

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Three - Destiny and Fate - Chapter Twelve- Working Out

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October 17, 2020



The gym was on the fourteenth floor of a high rise tower in the fashionable Wopuching district of downtown Beijing where Sheng Ping maintained his team's offices. It was a modern health club with all the machines, space for yoga, and martial arts practice, a sauna, and a luxurious locker room. The building itself was occupied by official government offices including high ranking officers in the People's Liberation Army and the state security services. The gym was used exclusively by the privileged including Ping. He tried to workout three times a week as his various official activities allowed. He was no body builder like a lot of the folks engaged in the more vigorous pursuits were. He figured regular exercise ought to keep him physically and mentally fit for his official duties which often kept him parked in front of several computer screens with the occasional bursts of activity like the surveillance of targets, apprehensions, and interrogations.

His usual workouts consisted of intense intervals on the weight machines and longer on a treadmill.

The running tended to clear his mind and he often came to decisions and made up his mind about the next course of action during or after a long run. It was after such a good session he made up his mind to settle the Sunflower one way or another. To Ping, he was nothing but a weed and he was gonna stamp it out. Although he was an elusive guy he could be brought to heel for his anti-social, anti-party, anti-progressive lifestyle, and subversive activities. It would only be a matter of bringing the full weight of the Party and its security services to bear on the miscreant.

The first order of business would be to locate him. Under the spray of a hot shower an idea came to him. He would approach it like a problem in astrophysics. When searching for a heavenly body that you knew must exist but couldn't observe it directly, you eliminate all the places it wasn't and you could be sure it would be in the place that remained. All he had to do was to ascertain all the places the Sunflower wasn't. He would surely be at the place that was left.

While toweling off he decided to start by rooting out the prey's lair in the mountains. In the process he would be sure to squeeze some useful intelligence out of that brood of whores up there.

The raid was simple to organize. He put it into the capable hands of his second in command who gathered the real time intelligence, mobilized the personnel and assets needed, and made an action plan. Once Ping had signed off, the refuge was surrounded and seized in a pre-dawn strike.

The women folk were, of course, shocked and awed. There was no resistance and the four women and three children who were in residence were taken into custody. The three younger women were immediately transported to the nearest police station for their initial interrogations. The kids, all toddlers, were turned over to state social services for placement with more politically reliable families. Ping ordered Qu xi held at the refuge for his arrival. He would handle her himself.

Extracting Information from a target was something like making love to a woman. A guy could learn techniques of seduction and pleasure but the real talent lay in the practitioner's heart and soul. If one truly enjoyed the process then a guy could be creative and more likely successful. Ping was an inspired interrogator and was happy in his work.

He always started with a benign interview where he sized up his target and formed a strategy. He needed to know what made this person tick; what they were all about and what kind of thing they feared the most. Then he knew which vulnerability to exploit.

In the case of Qu xi he had an almost pleasant chat in the front room of the refurbished temple. He started out by letting her know that he was empowered by the CCP to get to the bottom of the activities of the weed Sunflower and to put an end to them. She was certainly deeply involved and would also be held

accountable.

"You are now in a most dangerous predicament and will be charged with treason as well as other offenses against the Party and the State including distribution of illegal narcotics. Your future is now in your own hands. You can only help yourself by giving this investigation your full cooperation."

"Of course I will help you in any way I can," she calmly told Ping but her mind was racing seeking a way out and also how to warn the master of the house.

"Yes, I'm sure you will. You can start by writing a full confession of your activities here, your history with this Sunflower character including his real name, occupation, and all the crimes that you and he have committed against the Party and Motherland. Keep in mind we already know the truth and if you lie or try to obscure anything, it will go very bad for you. You have one hour. Get started."

Qu xi agonized over the confession document for almost the full hour. In the last ten minutes she scribbled a page and a half of almost unintelligible denials, half truths, and outright lies. She had no idea what the young man knew or didn't know. She figured that whatever she confessed to wouldn't make much difference. And she was right.

Ping never expected her to tell the truth. He knew she would try to hide as much as possible, mislead the investigation, and minimize her involvement in all things. The opening confession was standard practice. It was like the opening move in a chess game and would establish a baseline for evaluating statements made under more strenuous techniques.

Ping returned to collect the document after two hours. He had spent the interval enjoying a leisurely lunch and receiving reports from the evidence technicians who were conducting an extensive search of the premises and the local party cadre who were supervising the police in the interrogation of the other women at the local lock up.

When he entered the front room Qu xi was kneeling with her head down in a posture of submission and held her confession out with both hands. Ping ordered her to rise and took the two pages from her. He scanned the contents for about a minute and dropped it to the floor.

