

Life at the Top Chapter 576

Regardless of the sinister schemes being plotted, time continued to pass with each day.

It was New Year's Eve now, and the new year would soon arrive.

Jasper did not go anywhere that day, opting to stay home with his parents instead.

However, that did not mean he had nothing to do. He was making calls to Old Master Law and the like to relay New Year's Eve greetings.

Etiquettes should not be forgotten.

As for Gale Hurlbutt, Jasper had also called to greet him.

He had accepted Gale's conditions two days ago.

This meant that he would assume the role of vice president of the Haddock Chamber of Commerce Waterhoof branch after New Year's when work officially started again.

The news was still kept under wraps and there was only a handful who knew of it. Yet that did not stop Jasper and Gale's relationship from growing closer.

The most important thing was...

He had to deal with the long phone calls with Anna and Wendy.

While the two women were far apart, they seemed to have a very tacit understanding not to call Jasper first.

Jasper was elated by the fact, so he spent more than an hour calling Wendy before he dialed Anna's number.

Having called the people he had to, Jasper then received calls from Hudson, Jack, and a bunch of other people.

Everyone traded pleasantries, wishing for each other's good health and prosperity in the new year.

These were all necessary conversations. One would not gain anything if they spoke too much, but not speaking enough would easily offend others.

After entertaining the people he had to, Jasper looked up to realize that it was past 12 a.m. now.

This marked the beginning of 2001.

Jasper walked over to the window and was surprised to find that it had begun to snow tonight.

Snow was rare in the southeast and it had been a few years since it snowed in Tefa City.

The only one beside Jasper now was the burly Julian.

"Julian, do you know any responsible female martial artists you could recommend?" Jasper asked.

Julian gave it some thought before replying, "I do have a martial artist friend who has just become a martial arts instructor. Do you want to invite her over, Jasper?"

Jasper smiled. "I can't help but worry when there isn't anyone with Wendy to protect her."

Jasper nodded. "Alright, I'll contact her tomorrow."

Now that New Year's Eve was over, it was January again and Jasper would only be getting busier as time passed.

There were plenty of people coming over to greet him, including John who brought Kai over.

Kai brought over a gilded crucifix. Seeing its design and weight, it had to cost at least 100,000 Somer Dollars.

Despite knowing that Kai was giving the gift as thanks and to fawn over Jasper, Jasper did not decline it when he saw how his religious mom, Sally, was so happy that her mouth stayed agape.

After dealing with the large group of people, Jasper and his parents arrived in Nauritus City at the provincial capital on the fourth of January.

It was the day Jasper's and Wendy's parents would meet.

Jasper parked the Bentley just before Dawson's house. Dawson took the initiative to approach them.

He opened the car doors and reached out a hand to Charlie who was alighting the vehicle. "I've been anticipating for ages the day you'd come over, Charlie."

Charlie smiled, still slightly nervous, and shook Dawson's hand with both his hands. "Hello, Mr. Schuler. It's nice to meet you too."

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As if sensing Charlie's nerves, Dawson smiled. "You don't have to be too polite. While this is the first time we're meeting, we're going to be a family very soon. You're older than me, so I'll just treat you as my brother and call you Charlie. You can do the same as well."

Seeing how easy-going such a wealthy man like Dawson was, Charlie immediately took a liking to the man and chuckled. "Then I'll just call you Dawson, since I'm older than you."

"There we go. This must be my sister-in-law, then?" Dawson turned to smile at Sally and greeted her.

Seeing how their parents were speaking cheerfully with one another, both Jasper and Wendy exhaled a sigh of relief.

"You look beautiful today," Jasper told Wendy with a chuckle.

Wendy was donned in a pink faux-fur coat today with a scarf around her fair neck. Her choice of clothing had only made Wendy look more bright and playful.

Wendy chuckled. "You look very handsome today as well."

The two families entered the villa with smiles on their faces, and Charlie gave Jasper a look to prompt the other to bring out a large box. Jasper then handed it to Dawson. "Uncle Schuler, my parents didn't know what gift to get since it's their first time coming over. Please enjoy this small offering of ours."

