

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Three - Destiny and Fate - Chapter Fourteen - Run to Ground

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Lt. Col. Seng Ping hadn't reached his exalted rank in the Ministry of State Security by sitting on a lead. Before he had arrived back in the capital he already had his boys hot on the trail of one Bae In. They did a mass search of all relevant databases and in a short time they had multiple hits. Under the name in question there was a driver's license, a birth certificate issued in the former British colony of Hong Kong, and both a work and resident permit that allowed him to work as a construction laborer in Beijing. The photographs that popped up showed only unsmiling, unflattering head shots that were de rigueur for official documents and applications. Under several aliases that were connected back to his birth name he had a police record for petty crimes like theft and drunk and disorderly. In fact he had served time in a re-education camp and had been deported back to Hong Kong on two occasions under assumed names. Yet he continued to exist and work under the name Bae In.

"Just another anti-social thug living as a parasite on the Motherland. Find this guy and bring him in. I want to have a little talk with him," Ping announced

to his staff.

And they set out to do just that. It was not so much a matter of 'if' they would locate him, it was more like how soon they could lay hands on the scoundrel. They set a goal for themselves of twelve hours and figured it was doable.

They had three possible addresses in the metropolitan Beijing area where he might be. It was necessary to put eyes on each one and so a two man surveillance team parked outside all three. The other six guys on the team took a more proactive approach. Three spread out and began checking out construction sites and companies where he may be employed. The final three went back to the office and combed through local police records, intelligence reports from the various security services, and any other digital hiddy hole where the name of Bae In or one of his other names might pop up.

It was this team that scored first. By late afternoon, there were several hits in the organized crime database maintained by the metropolitan police. Since this guy was living outside of the bounds of legitimate society, it was pretty sure that he had some connection to one of the organized crime outfits that operated in defiance of law, Party, and civilized society. It was Ping himself who pointed them in the right direction.

Ping figured Bae In was obviously not Han Chinese and was born in Hong Kong, it would be a good bet that he was a member of one of the secret societies that were known as the Triads. If so, it would explain how he could operate in the capital city with such impunity; under several names and even after being deported twice. No doubt he had an entrenched support network. And there it was. The name showed up in three places in the organized crime Triad file. He was no godfather. More likely he was a low level

operative connected to the organization by bonds of blood and loyalty. It was another link in the chain.

There was a reason why they were called secret societies. Ping couldn't send his boys over to their headquarters and compel them to turn over the man they were looking for because they had no office, website, or public face at all. The Triads operated behind a veil of family, fraternal, and commercial fronts. But they were not totally inaccessible to the vigilant officers of the Ministry of State Security. In fact, Ping himself had dealt with a whorehouse in Yeongdeungpo that was surely owned by one of the brothers who had fallen into one of Ping's traps a few years ago. The affair had something to do with trafficking North Korean women to work in a string of brothels. Ping had allowed 'Big Nose' Chung to avoid the consequences of his anti-social behavior and continue his enterprise with the understanding that he owed Ping big time and in the future he would pay that debt. The future was now. Ping had 'Big Nose' picked up and delivered to an interrogation room in the MSS complex downtown.

The room had been designed to elicit the maximum terror, and so, quick and full cooperation from a detainee. It was not in the deep dungeons of the building but it was decorated to look like a Lubyanka terror cell from central casting with a concrete table in the center, one bright light shining down from above, and an assortment of chains and other restraint devices gracing the walls. 'Big Nose' was brought in, cuffed to a bench, and told to wait.

Ping arrived two hours later with a manila file, spread its contents out on the table, and informed 'Big Nose' what he wanted and when he wanted it.

"This is the criminal and traitor Bae In. Apparently he is one of your brothers. I need to know where he is tonight and if you attempt to hide him, things are going to get real bad for you." Ping showed the sweating, scratching Triad brother the photos of Bae In.

"How can I tell you what I don't know," 'Big Nose' tried to explain. "If I knew where this guy was I would surely tell you."

"If what you are saying is true then you are surely unfortunate. You will finish your life in this room tonight in profound agony," Ping a matter of factly informed him.

It took 'Big Nose' almost an hour to see the light. In fact he not only knew of Bae In, he was a distant relative. He also knew of a woman that Bae In was said to be keeping company with. He turned over the address of the woman in a suburb of the capital and thought he was out of the woods. He, of course, was badly mistaken.

