

8. B Û I M A I H Ạ N H

Translated by Chu Thị Thúy Linh and Peter Beamish

“Whoever Has Ears, Let Them Hear”

Originally posted on Facebook by Bùi Mai Hạnh on April 13, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/hanh.mai.3781/posts/pfbidokB9piHVioBnz8y2kdhLehdzY7L1t7h3dRd2NsrP5tg1k3ZuZyi2cCZ2Gfw7MSaPEL>.

At that time, it had been just one or two years since we had graduated from the Nguyễn Du school of writing. A classmate called me at a rather late hour and said that he was on duty and wanted to talk to ease his sadness. I don't remember what we were talking about. I just know that when I was drifting back to sleep, I heard a knock on the door. It was Lương Ngọc An.

I was surprised and asked him if it was anything important or if he just needed to continue the conversation from before. Maybe he was struggling with his love life and needed someone to talk to?

I opened the door because I often opened the door for the wanderers of my class, even when it was a bit late. Q, who was like my younger brother in the class, also used to come to my house to sleep over. My son and I slept on the bed. Q slept on the floor. In the morning he woke up with a grin, “You're lucky because I'm a nice guy, I didn't do anything to you.”

I opened the door because An and I were fellow students, having studied together for four years. Not close, but not strangers either. I invited my friend into the house. My house was actually my mother's kitchen, which was only big enough for a four-foot-wide bed and a desk.

The door opened. He rushed in. He mumbled something, pushed me down on the bed, and climbed on top of me. I cried out in terror, yet in a low voice, resisting the man—quietly, for fear of waking up my son, and softly, for fear of disturbing my sister's family next door and my mother and brother right at the door. “Let me go,” I begged him. I tried to take this as a joke. He didn't let go. I resisted more fiercely but was conscious to avoid touching my son. My mouth kept telling him that I didn't want him. I growled, “Stop it. I'm menstruating.”

He still wouldn't stop.

So, reasoning didn't work. Frightened, I tried to think of a way to get rid of him without having to fight, afraid that I might fall on my son. Suddenly, he let go of me, exclaiming, "Period indeed!" [*kinh thật*]. And he got up. I immediately got up.

He disappeared from my house before I knew what was happening. Reality or dream? What saved me?

Did he just realize that I was menstruating, had a "period indeed," and that I was not lying? Or was he terrified to rape a menstruating woman? Anyway, he stopped. Now, writing these lines again, I'm trembling, unable to determine the meaning of the two words "period indeed" that came out of my classmate's mouth. (Do readers have any ideas?)

I escaped. Menstruation, which makes me so tired all the time, saved me that night.

Twenty-five years passed. I only met An once again, when my poetry book was released. In Hà Nội. He came to receive the poetry book and immediately left.

9. PHẠM THỊ HOÀI

Translated by Nguyễn Nguyệt Cẩm and Peter Zinoman

When the Poet Did Not Rape Completely

Originally published by *Trẻ Weekly*. Republished on Phạm Thị Hoài's blog, ProContra, on April 14, 2022, <http://www.procontra.asia/?p=6477>.

The poet recently accused of rape by a female colleague responded in a newspaper interview: "I do not have an opinion on the matter, because I do not know where the case will lead and don't yet know how to act." "In my personal view," he continued, "the accusations are not completely accurate." But at the same time, he "[doesn't] want to speak too hastily to characterize what had happened." Sometimes a clear portrait is etched in a few sentences. Language reveals everything.