

Life at the Top Chapter 581

Darrel did not sit, opting to stand and speak to Jasper instead. “Jasper, did the Southface River construction site catch fire?”

There was no way such a grave incident could be covered up.

While it was still New Year’s holiday, it was not an excuse for the media not to report such a large incident.

The news of the fire at the Southface River construction site was being heavily discussed in the entire Southeast Province.

It had become the first large incident in the year 2001.

“Indeed. There was no way we could’ve foreseen such an accident,” Jasper replied calmly.

Darrel’s expression was conflicted as he spoke softly, “Jasper, this fire... You lost quite a lot because of it, haven’t you?”

“Not too much, just 100 million.” Jasper’s tone was casual as if he was talking about 100 bucks instead.

“Why? You sound very concerned about this incident.”

Jasper’s words made Darrel shudder. The latter looked up at Jasper with a deep gaze, and his knees suddenly bent forward as he kneeled on the ground. With a sob, he apologized, “I’m sorry, Jasper! Please forgive me!”

Narrowing his eyes, Jasper did not move. He did not even help the other up as he stared at Darrel kneeling before him. Jasper merely spoke calmly, "What did you do that requires my forgiveness?"

As though he had made the biggest decision, Darrel clenched his jaw and replied, "I was the one who set the fire!"

Jasper did not reply and merely stared at Darrel.

Under Jasper's gaze, Darrel felt as if the oxygen around him was getting sucked and he was no longer able to breathe freely.

After some time, when Darrel's forehead was filled with beads of sweat and he felt like he was about to suffocate, Jasper finally broke the silence.

"Do you know what your biggest weakness is, Darrel?"

Darrel looked up at Jasper in confusion.

Jasper smiled and continued to speak, "You can't lie.

"That's why I had already decided since the beginning that you weren't going to make it as a businessman. I even decided that if you made a big loss, I'd still cover for you and pay off your debts.

"But I never expected to be the first person you're lying to since our partnership.

"It's a shame that I don't plan to play along with this lie for you."

Darrel shivered and looked at Jasper in disbelief. "Jasper, what..."

Jasper picked up the coffee cup and took a sip as he spoke calmly, "Terence was the one who set the fire, wasn't he?"

Darrel was stricken and pale.

“And the reason why you’re willing to take the blame for him is so that I won’t look into him, correct? You could have just kept quiet and pretended not to know anything at all. After all, he’s done a very clean job and it’d be very difficult for me to hold him accountable.”

Then, Jasper smiled. “Of course, that’s before you decided to come and be his scapegoat. Now I know he’s the one who did it.”

Darrel shook his head instinctively. “No, I was the one behind it all. This has nothing to do with him at all—”

“Darrel Laine!”

Jasper shouted suddenly and slammed the coffee cup against the stone table heavily. Coffee splashed everywhere, wetting the area.

“As far as I’m concerned, spoiled brats aren’t lost causes. With enough setbacks, it’ll only be a matter of time before people like him realize that not everyone in this world is his parents and no one is obligated to help him.

“Those who are truly evil are people who still decide to let him be despite knowing that he has made a grave mistake on the pretext of protecting him. Now these people can f*ck right off!”

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Jasper’s bellow made Darrel pale in shock.

He was frozen in place, and he did not dare to look up at Jasper at all.

Jasper merely sighed when he saw Darrel's reaction. "I know that the only reason Terence is brave enough to do something like this is that he has someone supporting him.

"In fact, he desperately wishes that you join him in dealing with me, correct?"

Darrel looked up in fear and replied, "How did you know that?"

Jasper replied calmly, "The only way no one can find out about something is if you don't do anything.

"The only reason why I haven't dealt with Terence yet is that he's just a pawn the opponent is exploiting. My target is the mastermind behind this."

Jasper then looked at Darrel intently. "The fact that you've come to me today means that you don't dare to join them, so I'm hoping that you'll tell me who this other person is."

Darrel shook his head with a bitter smile. "It's not that I don't want to tell you, but I have no idea who that other person is either.

"I've never entertained the idea of working with them to harm you, so I didn't pay Terence any attention no matter how he persuaded me. But I know how his temper is and I'm scared that he'll get himself in trouble.

"I heard him on the phone last night with whom I think is the person supporting him. I heard Terence say that he was the one who set the fire.

