmed, worried that someone I knew might see this scene of me struggling with a man outside a motel. I pulled my hands from his: “Let go of my hands, people are looking at us.” Lương Ngọc An realized my fear of being recognized, and, taking advantage of this, dragged me inside the motel, saying: “If you are afraid, then come inside. Rest a bit until I’m okay, then we’ll go home. Nobody will do anything.”

In that moment, I felt stuck: afraid of going inside but scared of being the center of attention if I was outside. Making use of my befuddlement, Lương Ngọc An grabbed my hands tightly, quickly took a key, forced me inside a room, and then slammed the door.

He immediately pushed me to the bed, violently raping me. I was frightened, trying my best to resist, and begged him, “You have to stop, we are colleagues. Stop, at least think about your mistress. She will be sad.”

I begged Lương Ngọc An while I made a desperate attempt to push him away, biting, scratching, pinching, banging his head on the edge of the bed.

We fought a while. Suddenly, Lương Ngọc An stopped, breathing hard. I was too focused on fighting with him, but he did it so quickly that I didn't even realize that he had completed raping me. I thought I had defended myself successfully. I ran outside, with Lương Ngọc An following me, apologizing.

That night, Lương Ngọc An called me and said when his dad asked about the bruises on his face, he replied that he was bitten by his lover. I was outraged, telling him, "You are such a bastard, you raped me, I am not your lover."

The next day at the office, Lương Ngọc An apologized to me: "I was wrong yesterday, don't be mad at me. I swear I won't do that again." I was extremely scared and confused about the events that had just transpired. I didn't have the courage to talk to my parents, friends, or coworkers about the rape, and couldn't quit without giving an explanation. Being raped made me feel helpless and lose confidence in myself.

I didn't know how to protect myself, and I just avoided him as much as I could.

## STALKED, MANIPULATED

A few days after, during the early afternoon, when I was writing in the meeting room at *Văn Nghệ Trẻ* (it was quiet there), Lương Ngọc An jerked open the door. He used his strength to overpower me—holding me, hugging and kissing me, and telling me how much he missed me. I resisted, tried to shove him to the cabinet, and stabbed him with my pen. "If you don't stop," I implored him, "I will shout for help, I will report you!" Lương Ngọc An smirked: "Let me shout for you, 'help, help me, people help me, company help me, I am being raped!'" Lương Ngọc An's insolent attitude scared and bewildered me. I thought Lương Ngọc An wasn't afraid of being reported, and if I called for help, I would be named and shamed.

I am a slight woman, never having done physical labor. Lương Ngọc An was a 30-something-year-old man, a former member of the tank crew, and had worked as a driver for many years at *Văn Nghệ*. I was not strong enough to beat him. I was beaten and violated by him.

Lương Ngọc An attacked me several more times at the office. He hit me, twisted my hands, kicked my belly, pulled my hair. He made me miserable; he horrified me. I opposed him with words and physically fought back every

single time. I bit, punched, kicked, hit him with a pen, smashed him with the iron doorknob of the door in the meeting room (it was loose), and scratched his face.

The way he abused me gave me the sense that he wanted to humiliate me, that he was not acting out of sexual need. In return, I harbored a resentment, a hatred, but was helpless.

He even secretly stalked me, tracking me down at my home.

At that time, my parents had bought an additional small apartment in a collective building near Bưởi Market. I lived there by myself and took care of the house for my parents. Lương Ngọc An came late at night, loudly calling my name. Even though I didn't open the door, he parked in front of my house, reclining on his motorbike for hours on end, and ignoring the neighbors when they told him not to occupy the pavement. Once the neighbors spoke up, I was afraid that they would hurt my family's reputation, so I had to open the door to send him away. But he shoved the door open, attacking me.

## WHY DID I NOT CALL FOR HELP?

Lương Ngọc An always picked a location and a time when I couldn't be absent. He exploited my fears about "losing face," "being recognized," and "getting a bad reputation" to manipulate, control, and threaten me before he raped me.

At that time, I was a 20-something-year-old woman, fresh out of college, unmarried, inexperienced, and timid. My traditional northern family spoke highly of family honor and were very conservative about sex.

That explained why when I was attacked, I didn't think about myself as much as I thought about my family's honor. I was afraid that my parents would be ashamed and my family dishonored because of my scandal. My old-fashioned thoughts compelled me to protect my family's reputation at any cost, even if I had to keep the pain and shame to myself. I didn't consider myself at all; the possibility for gossip seemed more important.

I was also afraid nobody would believe me if I asked for help. People would blame me for being a reporter, for working so late at night, for going out with a man alone—all things an unmarried woman shouldn't do. They

might imply that I must be “that” type of girl, and that that was why I got in trouble and was harassed and attacked. I believed that even if they knew I was a victim, everybody would still consider me to be dirty and worthless. Thinking about that made me want to kill myself.

Because of naivete, I never dared to shout for help or tell anybody.

Lương Ngọc An, a very sly person, quickly smelled my weakness. He knew that I was very young. He knew that I was held hostage by fear—or, more accurately, by my concern for my reputation and my family’s reputation. That’s why he was so brazen and impudent. He was a criminal, but he made me so scared that I couldn’t divulge his crime. A coworker questioned him about a scratch on his forehead (I had caused it fighting him). Right in front of me he replied, “A furious cat scratched me.” He glanced over at me with a threatening look and a crocodile smile.

Lương Ngọc An had worked at *Văn Nghệ* for ten years and had relationships with powerful people. I was a new reporter and had no network.

I was passionate about literature and close to my coworkers. For me, work was my second family, and the idea of leaving it felt as hard as abandoning family.

I didn’t know how to escape my misery.

## UPDATED ON APRIL 17, 2022: MY FACEBOOK ACCOUNT HAS BEEN ATTACKED

- The post titled “My First Child” was reported and removed. Allow me to repost it below.
- I take all responsibility before the law, the public, and my conscience for my own words. I will not delete or hide what I have said.
- If you see my Facebook account disappear or become inactivated, or any of my posts erased, that means I am under attack.
- If possible, when you share my posts, please copy the content in case my account is hacked, then all the information will not vanish.

Thank you.

Dạ Thảo Phương