

Afterward, in the office meeting, Mr. Tuấn, on behalf of the leadership board, announced the disciplinary action for LNA starting in June 2002. I was very grateful to the leadership board for taking care of this matter for me.

But this matter cannot stop here, after I read the completely slanderous, defamatory statement written by LNA. I feel that it is even more necessary to clarify in black and white. With two statements, there will be a true statement and a made-up one.

I hope the leadership board will help me to clarify the black-and-white truth clearly and decisively.

I strongly believe in the integrity of the office's leaders.

I also believe that in necessary cases the law will support me.

6:10 p.m.

February 24, 2003

Đỗ Bạch Mai (signed)

Tạ Kim Liên (signed)

Dạ Thảo Phương (signed)

## 5. DẠ THẢO PHƯƠNG

*Translated by Trần Thảo Uyên*

### My First Child

Originally posted on Facebook by Dạ Thảo Phương on April 11, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/dathaophuongvn/posts/117364987583981>.

\*\*\* If you are under 16, please ask your parents for permission before reading this post.

\* Painfully ending motherhood

\* Continuing to be stalked

- \* In the abyss of loneliness and panic
- \* LƯƠNG NGỌC AN, ADMIT YOUR GUILT!

The first time I was raped, I just focused on fighting to escape. The feeling of Lương Ngọc An penetrating me was weak and fleeting, so I thought the rape had not been completed.

When I missed my period, I thought it was because I had a sudden mental crisis. I didn't know I was pregnant until my fetus was twelve weeks old.

Yes, twenty-three years ago, I was foolish and ignorant. I had never received sex education from my family or school or been taught how to deal with abuse. The internet was not widely available back then, and society's general understanding of this issue was still very outdated. When everything happened, I was shocked and even numb, not calm as I am now, sitting in front of the computer screen. I didn't know how to handle matters soberly and appropriately, as I am handling matters now.

## PAINFULLY ENDING MOTHERHOOD

From the moment I found out that I was pregnant, I loved my baby with all my maternal instincts. I once planned to run away from home to a rural area to become a single mother. I even bought my child cute wool socks. I loved my child so much that I would have given up all the life I had ever known to be a single mother, as long as we could live together.

Nevertheless, I thought about how the baby would face people's harsh criticism and how the baby would feel knowing that they were the result of a rape, knowing that half of their DNA came from a scoundrel like Lương Ngọc An. I did not feel like I had the right to let my child be born with so much pain and shame mixed into their blood.

Accepting my pain, I decided to have an abortion.

I was scared of being caught, of giving up my child, and of never becoming a mother again. With every step I took to the hospital, it was as if I embraced my child on the way to watching them be executed.

Three or four times, I went to the hospital and couldn't bear it. I cried and turned back home. Finally, in November 1999, when the fetus was fifteen weeks old, I couldn't wait any longer, so I was forced to have an abortion at Hospital C. (This was an underground abortion because I feared showing

my identity documents. I was afraid that I might run into someone who knew me and that if the rumor spread, I would bury my honor and that of my family.)

In a quandary and a panic, I cursed Lương Ngọc An because he raped me, he made me pregnant, and I couldn't keep my first child. Lương Ngọc An offered to take me to the hospital, made an appointment, and asked me what the cost would be. But right before we were supposed to meet, I called to ask Lương Ngọc An if he could share the fee, and he said that he was not in Hà Nội and that I should take care of it myself. Then he turned off his phone.

I needed money for the abortion. As a young journalist at a literary newspaper, I was dreamy and poor. I didn't dare to borrow money from anyone for fear of people asking why, so I had to sell everything I could, including a necklace that was a keepsake from my grandmother and the books that I loved.

I was unable to keep my first child.

What happened at the hospital has weighed on my mind to this day. I would like to keep that story to myself until the day God liberates me.

Leaving the hospital, I felt that life was scarier than death.

## CONTINUING TO BE STALKED

The day I returned to work, Lương Ngọc An continued to attack me. I fought against him. I begged him to stop. I was still bleeding after the abortion. I begged him not to commit a further offense against my recently deceased child.

He said, "At first when I saw that you were contemptuous and arrogant, I was annoyed and thus did it. But ever since I saw how much you loved your child, how hard it was to lose your child, I have started to love you. Suffering makes you breathtakingly beautiful. I'm addicted to you." I responded angrily and resentfully: "You have a sick mind. You make me nauseous."

He kept calling my home phone number, blocking me on the street, hanging around my desk, and threatening and manipulating me. Going to the office, sitting in the editorial room, I had to endure sharing the office with him. He kept staring at me and trying to touch me. Although I ran away to the reception room for freelancers to sit alone and locked the door from the inside, he could open it. Lương Ngọc An had an inexplicable trick: no

matter what room of the office I locked, he could quickly open it. When I had to run down to the reading room of *Văn Nghệ* to write articles, he also followed, frightening me and revolting me. I felt like I could see my child's blood on his face.

