

CHOSEN

CHARLES DE ANDRADE

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FIRST SEGMENT *of the*
STEWARD SERIES



Chosen

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For the four men the Lord used in my life
To draw me to the King:
Mark Pett, Charlie Klein, Charlie Estes, and Charlie Lathe.
All four are now with the cloud of witnesses surrounding us
Waiting for the final number to be drawn in
Thanks be to God for their faithful lives and
their unfailing witness of the truth.

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To God be the glory.

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“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

Ephesians 6:12-13

THE VISION

DANANG, VIETNAM, MAY 1969

A wake. The tickling sensation of the bead of sweat sliding across his back coupled with the swatting sounds of the ceiling fan above his head confirmed his conclusion. He was indeed awake.

Glancing down at his arms, he stared in appreciation.

Whole.

His arms were still there.

The one arm still embraced the sleeping form beside him. The portrayed violence to his arms was not in evidence. It was the dream. The gruesome dream had returned, but this time with a vividness and detail that left him wondering what separated that vision from reality.

A month had passed since that experience had last disturbed his sleep. Tonight of all nights, it returned, the same frightening apparition raising the wicked-looking sword swooping down toward him.

There was an added feature this time. He saw the apparition's hand. It appeared more as a claw, with long talon-like appendages. The dream caused him to start, waking as the blade sliced easily through his outstretched arms, raised to deflect the descent. He stared down at his arms. They were still there, still whole, still untouched by the violence promised by the dream.

Glenn Hitch raised his free wrist and stared at the luminous watch dial. One a.m. stood just beyond his eyes. He had slept only an hour.

He slipped his arm from under the sleeping form.

He looked at her figure, feeling the warmth of her presence, the lightness of her form, as her body released its hold upon him. He saw the peacefulness of her face, and he rejoiced that his sudden waking had not disturbed her slumber. He stared again at her lips. Even in sleep, they seemed to smile. Her lids covered her closed eyes, hiding the large brown spheres that always seemed to sparkle with mirth. The sight distracted his mind from the terrible dream. His heart slowed its fearful beating as a new emotion flooded his senses. She was beautiful, her long black hair sliding down her shoulder and slipping off her back and under her other arm.

Glenn marveled. Mylinh had said yes.

The wedding had been simple and rushed.

Only Mylinh's aunt, the sisters, and children from the orphanage were able to attend. It took a great deal of wrangling for Glenn to take leave from the orphanage for even the day.

Father Joshua, turned doctor, objected strenuously.

Joshua's objections tempered only when Glenn asked him to perform the wedding. Mylinh, looking at Father Joshua with pleading eyes, helped melt any remaining opposition. Joshua had even agreed to transport them to the nearest city after the wedding for a one-evening honeymoon. Joshua would spend the evening in the city as well to ensure that both Glenn and Mylinh would be on time the next morning.

It would take a lot of paperwork to have the wedding considered official. That was not Father Joshua's concern; official steps would have to wait for Glenn's return from America. It was still frowned upon when any American soldier married here. Americans were not occupiers or even long-term visitors.

“He was here to do a job, and falling in love was not included in the job description,” as Colonel Fellson, his commanding officer, had reminded him several times over the field phone left at the orphanage.

“You may not even be allowed to bring her back home! Too many women over here looking for an easy ride to the Promised Land! And of all people, her!” the colonel added.

If it had not been for Glenn’s citations and his respect among so many of his peers and superiors, he may have been shipped home early to recuperate—just to prevent the wedding from occurring. Even the region’s commanding general, who had personally awarded the silver star for Glenn’s role in the recent action, knew of Glenn. The Purple Heart would be awarded before he boarded the transport to head home, but only after Joshua removed the brace and the rods.

The colonel had given in.

“Why can’t you just enjoy her without marrying her?” he demanded.

Invisible to the voice on the radio, Glenn had shaken his head, and said,

“I love her.”

Glenn had heard the hesitation in the colonel’s final statement. Glenn knew that the colonel was already reproving himself for his suggestive outburst. The colonel knew his suggestion was more than just wrong.

Stretching, Glenn tried to distract his mind and delay the replaying of unpleasant memories lurking just beneath the happiness of this day. Carefully, he moved Mylinh’s head from his shoulder. She remained blissfully asleep. She was so beautiful. Her lips still seemingly forming the words “I love you” that she had spoken at the height of their lovemaking just a short time ago. Those words etched within her smile.