"I told you not to lie bitch," he shouted as he struck her hard in the solar plexus with a closed fist.

She immediately fell to the floor and curled up into a ball. He turned on his heel and left the room. It was time to move on to phase II.

Terror and physical pain were superb tools for breaking down a detainee but they were limited if you were seeking true information. Under the most severe torture everyone is gonna talk. In order to avoid the pain folks will say anything at all that might stop the pain. Ping had heard the most absurd tales under severe techniques. Some of the things he had heard were laughable.

It was more effective to break the mind and spirit of the target by mixing it up some. Electrical shocks to the genitals, twisting the body up like a pretzel, and trussing the unfortunate up like a duck for slaughter and hanging them from the ceiling were all tried and true methods. Degrading sexual assaults were effective with some women but not all. Others seemed to enjoy it. Hell, Ping had seen girls take on large groups and walk away unfazed.

One of Pings favorites was to enlist the victim's own mind and conscience as co-torturer. He ordered his assistants to take Qu xi to a fruit cellar in the bowels of the building, strip her naked, and require her to stand with her arms above her head and think about the lies she had told. The six acolytes took turns sitting on a chair in front of her and striking her with metal rods if she allowed her hands to fall, her body to droop, or her eyelids to close. It was time consuming but in twenty-four hours she would be ready for phase III.

In the meantime Ping took a long walk in the mountains enjoying the blossoming trees, the cool fresh air, and all that nature had to offer. It lifted his spirits and filled him with optimism for his future. On returning to the hermitage he took a long soak in the hot pool. He had to hand it to Sunflower. He did know how to live.

While bathing he gazed out the windows and contemplated the final disposition of this fine piece of real estate. It was now the property of the State having been seized from a declared enemy of socialism and the people. Besides, Sunflower wouldn't be able to use it again once he caught up with him. Ping wasn't able to deny that he coveted the place for himself. He imagined scenarios that would place it in his hands. It was not hard to rationalize that it was not unreasonable for a loyal, hard working, and successful protector of the Party, the people, and the State be justly rewarded. Sure, why not?

The next morning, after checking on the progress in the fruit cellar, he finalized plans for phase III. He ordered the three women to be brought to the temple by noon. They had spent the night being gang raped, beaten, and various other delights. They had all written confessions that, Ping knew, were pure nonsense. He expected nothing else. Really they knew nothing about the whereabouts of the Sunflower. It was more a training exercise and a kind of reward for the local lads. The women would have their role to play in phase III.

They arrived at precisely noon, still naked and bound in the Japanese style with rope. They were taken to the grassy hill behind the temple where the sunflowers were soon to bloom. They each had their own uniformed guard armed with a truncheon and a sidearm in a holster. They were placed side by side on their knees facing the temple wall. All was ready.

Qu xi had had a bad night; not a wink of sleep and was almost out of her mind. She had been beaten again and again and was bloody from head to toes. Ping was sitting on a canvas camp chair facing the three women on their knees. It would appear that he was directing a movie shoot on location but this play was going to be all too real.

Qu xi was brought in front of Ping and thrust to her knees. The henchman behind her grabbed her by the hair and held her head up so she could carry on a conversation with the boss.

"So, I expect you may be ready to give me the truth now," Ping quietly told her.

She said nothing. The guard swung her around so she was facing her three former charges. Ping gave a signal and the guard behind the first young woman unholstered his pistol, pulled back the slide, and fired one round into the back of the woman's head blowing away her forehead. She slumped to the ground dead as her warm blood and brains splattered Qu xi's face. The executioner then stepped behind the second woman and raised his pistol again.

Qu xi broke. She spit blood and gray matter out of her mouth and croaked, "Ok, ok, I'll tell you. What do you want?"

"I want to know how to get my hands on this Sunflower and I want the truth," Ping told her.

"There's a man, his driver and bodyguard. I have his cell phone number for emergencies. He is Bae In," and she gave a number.

One of the flunkies jotted it down and ran down the hill to the communication van to get someone to verify it.

Ping said, "You are such a liar. How do you expect me to believe you?"

"It's true, I swear!" She cried.

"We shall see," Ping said and gave the signal to the pistolero.

He fired again and the victim slumped forward.

"No, no, it's the truth!" She screamed.

This time he believed her. He touched his nose again and the guy fired once more dispatching the third woman. It was over and he now had a promising lead. The grounds were a bloody mess but the coming rains would wash it all away. He left the disposing of the bodies and the half alive Qu xi to his underlings and returned right away to Beijing. It had all worked out well.