

## Between Heaven and Earth: Book Three - Destiny and Fate - Chapter Fifteen - A Tough Nut to Crack

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October 22, 2020



Bae In hung on a cross like device on the wall and considered his predicament. His lifestyle and identity was rife with certain vulnerabilities and to fall into the hands of the security services was one of them. He was Haka Chinese, a Triad member, and a sworn enemy of the central government. As a brother in the Triads he was not alone.

He grew up among the Hakka community in Hong Kong and was a boyhood friend of Sunflower. They had been allies in the ongoing struggle to survive in the Han Chinese world. In fact they were blood brothers and had entered the Triad secret society together. Over the years their paths had

diverged but ten years ago, when they had met again in Beijing, it was like old home week. The hallmark of the Triad society was mutual support and the renewed brothers looked for ways to support each other. Sunflower was in need of someone who was physically competent and mentally alert to act as his driver and bodyguard. Most of all he needed a guy whose loyalty was unquestionable.

It was this very quality that would be severely tested that night.

When Bae In had been picked up and roughed up he had no idea that it concerned his brother Sunflower. There were more than a dozen reasons why he might be a target of the authorities or it may have been for no discernible reason at all. It was only when he learned that the arresting authority was the MSS that he began to be increasingly concerned. He was not told what it was about but he figured it would come out before long. In the initial interview he did his best to slip and slide, duck and cover, and give up as little information as possible and at the same time avoid more brutality. All the while he tried to figure out what it was they really wanted.

It was only when the interrogator began to ask about Sunflower and his own dealings with him that he thought he might be in real trouble this time. Nevertheless he was resolved to hang tough without revealing anything about the Sunflower. That ought to be easy, he reasoned, because he really didn't know much.

For Lt. Col. Ping's part, he was determined to make fast work of this guy. He immediately called in the technicians with their apparatus. When using severe techniques there was the delicate matter of discerning the truth and what were just lies to make the pain stop. This required a man with experience and in the second round Ping took over from Jin Sung. Right away the lies and denials began. Ping rejected them all. Instinctively he felt that this miserable piece of shit knew how to find Sunflower and with the right incentives, would give him up.

Round three began when the white coated technicians entered the room with what looked like a cross between an old crank telephone and a heart monitor, on a wheeled cart. They efficiently went about their business, attaching leads to the most sensitive parts of Bae In's sagging body as he hung on the wall. Ping sat in a chair behind a desk that was brought in for him. He instructed the operators to test the device before the questioning could begin. The guy in the lab coat turned a dial, spun the crank and Bae In screamed. All was in order.

In the observation room, Jin Sung watched with several others. He was sick to his stomach. It was his first time to observe the special interrogation measures. Until now he had a bright and promising career in the services. He was a true believer in Marx, Lenin, Mao, and the CCP. He was a patriot and was striving for the ideal, utopian world that the revolutionary ideology and its vanguard, the Party, was promising to make a reality in China and eventually the rest of the world. It had become necessary for him to know the truth.

Ping was experienced and just about an expert in eliciting the cooperation of the likes of Bae In. He was also a pretty good judge of the character and resilience of his targets. From the first application of electricity to the wires attached to this guy's penis and scrotum he was pretty sure he would break in short order. And he was right. It took less than an hour and only a turning of the dial to number seven, out of ten, to convince Bae In to give up all his previously highly held virtues like loyalty to his friend. He sold his soul to make the pain stop.

Trouble was, Bae In was telling the truth when he said he didn't know much about Sunflower's various activities or even how to locate him on a moment's notice. Ping believed him, mostly. Bae In knew a lot about Sunflower's fraternal and martial associations because they shared the same connections. He didn't hesitate to divulge it all once he broke. It was all filed away as background and for later action but what Ping needed post haste was how he could put his hands on Sunflower, like right now.

Whenever his services were required Bae In would get a message on a social messenger app and he would pick up the boss and take him where he needed to go. He had never initiated a meet up and didn't know how. They did touch base once a day on WeChat using the cryptic double speak of the hyper security conscious. Ping judged that more torture would not produce any more immediately pertinent information. But he had an idea that he was pretty sure would get the results that he was looking for.

Bae In was bundled into an ambulance and taken to the Beijing National University Hospital. There, under the orders of the MSS, he was admitted as a patient who had been severely injured in an automobile accident. The patient, after a short stay in the custody of MSS, looked the part. Once Sunflower learned of his blood brother's unfortunate circumstances he was sure to show up in order to comfort the sick.

