

## By The Light of A Silvery Moon

Vietnam and Thailand

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*A perfect moon sails the night. For lingering long moments he cast his eyes upward in primeval wonder and awe ... the heavens are aglow.*

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*Would the elders talk all night?*

We passed near my village, and I had been away three years --and I am suddenly allowed to stay until morning.

*She had changed.* No longer a child, but a young woman. Beautiful. Desirable--and watched by sisters and guarded *closely* by brothers, father, and grand-father. I had changed to ... *so she said* ... and perhaps that is true.

*Why are the elders staying up so late -- and on this night?*

She had promised to sneak out and meet me at our secret place ... *as soon as the elders are asleep.*

*Do they think they can solve Vietnam's problems and make the Americans go away?*

Yes, I am impatient, and tired, and have caught my head bobbing once or twice, as I wait for her near the bamboo trees we played chase by as kids. *I will wait forever!*

The elders' fire in village center is hypnotic. I can almost feel the warmth of burning logs, and inhale the fragrant scent of ironwood from the mountains.

Embers sore and twinkle like fireflies, as if trying to return to their forest home in the sky. He breathed deeply the familiar scents of home, and happy memories of family. He pondered the crackling fire's smoke, and its intent, as it conspired and wavered protectively above her hut.

Strangely, I think of the American papers that rain from the sky, with drawings of villages like mine. *Everyone is happy.*

Once I saw her peeking from the hut window. But that was forever ago. *The night is perfect for a first-walk ... and maybe ... if only....*

When she had smiled, my mouth gaped and she laughed, and smiled even brighter. *Surely she has not forgotten her promise to come to me.*

A soft breeze is alive with new cut hay, gathered for the animals, and the perfume of forest flowers and scented fragrance of newly extinguished lanterns, confirming the village sleeps.

His mind drifted, remembering the day *they came from the North* to the village and took him. Since then, he had longed for his village ... *even the elders* ... yet wondered what his comrades were now doing, and thought of dead friends ... too many had died ... and felt the ache once more of a healing wound.

The village is so still, and all the hut fires are long out ... *except for the elders' fire*, and one of them just tossed another log on the low flames, shooting embers and sparks – *what are they cooking on sticks?* – his stomach growled at the wafting aroma of some sweet meat.

*A perfect moon sails the night.*

For lingering moments he cast his eyes upward, captivated in primeval wonder and awe ... *the heavens are aglow* ... veiled in pale-silver splendor of a laughing-moon at the black and silver world below: dancing bamboo teased by skipping cloud-shadows and a racing moon. A sawing wind rippled the forest palms like an ocean swell ... leaves rustling vigorously in imitation of a joyous rain.

You would never guess war was all about us. Here, at this moment, I can even dream of peace and wonder what it is really like, and if someday I will set with the elders at their fire on a perfect night such as this.

*Perhaps they might forget to return for me?*

The fire began to flicker its weariness of the long night. Glowing embers snuggled near starving flames ... like comrades throwing themselves against an Air Base fortification ... *more would die*, as certain as the dying embers.

Even the dragon planes are asleep and not flying for some reason. No flares are drifting nearby ... not even on the horizon. No false thunder. And the earth does not quake from distant bombs. Only the moon rules... cooling hazy-translucent clouds in a silver glow. As a boy, I remember a French soldier had whistled a song on a night like this, and said it was an American song called "*By the Light of the Silvery Moon.*" Then, as now, I cannot not help being amazed by the starlight, clouds, and moonlight that bath the palms and village in the softest silver glow ... *the only light* ... now waning from the elders' fire.

*Will they ever go to bed?*

Crickets merrily challenged frogs to acapella duets of croaks and chirps.

Clouds faded and were reborn in intertwined ever-drifting patterns of melancholy ... savoring the glow and magical light of the Silvery Moon.

By dawn, only the elder grand-father dozed near radiate embers; his grandsons felt it safe to sleep before the day's work drifted to their huts, one by one, knowing their sisters would watch her until the boy left.