"I spent the night thinking, and I don't dare to hide it from you. That's why I planned to look for you and take the blame for him. I just never thought... Sigh."

Jasper tapped his fingers on the table slowly as he heard Darrel speak. After that, Jasper looked up at Julian, "Jul!"

“Yes!” Julian immediately replied.

“Bring Terence to me.”

Darrel’s expression changed immediately when he heard Jasper. He said, “Jasper...”

“Don’t be too aggressive. If he’s home, try not to frighten my uncle and aunt.”

As if knowing what Darrel was worried about, Jasper instructed Julian in detail.

Julian made a sound of acknowledgment and left, leaving Darrel to sit despondently on the ground with a bitter smile. “This is the end of our brotherhood, then.”

Jasper tossed Darrel a cigarette and replied, “You have to believe that you’re doing this for his own good.”

Darrel took the cigarette with a bitter chuckle. “Let’s hope he understands, then.”

40 minutes later, the study’s doors opened to reveal Julian who was single-handedly dragging Terence into the room. The man had a cloth stuffed in his mouth.

“I’ve brought him over, Jasper. He was downstairs and about to leave when I got there, so I just brought him over. No one else knows.”

Terence was lying face-down on the floor, struggling as Julian spoke. Muffled cries could be heard through the cloth.

His eyes widened the moment he looked up and saw Jasper and Darrel sitting together, as though he had seen something unthinkable.

“Alright, you can pull the thing out of his mouth now,” Jasper said.

Julian bent over to pull the cloth away.

Now that he could speak, Terence roared, “Why did you kidnap me here, Jasper?! Let me tell you, just because you’re rich doesn’t mean you can do whatever you want! You’re not going to get anything out of this if you dare to do anything to me!”

Terence’s fierce facade hid the guilt and fear he was feeling underneath. His eyes flitted rapidly between Jasper and Darrel as if he was mulling over an important question.

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“Let’s ignore whether I’ll get anything out of this or not. Do you know that arson leading to huge property loss and injuries is a severe crime? Do you know that you’ll get at least ten years in prison?”

Terence’s expression changed drastically at Jasper’s words, and he replied guiltily, “I don’t know what you’re talking about! You’re telling me you brought me here so I could listen to you talk about the law?”

“The fire you set made me lose 100 million Somer Dollars. More than a dozen workers are severely injured and there are still a few workers in the emergency room as we speak. Do you think by denying you know anything regarding this matter will get you exempted from legal consequences?” Jasper looked at Terence and asked.

Terence’s heart thumped frantically, and his expression turned fierce as he spoke, “I don’t know what kind of nonsense you’re talking about here! What the f*ck does your construction site catching fire have to do with me? Don’t think that being rich gives you the right to slander me however you want!”

“Sigh...”

Darrel sighed and looked at Terence disappointedly. “Stop struggling, Terence. Jasper already knows everything. Be more sincere and I’ll ask him to let you go. I won’t be able to help you even if I want to if you’re going to continue being so stubborn.”

Terence was enraged. “Darrel Laine! How dare you help an outsider instead of your own brother? What are you saying here?!”

Darrel replied hopelessly, “I overheard your call last night. I know that you were the one who lit that fire. Did you think you left no leads behind? Jasper has had his eyes on you a long time ago, so will you stop being so stubborn for once?”

Terence was stricken by the words, and he looked at Jasper in disbelief. Deep fear tinted his eyes.

“I... I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

Even until the end, Terence remained unwilling to speak.

He was well aware that should he admit to setting the fire, there would be terrifying consequences coming for him.

He wanted to join forces with Zayden, but that did not mean he was willing to go to prison for it.

“I can choose not to hold you accountable, but you have to tell me who’s the one ordering you around,” Jasper said.

Terence had a painfully conflicted expression on his face, but he still did not reply.

Jasper furrowed his brows. The problem would be much more difficult to solve if Terence decided to remain quiet.

Since the plan was not to alert the opponent, it would be inappropriate to turn Terence in to the police.

Doing so would only force the mastermind Jasper was looking for to hide even deeper away.

“Let me talk to him alone, Jasper,” Darrel suddenly spoke.

Jasper made a noncommittal sound and stood to exit the room with Julian in tow.

When they were outside, Julian turned to Jasper. “I know a few tricks that could cause immense pain, Jasper. People like Terence have a pretty weak will.”