Dawson was stunned. "It's enough that you're here, what's with all this gift-giving?"

“These are rare goods, Dad. Some 200-year-old wild ginseng,” Wendy told him as she stood beside him.

Dawson’s expression changed. “200 years old? What a treasure.”

He opened the box in front of everyone, and within the red gift box was a stalk of wild ginseng that would unfurl to a length of more than one meter long. It looked like it was pregnant.

“This is too much,” Dawson turned to Charlie.

Charlie smiled. “Its value isn’t important. You were the one who told me not to be too polite.”

Dawson did not protest and accepted the gift with a smile.

Lunch went by joyfully.

Both Dawson and Charlie had drunk some alcohol, so the two went to their own rooms to rest after lunch.

Jasper was just planning to bring his girlfriend out on a date when he received a phone call from Sean.

Thinking that it was just a call for greetings, Jasper accepted it only to hear Sean’s frantic tone echo through the speakers once the call connected.

“Something has happened, Mr. Laine! The site... Something has happened on the site!”

Jasper’s eyebrows arched as he replied with a heavy tone, “What are you so panicked about? Tell me what happened slowly.”

Hearing that, Wendy’s expression turned serious as well.

Sean gulped a few times over the phone as he forced himself to calm down. When he spoke again, it was with an exceptionally grim tone, "I've just received news that a fire broke out at the site half an hour ago. Firefighters are still trying to extinguish the flames but they've already pulled out five to six people from the site. All of them are severely injured and official personnel is carrying out emergency rescue on them..."

Jasper was furious at what he heard and roared, "What the hell were the people in charge of the site doing? How many times have I told them that it's New Year's and while I understand everyone is trying to meet deadlines, we have to be careful! How could a fire break out at such a stage? And with five to six workers severely injured?!"

Sean replied sorrowfully, "We've been especially careful all this time but it was really weird how the fire started. It started from the workers' living quarters during lunch break when most of the workers were sleeping. It started too abruptly for anyone to make it out in time."

"Where are you now?" Jasper pushed down his anger and asked.

"On my way to the construction site," Sean replied frantically.

"Get there as fast as you can and focus on placating the workers. You have to control this situation and don't let news of it leak yet. I'll be there shortly."

Jasper then hung up the phone.

"The site caught on fire, Jasp?" Wendy asked worriedly.

Jasper nodded and replied grimly, "We still don't know what happened exactly, but there are already five to six of them severely injured. There might be more people inside but we haven't found them yet. I've got to go over. Wait for my news here."

"Should I wake my dad?" Wendy asked.

Jasper shook his head. “He drank quite a bit during lunch, so let him rest. I’ll deal with this.”

Jasper then informed Julian and sped toward the construction site.

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Flames and smoke engulfed the construction site on the South Bank of the Southface river, attracting the attention of countless people.

Long before he had even arrived, Jasper could already see how the fire brightened up half the sky as smoke burst into the air. The smell of burning materials permeated the air kilometers away from the scene.

“It’s not a small fire this time, Jasper. From what the looks of it, I’d say it’s pretty severe,” Julian spoke grimly to Jasper.

Jasper took a deep breath and replied calmly, “It’s alright. It’s not a loss if it can be fixed with money.”

The large Bentley arrived outside the construction site and was held back by the caution tape the firefighters had put up.

Jasper did not explain himself to the firefighters as he got out of the car and walked toward the site.

Jasper and Julian were currently around 700 to 800 meters away from the site, but despite the distance, Jasper could still feel the burning heat from the scene. That spoke levels about how severe this fire was and that it was rapidly spreading.

“Mister... Mr. Laine!”

Having arrived before them, Sean ran over with a pant. Sean’s meticulous suit was now in an embarrassing state with traces of soot all over. The man was drenched in sweat, and it was a sorry sight.

“How’s the situation?” Jasper walked toward the site with Sean following beside him.

While panting, Sean replied, “The fire hasn’t been put out yet, but the firefighters told me that from what they can see, the fire started in two different places. The workers’ rest and living quarters, and the warehouse for all the building materials.