The bed squeaked mercilessly as he rolled off. His leg throbbed; the strange device with the rods immobilized his leg,

making movements difficult at best. Their lovemaking had been a challenge, but the sheer joy of it had removed any lingering fear that the activity would be something less than expected.

He carefully laid Mylinh's head on the sorry excuse for a pillow. Rising up, he hobbled over to the damaged chest of drawers and the mirror. The small light there revealed his image. At six feet, Glenn was tall by Vietnamese standards, and he needed to bend at the waist for his face to be reflected by the mirror. The reflection struck him as strange.

Staring back from the mirror was a face appearing older than the twenty-one-year-old he knew he was. Even in the dim light, the blue eyes revealed his Dutch heritage, but the black hair was out of place for a race known for its blond gene. His chest was not broad, but the muscles upon it were taut and bronze. He looked down at his feet. Unseen by the mirror, they were the only part of his body still white, having been masked from the Vietnamese sun for the past three years.

If he had been a smoker, now would have been the time to light up. Instead, he rummaged on the top of the dresser and found the small pack of gum he'd deposited there. He unwrapped and popped a stick into his mouth. He continued to survey his reflection as he chewed. He smiled at himself, but the crack in the mirror turned the smile into a smirk. Glenn thought about the choices he had made that had put him here at this time and place.

Few Marine sergeants chose another tour but Glenn did.

His first tour was spent in the field. Rain, bugs, sunburn, rashes, sweat, and fighting marked his memory of the first seventeen months. Glenn was still alive. His field promotion to lieutenant from sergeant just four months ago only meant it was even less likely he would have survived this tour.

He did not tell his mother Emma the reason he had returned for another tour. He was not sure he even understood the strange compulsion that pushed him into a second tour. His mother did not know that he had an option not to return.

Now, he was being shipped home to recover from his wounds. He did not want to go. His first trip back, between tours, to his home in Michigan had been difficult. This time, many memories and fractured relationships still waited for his return.

His half-brother Buddy was only seven when Glenn came home the first time. Buddy asked lots of questions, mostly about killing and death. Despite every attempt, Glenn never really fit into Buddy's understanding of reality. Buddy was off in a world where war was thrilling, and killing was both exciting and mysterious.

Buddy seemed fairly smart, but his internal compass only ever pointed one way. The rest of the world was there for his benefit. Glenn tired of the discussions quickly. Glenn prayed he would be the last of his family to know war, and that Buddy would grow up with a different view of life. All Glenn sensed was trouble ahead for Buddy.

Then there was Bert, Glenn's stepfather. He'd married his mother Emma when Glenn was only five years old. The first years went along okay, but when Buddy arrived, things changed. Now, at best, Glenn and Bert tolerated each other.

Glenn did not remember his own father.

His father, Elvin, died in the Korean War before he was born. Until she married Bert, Emma spoke often with Glenn about his father. Now she only mentioned Elvin when Bert was not around. She gave Glenn Elvin's Bible and his watch before the wedding to Bert.

Elvin's handwritten notes in the leaves of the Bible fascinated Glenn as a youngster. Emma took Glenn to church every Sunday, but when he became a teenager, the Bible went into his dresser room drawer and so did his attendance at church. The Bible was still in the drawer, and Glenn had not been in a church in over six years. However, he had worn his father's watch every day since his mother had given it to him.

Glenn had seen the bruising on his mother's face when he came back from his basic training and confronted Bert. Bert tried to rough Glenn up, but Bert ended up losing that encounter. The Marine training paid off. Bert disappeared, taking a road trip and not returning until after Glenn began his first tour. Glenn knew that Bert got the message. There would be hell to pay if he ever hurt Emma again.

Many of the men with whom Glenn served returned to the States. Their tours over, most chose not to return. Some who thought of making the service a career changed their minds shortly into their first tour under the Vietnamese sun. The fortunate returned alive. Many others went home, never to come back, but not the way they'd hoped.

The bed springs squeaked as Mylinh stirred slightly, and Glenn turned and surveyed his room with his clothes and hers strewn upon the floor. This was the best hotel room available for them, and in his mind, it was a poor excuse for a honeymoon suite. Yet Mylinh quieted his protests and simply kissed him into submission. Her perfect English was made more musical by her Vietnamese accent.

“I did not come here for the hotel room but for you.”

One night, that is all he had. She was special. His smile did not change as he thought back to the orphanage and the frightful day he'd met her.