

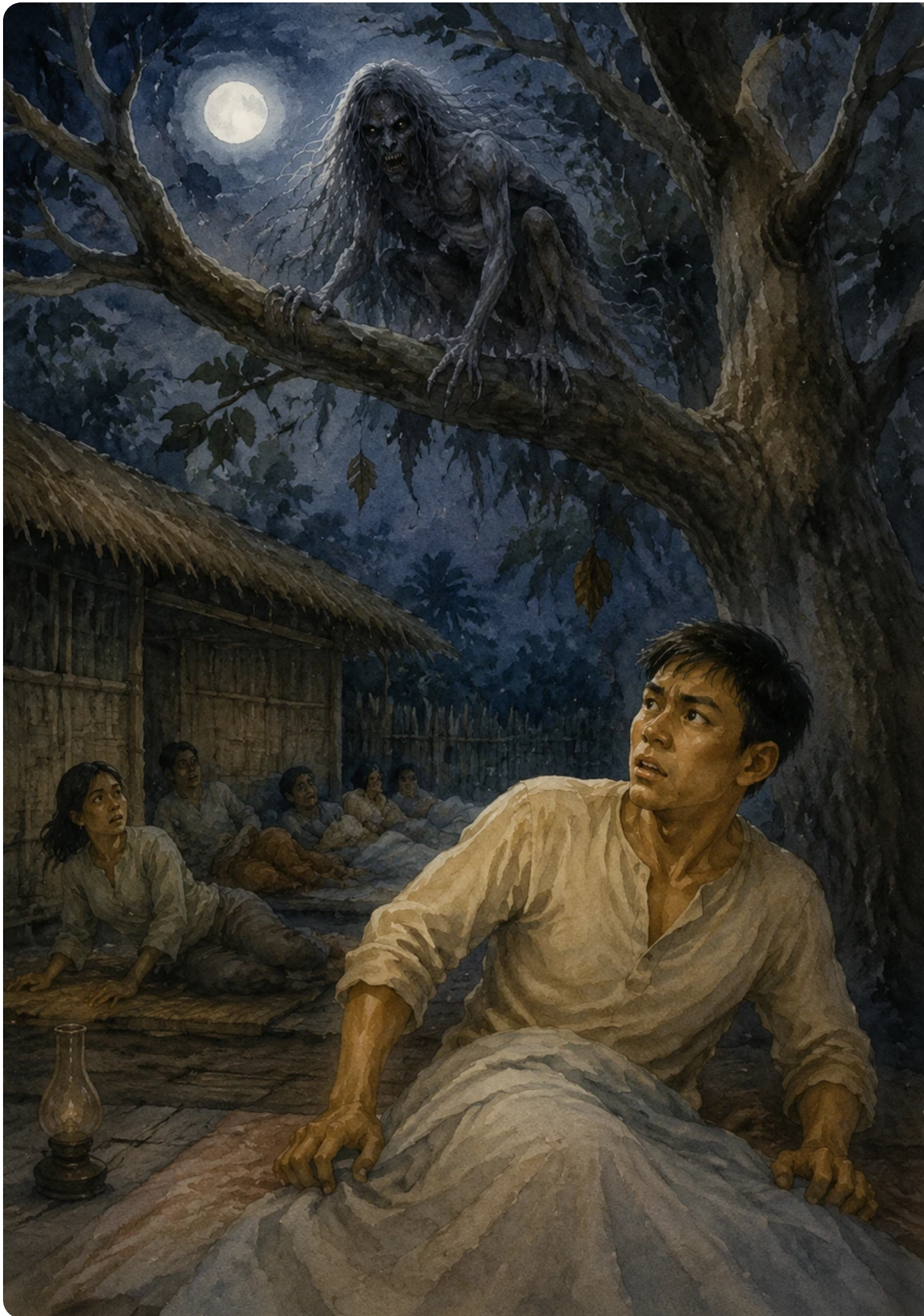


## The Aswang of the Forest Edge

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The village sits in a valley where the wind moans through the trees like a restless spirit. As the sun dips below the mountains, the forest turns into a wall of impenetrable darkness, hiding ancient secrets and watchful eyes.



In the silence of the night, a chilling sound begins to echo from the trees: 'Tik... tik... tik...' The rhythmic tapping grows louder and sharper, cutting through the rustle of the dry leaves and making the villagers tremble in their beds.



A terrifying silhouette emerges from the canopy, its body severed at the waist and floating with unnatural grace. This is the Aswang, with skin like charred wood, long matted hair trailing behind it, and claws that glint like knives in the moonlight.



Berto, a brave young man, watches the creature from his window and notices a dark pattern in its movements. It only approaches the homes where someone is sick or where a new life is waiting to be born, hunting the most vulnerable under the cover of night.



The 'Tik-tik' sound reaches a deafening crescendo right above Berto's roof, followed by a low, guttural groan that vibrates through the walls. The wind howls violently, shaking the hut as the Aswang descends, its presence bringing a heavy, suffocating chill to the air.



Anticipating the attack, Berto quickly moves to protect his home using the old ways passed down through generations. He spreads coarse salt across the threshold and hangs pungent garlic and bitter papaya fruit at the entrance to ward off the evil spirit.



The Aswang lands heavily on the porch, its long, thin tongue flicking through the cracks in the bamboo door. It hisses in anticipation, reaching out with its sharp, dark claws to tear its way into the silent house, searching for a way inside.



As the creature's hands touch the salt and the scent of garlic hits its nose, it recoils with a scream of pure agony. The natural elements burn its cursed flesh like hot iron, and it thrashes in pain, its eyes glowing with a mixture of shock and fury.



Defeated by Berto's preparation, the Aswang lets out a final, haunting cry that echoes across the valley and wakes the distant birds. It gathers its dark, floating form and flees back into the deepest parts of the forest, disappearing into the swirling mist.



With the arrival of the morning sun, the village is finally at peace, bathed in warm, golden light that chases away the shadows. Berto stands at his doorway, looking out at the quiet forest, knowing that his courage and the old traditions have kept the darkness away.