“Both fires started almost at the same time, so that explains why the fire is so unrelenting. The firefighters suspect arson, but there’s no concrete evidence.”

Jasper replied grimly, “All of that can wait. The most important thing now is to contain the fire and minimize injuries and deaths.”

Sean took a deep breath and wiped the sweat from his forehead. “I agree, that’s what I thought too—”

A firefighter who was seemingly the captain ran over to Jasper and interrupted Sean with a question, “Who are you?”

Jasper did not mind the other’s abrupt attitude and replied, “I’m the person in charge of JW Real Estates.”

The firefighter scoffed and pointed at the construction site that was still in flames. “What kind of safety measures are you using here? It’s really difficult to contain a fire like this. You’re going to have to take legal responsibility if people lose their lives or get injured by this!”

Sean’s expression changed, and he was about to chide the captain when Jasper waved at Sean to stop him.

“I understand how you feel, captain, but trust me when I say I’m more nervous about this than you. You have to believe me when I say that there’s nothing wrong with the safety measures in the construction site. We can talk about whether I should be held accountable or not later, but I only have one request right now.”

Jasper’s gaze turned solemn as he stared at the captain and continued, “Do anything you can to minimize the harm done to my workers!”

The captain was stunned when he heard Jasper. He had dealt with countless industrial fires and almost every boss was most worried about their property and materials. This was the first time he had heard such a request.

“Aren’t you worried about property loss?” the captain asked.

Jasper replied calmly, “I can continue investing if it’s just monetary loss and I can just buy more facilities if they break. But there’s nothing I can do to atone if human lives are lost here.”

The captain immediately found respect for Jasper at his words and gave Jasper an intense look before he spoke, “Don’t worry. It’s our job, so we’ll do everything we can to save the workers inside.”

Jasper took a deep breath and replied, “I only request that the firefighters take care of themselves as well, then.”

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Jasper then turned to Sean. “Mr. Tucker, on behalf of JW Real Estates, please donate one million Somer Dollars in cash and three firetrucks to the fire department that’s putting the fire out after all of this is over.”

Sean shouted reflexively, "Understood, Mr. Laine!"

The captain gave Jasper an intent look. "I've seen my fair share of rich men, but you're the most unique out of all of them. I'm certain now that this fire has nothing to do with you."

The captain then quickly ran back to instruct his team in putting the fire out.

Jasper and Sean stood by the entrance of the site and stared grimly as the red flames devoured the place.

From time to time, there would be severely injured workers carried out by firefighters. Each time he saw this scene, Jasper's expression grew darker.

"Mr. Tucker," Jasper called out.

"Yes, Mr. Laine?" Sean moved toward him.

"Immediately notify the office that every employee above the managerial level and those in charge of the site's safety measures are to have all their remaining holidays canceled. They should return to the office right away.

"The company has only one job now and that is to team up to take care of the workers harmed in this fire.

"Every injured worker is to be compensated by the insurance company they signed their contracts with and if their insurance can't cover them, then the company will top up the amount.

"I'm not short on money, let alone money that I should be paying," Jasper replied heavily.

Sean's heart lurched as he replied instinctively, "Mr. Laine, the compensation from their insurance companies is enough. We've bought them enough

employment injury insurance, and it's going to cost the company tens of millions if we pay the rest for them."

Jasper turned to Sean coldly. "Tens of millions is nothing to me, but to these workers? That money is enough to pay for their entire lives!"

Sean did not even dare to look into Jasper's frosty eyes. Shuddering, he quickly replied, "I understand, Mr. Laine. I'll get to it right away."

...

At the same time, Zayden was several kilometers away in a high-rise where he watched the fire brighten the sky over the South Bank of the Southface River while chortling.

"Not bad. Not bad at all. You've done well this time." Zayden laughed loudly as he turned and clapped Terence on the shoulder.

Terence laughed drily and nodded, replying with a bow, "I'm happy that you're satisfied with my performance, Mr. Hanks."

While Zayden was laughing, his gaze could not be more sinister and cold as he stared at Terence. "You did well with lighting the fire, but you didn't leave any evidence behind, did you?"