"See how easy that was?" Ping said with a smile. "You will remain our guest here while we check this out. Once this affair is settled we'll have to make a determination as to your future. I'm thinking a twenty year stretch in a reeducation camp might be good for your soul."

A little after midnight, the three surveillance teams were recalled and directed to the new location. It was a five story building of mixed use in a rundown area of shops and light industry. In the early dawn hours there was not much traffic on the streets or sidewalks in the neighborhood. It was a cinch to reconnoiter the place and identify both exits. The woman's name was on a mailbox marked as apt. 306. She lived here and if the target either exited or entered, they'd have him. The original twelve hours had ticked away but they were still within the first twenty-four. If the target didn't show by mid morning they would start knocking on doors and see what the neighbors would tell them. It had been a long night but they were upbeat.

Around 6:15 it was starting to get light. They sent the 'kid', the youngest guy on the team, down the block for coffees. Before he got back their man showed up. Walking down the street from the direction of the 7-11 was a lone pedestrian dressed in sneakers, a jogging suit and a ball cap. Under his arm was a newspaper and he was carrying two cups of something hot from the convenience store.

"Heads up," the radios crackled. "Somebody get eyes on this guy. Jin Sung, get out in front of him and get a look at his face." They had all memorized Bae In's mugshots and it was only a matter of getting an unobstructed view of his face.

Within minutes Jin Sung confirmed it was him. They quickly put the contingency plan in place. Two officers approached him head on in front of the building while two more came up behind and cut off any possible retreat. The take down team jumped him and threw him to the sidewalk once he had been stopped. He was quickly cuffed, hobbled, and patted down for weapons. Nobody asked for identification; that would come later. It was important not to take any chances with someone who might be proficient in the martial arts. A van pulled up and the trussed turkey was bundled into the back. Jin Sung and his partner immediately set off for headquarters with the target. He phoned Ping on the way to let him know they had their man. The rest of the boys kicked in the door to apt. 306 and arrested the girlfriend. When the 'kid' got back with the coffee ten minutes later he was totally pissed that he had missed all the action.

When Ping arrived at the MSS integration center for the second time in twenty-four hours he was quite pleased with how things were unfolding. Several hours earlier he had been at his mistress' place when he had received an encrypted email from one of his confidential informants. Part of his job was to keep his finger on the pulse of the underbelly of Chinese society and maintaining a string of informants was a key tool.

The guy looking to sell information this time was in fact one Rhee Jong Bok, a North Korean defector who was in the business of selling information and a line of disinformation to the highest bidder on either side of the fence. He often had actionable intel worth the finder's fee once the wheat was separated from the chaff. Ping wasted no time getting back to him and was flabbergasted when Rhee told the story of an operation in the process of being mounted into North Korea involving a female refugee, an American writer, and a broker known as Sunflower.

Apparently they were planning to move a large chunk of cash into the north and create some kind of subversion. The words 'prison break' were bandied about by the informant. Perfect, Ping surmised, with the black money movement, the Sunflower involvement, and the international angle, it was right up his alley. Once he rolled the whole mess up it would be big and could do nothing but enhance his standing in both the MSS and the Party. It was a career maker.

Will wonders never cease, he thought to himself. He felt the gods of his ancestors were smiling down on him. Now he had a gangster in custody and the next thing on the agenda was to crack his nuts and get him to roll over on Sunflower.

As per Ping's instructions, Bae In had already been stripped naked, chained to the wall, and beaten severely. Now Bae In was a tough guy. He was an expert in more than one of the fighting arts. In addition to his physical prowess he was also well trained in controlling his mind. What's more, the welcoming treatment was nothing new. He knew what to expect and had strategies to deal with it. Bae In figured that if they were going to break him they had better bring their 'A' game. He wasn't going down easy.

Upon arriving Ping took reports from the arresting officers and the center staff to learn what he could about his next opponent. Next he spent thirty minutes in the observation room watching while Jin Sung and his partner conducted the preliminary interview. Ping had prepared a script and a list of questions all about Bae In, his background, current activities, and his relationship to Sunflower. Ping watched and took notes. Always keen to raise up a talented young man, he had given the assignment to Jin Sung as both a training exercise and an opportunity to assess his style.

While watching, Ping contacted the director of the center to inquire about the availability of specialized technicians and apparatus that he anticipated requiring. Ping was anxious to finish with this guy and move on to the bigger fish.