After the shock of losing a child, I could not afford the healthcare expenses to recover. My spirit was broken, and Lương Ngọc An stalked and tormented me. I suffered from chronic fatigue syndrome, anemia, stomach aches, headaches, piercing pain in my bones, and dizziness. My weight dropped from 48 kilograms to 41 kilograms.

### IN THE ABYSS OF LONELINESS AND PANIC

In pain from losing my child but still being stalked by Lương Ngọc An, I looked up his home phone number in the office directory and called his mother. I did not dare tell her the whole story, so I only asked her to dissuade him from harassing me. His mother said, "You have to find a way to protect yourself. I can't deal with him. I haven't been able to educate him for a long time. I've heard him talking to his friends about other girls... What a bunch of ill-bred thugs! Quite terrifying! Be careful, dear!" When I called again for help, she said, "There's nothing I can do to help you."

I contacted Lương Ngọc An's mistress. She was caught off guard and said, "Oh, he still pampers me! You don't have to be afraid anymore; let me tell him to stop bothering you." After that, Lương Ngọc An left me alone for a few days. Then he started up again.

I continued to call his mistress, asking her for help. I don't know what stories he made up about me to deceive her, but she was surprised by my call. She said, "I already taught him a lesson, so I thought he would have stopped doing this kind of thing." Then she called back and told me that Lương Ngọc An had said that I made up the story because of a workplace conflict. But in reality, his job and mine were totally unrelated; there was no workplace conflict. I proposed to confront Lương Ngọc An in front of his mistress at a coffee shop, but she said, "I have a family and don't want to be part of a noisy quarrel in public. I can't deal with this anymore."

Lương Ngọc An continued to cling to me, to say shameless things to me about love, and to torture me.

I only wished that a miracle would make me invisible and that I could be alone with the secret pain of my lost child. Afraid that my secret could be unveiled, I still had to try to act normal. But inside, I was exhausted, bewildered, stuck, and heartbroken.

I bought a phone with a recording function, intending that when Lương Ngọc An called to flirt, I would get proof to give over to his mistress. Digging around in Hà Nội, I found a phone that was not very modern; it could record missed calls but not record ongoing ones secretly. Every few seconds, the tape recorder went “tick, tick.” Lương Ngọc An called and said just a sentence, and then anxiously asked, “Are you recording?”

Hearing his voice, I lost my temper, forgot about my plan to record him, and sobbed and asked, “Why did you rape me? Why did you rape me? That was my first baby; I loved my child.”

Lương Ngọc An was cautious, so he silently listened to my questions for a while, then hung up.

I did not want anyone to know that I had been raped and forced to have an abortion, so I did not know what to do with the tape. I hid it in my office locker in the newsroom. Later, when I checked again, the tape was empty, which made me think that I had deleted it by mistake. But afterward, I learned that Lương Ngọc An had somehow managed to open my locker and erase the tape.

Lương Ngọc An did not call me at home anymore.

After Lương Ngọc An failed to rape me on April 14, 2000, I submitted complaints many times based on the incident, without reporting the whole story to the office. On the one hand, I had no real proof. But on the other, losing a child was such an extreme and sacred pain that I did not want to let anyone touch it. Also, I was afraid for my family and myself, that we would become the subject of gossip and ridicule. I didn’t think there was any young single girl who wanted to tell the world that she had been beaten and raped to the point of having an abortion.

The young girl who was me twenty-three years ago was immature, lacking in life experience and courage, and hemmed in by many outdated social prejudices. The girl silently drowned in an abyss of loneliness and panic.

## LƯƠNG NGỌC AN, ADMIT YOUR GUILT!

I attempted suicide many times in order to follow my child. My child probably insisted that God force me to stay alive so that I could speak The Truth for my child.

My child wasn't born not because his or her mother didn't love the child very much or didn't dare to be a single mother. No. My child wasn't born because the beginning of my child's life resulted from a rape. Rape cannot be changed into a "fight" that is due to "jealousy."

## LƯƠNG NGỌC AN, ADMIT YOUR GUILT!

At some point, every sin, including murder, can be forgiven.

Lương Ngọc An may also be forgiven—but only when he accepts responsibility for his sin, which is the first manifestation of a shift in awareness: knowing that what he did is harmful to society, knowing that he will never be allowed to repeat his horrible act.

My unborn child and I would like to appeal to Lương Ngọc An:

LƯƠNG NGỌC AN, ADMIT YOUR SINS AGAINST ME—RAPE AND SLANDER.

Lương Ngọc An, if you find that you have been falsely accused, sue me! Let this story get out of the dead end of being "past the statute of limitations" and be brought to a public trial before the law.

If Lương Ngọc An does not speak up, dares not confront me in front of representatives of the authorities, my husband, and lawyers, if he continues to be silent, then he has indirectly acknowledged that my accusations are accurate.

Dạ Thảo Phương

(I will continue to tell my true story.)

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\* Please note, I filed a complaint shortly after the incident of April 14, 2000, but these meetings were not held until 2003.