Terence shuddered and quickly looked down as he replied, "Don't worry, Mr. Hanks. I had observed them for a few days before I acted. I didn't leave behind any evidence at all."

Zayden nodded. "Very good. Well done."

Zayden then turned to look at the construction site that was bursting in flames. "What a beautiful sight. If only the fire was even bigger. How terrible do you think Jasper's expression is right now?"

“When I think of that, I just can’t wait to see what Jasper looks like. He must be heartbroken. He must be furious, wouldn’t you say? Hahaha!”

Terence shivered in terror amidst Zayden’s chortles but still laughed along with him. “Who does Jasper think he is? Who is he to compete with you, Mr. Hanks? This is just a small lesson, the true suffering comes later.”

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This fire became earth-shattering news that wracked through all of the Southeast Province. It had also taken 47 million out of Jasper’s pockets.

“Mr. Laine, Mr. Schuler, the fire has burned 40 million Somer Dollars worth of our building materials and facilities in total. There’s also an invisible loss of seven million for rebuilding and adding new facilities as well as compensations for the workers’ injuries.

“Moreover, while no lives are lost, there are 16 severely injured workers. Among them, five are permanently crippled and three were severely burnt as well. These people will have to live the rest of their lives in a hospital bed.

“After the relevant compensations and deducting the insurance, we still have to pay six million excluding the cost for the other mildly injured workers. Including them, it will amount to around 11 million Somer Dollars.”

It was in the middle of the night when Jasper and Dawson listened grimly to Sean’s report in JW Real Estates’ office.

Jasper initially did not intend to worry Dawson, but with how huge the issue was, it was only right that Dawson knew what was happening. Otherwise, any more mistakes would only result in greater losses.

“Do you mean our financial loss has amounted to around 60 million?” Jasper concluded calmly.

Sean replied in embarrassment, “These are all direct losses. We still haven’t considered the indirect losses. We won’t be able to start work for at least another week, so the halt in progress and the loss of past progress will amount to around another 30 million.”

Bang!

Dawson lit a cigarette and slammed the lighter heavily against the office desk.

Sean shuddered, not daring to look up at Dawson’s sinister expression.

Jasper turned to look at Sean. “You’ve worked hard today. You still have work tomorrow, so go home first and rest.”

As if he was shown the biggest mercy, Sean frantically bade them farewell and left the office.

With Sean gone, there were only Jasper and Dawson in the office.

“There’s something wrong about this fire, Jasper,” Dawson exhaled a breath of smoke and spoke.

Jasper leaned against the sofa and rubbed his temple, muttering, “Yeah, there really is something wrong. It’s too coincidental that I can’t explain it with the word ‘accident’.”

“A 100 million Somer Dollar loss. Haha, good job to whoever was behind this. One fire and we’ve lost 100 million just like that.”

Fiery anger burned in Dawson's gaze as he spoke, "I've never made such a big loss since I started working. What a sinister scheme. This is a capable opponent we're dealing with... Do you have an idea who this might be, Jasper?"

Jasper shook his head. "There's no evidence at all. Whoever was behind this is very meticulous. Not to mention with a fire this big, any evidence would've been burnt away as well."

"Alright then. Do everything you can to sniff out the person behind this, and I'll deal with the public and the follow-up," Dawson suggested.

Jasper nodded. "That's probably for the best."

As the night was dark, both Jasper and Dawson did not stay in the office for much longer. They quickly returned to their respective homes to rest.

Moments after Jasper woke up the following day, he saw Julian looking for him.

"Someone's looking for you, Jasper," Julian informed him.

Jasper frowned. "I'll be very busy for the time being. If it isn't anyone special, decline them."

"It's Darrel."

"Darrel?"

Jasper's head lifted as he replied calmly, "Have him meet me in the backyard then."

In the backyard, a haggard-looking Darrel arrived before Jasper under Julian's lead.

"Jasper."

Darrel greeted him with a raspy voice.

Jasper pointed at the seat before him and smiled. "It's just been a few days since we last met. How did the New Year's wear you out till your cheeks are hollow?"