

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Three - Destiny and Fate - Chapter Eighteen - In the Dead of the Night

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It's understandable that much of the most horrific evil in this world is done under the cover of darkness. All manner of deeds can be carried out away from prying eyes that would surely recoil if they were to witness them in the light of day. On the other hand great goodness may also be accomplished at night. Epic heroes can and do emerge in the night and only become visible with the break of day.

In the case of Sunflower, he had lost track of the passage of time since he had fallen into the clutches of the CCP and its security services. He had no idea if it was day or night. He was intently aware of the bright fluorescent light that flooded the interrogation chamber like the sun itself. He had set his mind on the objective of revealing no information about the rescue operation at the border for the three days that it would take to successfully conclude the affair.

Problem was, he had absolutely no idea if it was the third day or the thirty third day. It had surely been daylight when he had been drugged, hogtied, and hustled into the presence of his nemesis, Lt.

Col Sheng Ping. In his muddled mind, that seemed like a lifetime ago. So much water, blood, and other bodily fluids had passed over the damn since then. Now he wondered where he stood. He knew he couldn't endure much more.

To Ping it was nothing more than a professional problem. Fresh off of several quick coups, he was fairly confident to finish this business in good time; maybe less than forty eight hours. He had the full array of interrogation tools at his disposal and he considered carefully where to start. He sensed from their previous encounter that his target was a prime mover in the criminal underground and as a Triad member had some formidable internal assets and training in evasion. It would be both a professional and personal achievement to break this guy and mine all his secrets. The challenge would be to apply maximum pressure without letting the culprit escape into death before he gave up everything. It would be kind of like another chess match; this time with a master.

The initial interview was Ping's opening move.

"Well, we meet again. You need to know that you are now on my turf and I will be setting the agenda," Ping started out.

Sunflower was still shaking off the effects of the drugs but was ready to engage.

"Yes, I'm sure you will. May I ask why you didn't just invite me for a coffee? I got no problem having a chat."

"We won't be chatting today. I'll be asking and you will be answering. Since I already know something about you and your criminal, anti social, and anti Party activities, I don't expect you to be forthcoming without the proper persuasion. In order to lay the groundwork for our next session our doctors will be visiting you to check on your health and to administer a serum that will incline you to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and Ping was sure this guy wouldn't be needing to put his hand on a bible.

Over the years since seizing power, the communist party had tasked scientists, universities, and research labs with developing all manner of devices and substances to benefit the Party's mission to advance the revolution and stay in power. One of the drugs that had been used extensively to obtain true information from reluctant subjects was a barbiturate similar to sodium pentothal that was used in the west. After the docs had pronounced Sunflower in good health and likely to survive the rigors of the extreme measures, up to a point of course, administered a healthy dose of the drug. Forty minutes later Ping and Sunflower

had another talk.

The Sunflower had spent a good deal of his life practicing to control his thoughts, feelings, and body through breathing techniques that had been developed by practitioners down through the ages. These arts had been in use for much longer in fact than the chemicals Ping was banking on. The drugs only made Sunflower slightly confused, humorous, but extremely fatigued. All he wanted to do was sleep.

Although disappointed, Ping could see right away that this guy was struggling to keep his eyes open. It was potentially a chink in his armor and Ping moved to exploit it. He ordered his playmate to stand naked in the middle of the room and posted two junior associates with batons to ensure he didn't drift off. Every three hours or so, Ping would pop his head in to ask more questions. At one point in the night, the electrical shock device was brought in and the physical agony began. The anticipation of the regular application of pain began to work on Sunflower. Combined with the exhaustion and mental confusion, his mind began to slip ever so slightly but he continued to breathe in and breathe out; his hard round belly rising and falling almost automatically.

In the course of their verbal sparring Ping got the distinct impression that of all that Sunflower was hiding, there was something that he was attempting to conceal more than anything else. This could be the linchpin and if he could kick it loose, everything else would crumble. It became the one thing that Ping focused on and the one thing Sunflower refused to reveal.

In the predawn hours Ping was getting worried. Sunflower was looking pretty ragged. His pupils were fully dilated, he was drooling from both his nose and mouth, the beatings, and electric shocks could no longer keep him upright or coherent. Ping put in a call to the doctors and they recommend LSD. It was a risky proposal since it would surely revive the patient but could also blow out what was left of his mind. Ping made the decision to take that risk.