Jasper laughed. “Let’s wait a little longer first. Best case scenario, Darrel manages to persuade him to talk. If that doesn’t work, then we’ll resort to your methods.”

Jasper did not have the intention to eavesdrop on the brothers’ conversation, but loud shouts and scoldings came continuously from the study.

It continued for another 20 minutes or so before the door to the study opened again.

Darrel, who looked exhausted, walked out and turned to Jasper. “He’s willing to talk now.”

Upon returning to the study, Jasper saw that Terence now seemed soulless as he stared at him with profound resentment.

“I don’t know what you drugged my brother with that he’s so loyal to you, Jasper, but don’t you forget that I will never respect you!”

Jasper replied calmly, “I don’t need your respect. I need a name.”

“Zayden Hanks!”

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‘Zayden Hanks!’

Hearing the name, the calm Jasper was shocked as well.

In all honesty, he had almost forgotten about Zayden.

While Zayden had caused Jasper some problems back in Harbor City, Jasper had also dealt with him and Zayden dropped off the grid afterward.

Jasper then had to face quite a few other issues and did not have the mind to think about Zayden anymore.

He had never expected this bothersome man to appear again.

Jasper could acutely sense that Zayden’s appearance this time was not as simple as it seemed.

“He was the one who sought me out first. Seeing that he was rich and powerful, I decided that I’d get acquainted with him. He ordered me to do things mainly so he could deal with you.

“Seeing that our goals were the same and I’d also be benefitted by this, I agreed.”

Terence spoke coldly and stared at Jasper. “Yes, I set that fire. I’ve already told you everything you want to know. You said you won’t hold me accountable!”

“And I’ll stand by my word.”

Jasper smiled and turned to Terence. “But I do hope that you’ll do one more thing for me.”

Terence scoffed. “You wish. There’s no way I’ll help you do anything.”

“Alright, then.” Jasper nodded and turned to Julian. “Contact the city’s government and tell them that we’ve found the arsonist. Have them come over and take him to jail.”

Terence’s expression changed as he roared, “Jasper! You f*cking b*stard, you said you won’t hold me accountable!”

Jasper replied calmly, “That real estate company is both mine and my father-in-law’s. I can opt not to hold you accountable for my loss, but you’ve got to repay him for his, don’t you?”

Terence’s face paled in anger as he ground his teeth and shouted at Darrel, “Do you see what I mean?! I told you that Jasper is sinister and sly! He’s sending me to prison now and this is all your fault!”

Darrel looked uncomfortable, and he turned to Jasper only to swallow down the words he wanted to say.

Jasper’s expression was calm when he spoke, “You have two choices here. Work with me, or you can rot in jail.”

Terence clenched his jaw, and his gaze was fiery when he growled. “Fine. What do you want me to do?”

“Help me find out who the other people he has been in contact with are.”

Terence was stunned and scoffed at Jasper's words. "Who else can he be in contact with? Except for his dad, no one else knows he's back at all. There's no way he has any other contacts."

"You think he has the galls to come at me by himself? Why do you think he's trying to deal with me in the dark? He has lost to me too many times," Jasper replied calmly.

Terence's brows twitched as he looked at Jasper disdainfully. "Sure, whatever you say."

"You don't have to worry about anything else. All you need to do is look into what I've asked you, and I can promise no one will ever hold you accountable for setting this fire," Jasper replied calmly.

Terence sneered. "You'd better keep your word this time."

Soon after, Terence left. For some unknown reason, Darrel stayed back instead of leaving with his brother.

Standing by the study's window, Jasper drank his coffee as he watched Terence leave the villa. Suddenly, he turned to Darrel who stood behind him and asked with a smile, "What do you think your brother is going to do first?"

Darrel was stunned for a moment before he replied, "Isn't he going to find out who else that Zayden person is in contact with? That's what you asked him to do, right?"

Jasper replied calmly, "If only it was that simple. I'm willing to bet that the first thing this brother of yours will do is look for Zayden and tell him everything that has happened."

Darrel's expression changed. "That's impossible... How... How would he dare to? Plus, he already promised me..."

Jasper replied calmly, "If I'm being honest, I'd say your brother is more of a businessman than you are when it comes down to both your personalities. You're too soft and easily driven by your emotions. They're not good traits for businessmen.

"But your brother is different. He knows how to lie and he's selfish. He also knows how to target others."