The day's proceedings had broken the spirit of more than one man. Jin Sung had become violently ill and had vomited until his guts were empty while watching. He fled the observation room and the building in both physical and spiritual distress. His conscience could not digest the brutal means that were part and parcel of maintaining the power and position of the CCP. Once that was clear, the other dominos of his moral world fell one after another.

Within a day he was on the run from his previous work unit with no moral compass to guide him. He fell into a world of petty crime, hedonism and quickly became a drug addict living in the depths of hell. At the end of his rope and perhaps his life, fate intervened. He accidentally met a young woman who was to become his saviour. She was an adherent of the outlawed sect; the Church of Almighty God. He became a convert, and as it has often been the case since the days of Saul of Tarus, he became a true believer again and a leading advocate for and protector of the church that he had previously persecuted. Seems there is no avoiding your fate.

As usual, Sunflower had a full plate and was doing what he could to pursue destiny and avoid his fate. In the face of the news that the low life Rhee was involved in the North Korea rescue affair, he considered dropping his support for the operation. But he knew his destiny was calling him to facilitate the rescue of as many of his mother's people as possible. Once he had made up his mind, he put in place a plan to locate, secure the release of, and deliver to the Chinese border the relatives of Kim Jeong Sook. Over the course of three days, negotiations were conducted and money changed hands. It was a complicated plan involving money brokers on both sides of the border, operatives in the north, and the payment of bribes on several different levels. The total cost exceeded the money that the principals had and so both Sunflower and the Rev. Kim kicked in to make up the balance. Finally all was in place and a rendezvous at the border was arranged.

Although he continually pushed the very real threats of disaster and betrayal from the likes of Rhee and Ping out of his mind, they had a way of pushing their way back to the forefront if he let his guard down. His intelligence on Ping, obtained from the Ball Agency, was scary. He was a high ranking officer in the Ministry of State Security and once Sunflower was in his sights the danger was grave. Sunflower began to shut down all his operations on the mainland, move assets offshore, and prepare to move to Vancouver. It would take several weeks but by the time the current operation was concluded, he and most of his portfolio would be out of harm's way. Once he pulled the trigger things would move fast and if all went well the folks would be at the bridge in three days. It was prudent to do it as soon as possible to reduce the opportunities for betrayal.

At ten am Sunflower communicated the timeline to Kim Baek Soo, transferred the final payment, and sent the signal to kick things off. Then he turned to his latest problem. He had been unable to reach his man Bae In for the past two days. It was unlike Bae In to be out of touch. He had sent several messages through normal channels and got no reply. That morning he sent an urgent message through an email account that they had set up for just such emergencies. The reply was troubling. A traffic accident; well that would explain it. He immediately checked with the hospital and yes, he was a patient and was in critical condition. He jumped in a cab and headed straight for the hospital. On the way it occurred to him that if Bae In was in such bad shape, how had he responded to the email?

With no clear answer, the Sunflower inquired at the nurse's station on the nineteenth floor and was directed to room 1906. Now alarm bells were going off in his head; a private room? But he was sincerely concerned for his old friend and so pushed the door open and cheerfully called out,

"Hey brother, what's up with you?" He got no reply.

Four guys in scrubs were right behind him. Two of the apprehension team immediately wrestled him to the floor and the other two expertly jammed the hypodermic needles in both sides of his neck. Sunflower was out cold and within five minutes he was strapped to a gurney for his trip downtown in the waiting ambulance.

Ping anxiously waited for him. The Sunflower came-to slowly, not in one of the Lubyanka rooms but in what was surely a hospital setting. His confusion was to be expected as he shook off the effects of the powerful narcotic. He was pretty sure he was in a room just down the hall from his blood brother. It was only when the smiling face of Ping came into focus that he realized he had made the biggest mistake of his life.

"Good afternoon Master Sunflower. I've been looking forward to seeing you again."

As he labored to brush away the cobwebs, Sunflower endeavored to recover his customary equilibrium,

"I assure you the pleasure is all mine. To what do I owe this unexpected pleasure Col. Ping?"

"There are quite a few things we need to talk over. We can start with the small matter of your cross border financial and human trafficking adventure."

Sunflower was suddenly clear as a bell. He surely held in his hand the key to the success or failure of that operation. In addition he also held the very lives of everyone involved in his hands. He was under no illusion that if Peng was determined to get that key, he couldn't prevent it. It was only a matter of stalling for time. If he could hold out for three days then his information would not thwart the plan. He decided to sell his soul as dearly as possible. The high stakes game commenced.

"This guy may be a tough nut to crack," Ping said under his breath.