In his days spent with his counterculture compatriots back in the States, he had ingested various substances, including both window pane and blotter acid, psilocybin, and copious amounts of weed. He had been told it would expand his mind if he would only tune in, turn on, and drop out. He had seen some others in the thralls of the so-called 'bad trip' but in his case he mainly recalled just getting high as a kite. This time it was by no means a recreational adventure into the world of psychedelics and that made all the difference. The first indication that he had been given the powerful psychoactive drug without his knowledge was the rush. It felt like the top of his head had blown off and all the gray matter, turned several shades of orange and purple, had splattered across the ceiling and dripped down. As he watched, he realized that he could read all of his deepest thoughts and secrets in the goo and so could everyone else. As he desperately tried to hide the key information he knew that his brain was scrambled and he could no longer control his breathing. When he breathed in his belly expanded into a ball the size of a beach ball and he couldn't exhale. The end was near.

Ping watched from the observation room and saw that Sunflower had indeed been revived by the LSD. He appeared frantic and almost crazed. Ping entered the chamber in order to press his case. In response to his repeated queries concerning the 'big thing,' Sunflower was now fully cooperative. He spewed out words and sentences like a geyser. Of course they made no sense. He described in detail the shapes, forms, and colors of his hallucinations. Because they were so vivid, he was not satisfied and tried to explain again and again. It became like free form poetry and Ping finally gave up trying to decipher it.

Every word, however, had been recorded and Ping got his staff hot on the task of analyzing it. In the meantime he called the techs in with their device for another round of shock therapy. He had no idea if the shock would push Sunflower over the edge into insanity, he was real close, or bring him around. Such interrogations were as much an art as a science and Ping was more than curious how this one would turn out.

The additional electrical shocks made Sunflower's agony almost palatable. He could see, smell and taste the pain as well as feel it. It served to break open the last barriers in his mind and he began to receive revelations from where he knew not.

"The depth of the soul can be measured by the suffering one voluntarily takes on."

The words were like a flashing psychedelic, neon banner floating in the heavens. They filled his soul and gave him the resolve to try once more. When he smiled he lit up the room.

"This is not yet finished," Sunflower told all that were listening.

The analysts had a long row to hoe in gleaning any useful information from the tapes they had. It appeared to be a mish-mash of unconnected, in Chinese, Korean, and surprisingly enough English, utterings of a crazy man. At the end of three hours there seemed to be something about North Korea, money, and a name; Kim Jeong Sook. These things matched the information that Ping had bought from

the whore Rhee and so became credible.

Ping took the name like a thread and began to unravel the plot. Most intriguing was the mention of two Americans as conspirators. Surely they were CIA and were behind this. Nothing else made sense. It was exhilarating to realize that he had uncovered an international plot that was targeting a socialist brother country from China's sovereign territory. One more session would wrap things up. He would squeeze the mark as much as possible to get more names, a timeline, and any other actionable information.

In the end it was probably the cattle prod in the anus that broke the dam and all the details that Ping needed were quickly forthcoming. The wreck that had once been the Sunflower was turned over to subordinates for mopping up and disposal. Ping got on the phone and started to marshal assets in order to foil the operation. He got his boys busy trying to verify names and places. He reached out for Rhee. A little further pressure would produce any details he had failed to mention.

Problem was it was all raw intelligence and if the timeline was correct there were less than twelve hours before it was scheduled to go down. The CCP and the Ministry of State Security were vast bureaucracies that would be slow to mobilize based on unconfirmed raw intelligence. In addition, communication and cooperation with the North Korean government was ripe with the potential for the tossing of monkey wrenches into the works. It was gonna be a race against time.

The Party and the security organs began to slowly move based on Ping's assurances that, although not fully confirmed, this was time sensitive and had to be acted on. As confirmation of details began to trickle in by mid morning Ping was ordered to submit a tactical plan. As usual, all communication with 'little brother' across the frontier was without a timely response. It was like pouring ink into a black hole. Based on past experience Ping knew that it could be hours or even days before the North Koreans passed the intelligence up to the right folks, it was evaluated, and a response was formulated. He would make his plan and put it in place without the input of the North Koreans. Since they jealously guarded their sovereignty there would be no question of crossing the border without the formal approval of the smelly garlic eaters.

Although there was surely more valuable information in the memory banks of the Sunflower and his tormentors would have preferred to keep him alive awhile longer, he had endured too much and shortly after dawn on the third day he gave up the ghost. His time in hell was over. And when he crossed over that last river he immediately entered the ranks of the great souls who had fulfilled their destiny and met their fate.