Jasper turned to look at Darrel who was gaping in shock and spoke, "The chances of people like you ending up as a large businessman is one out of 10,000. Either that, or you'll die trying. For people like your brother, it's a 5,000 out of 10,000 chance that he ends up as a small businessman, but there's also no chance that he'll ever make it big.

"It was quite a fierce fight you two had just now, so don't you find it weird that he was suddenly persuaded?" Jasper asked.

Darrel still wanted to argue, saying, "That's because he understands where I'm coming from."

"That's not it. People like him harbor a hatred for me that's so deep it might as well be engraved in his heart. How could he just suddenly understand where you're coming from?"

"No, he's already come up with a plan. He'd pretend to be against it first and then agree to it after some persuasion. That way, he'd get to be exempted from being charged with arson while at the same time, it would extinguish all the remaining suspicion we have for him.

"But he's also well aware that he's not strong enough to topple me himself. His only option is to get help from Zayden. Why else would he suddenly give in with just a few words from you?"

Darrel's lips quivered. He had to admit that the Terence Jasper described was precisely the brother he knew—ruthless and crafty.

Yet the most terrifying of all was not Terence but the man before his eyes who had managed to see through the two brothers so clearly. Jasper was petrifying.

“Then why did you let him leave anyway?” Darrel asked.

“Since we already know that Zayden is the one behind it all, then nothing else really matters anymore. Plus, don’t you think sending Terence back with a fake request will give us the perfect diversion?”

“Zayden and Terence used to deal in the dark while we were out in the open. But now, the tables have turned with them out in the open and us in the dark.

“Plus, they’d never expect me accounting for Terence telling Zayden everything, and that has just nailed our victory.”

...

After leaving the villa, Terence quickly took a taxi toward the provincial capital.

After a two-hour drive, Terence arrived at the house Zayden was currently residing in.

“Didn’t I tell you not to look for me unless something happened?”

Zayden was displeased at the fact that Terence came to his house without sending a single text first.

Terence smiled bitterly. “Something big has happened, Mr. Hanks, and I thought I should tell you in person.”

Zayden frowned. “What happened?”

Terence gulped and replied carefully, “Jasper... knows that I set the fire. He also told me to keep an eye on you to find out if you’re in contact with anyone else.”

Zayden stood up at his words. His eyes widened as he glared at Terence like he wanted to rip the man apart.

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“Mister... Mr. Hanks, why are you looking at me like that...”

Startled by Zayden’s gaze, Terence asked with a tremble.

Zayden clenched his jaw and glared at Terence. “Why am I looking at you like that? Let me ask you instead, how did Jasper know that you were the one who set the fire, huh? Also, he told you to find out who else I’m in contact with? Did you tell him I was here?”

Terence’s mind buzzed, and he was dazed.

Countless excuses had flashed through his mind on the way here before he decided that he would just be frank instead. After all, he would be screwed if Zayden found anything out.

However, it had not occurred to him that he had a fatal loophole in this script of his.

Jasper did not know that Zayden had returned at all, so the fact that Jasper would tell Terence to find out who else Zayden was in contact with meant that Terence had already confessed about Zayden being the person he was taking orders from.

“I didn’t have another choice, Mr. Hanks!”

Upset, Terence told Zayden about everything that had happened without hiding a thing.

“Jasper told me to help him, Mr. Hanks, but how would I dare?!”

“But I couldn’t just reject him either. I don’t mind going to prison, but I can’t end up delaying your plans just because of my own problems.

“That’s why I pretended to agree first and then came to report what happened. I’m on your side, really!”

Terence spoke with a wail, truly afraid that Zayden would suspect him.

Staring at Terence sinisterly, Zayden waited until the man was done speaking before he landed a harsh and sudden slap across Terence’s face.

“Motherf*cker! If I’d known that your brother was such a person, I’d have killed him long ago. What the f*ck is wrong with you anyway? Don’t you know better than to keep an eye on your brother? How’d you let him eavesdrop on such important information?!”

Terence cupped his cheek, and his gaze was filled with fear and resentment when he spoke, “I never expected that he would help an outsider. I can’t believe he ran to Jasper to tattle on me!”

“Forget it. He already knows and there’s nothing we can do about this anyway. I’m no longer the same person I used to be. So what if Jasper knows, hmm? What can he do about it?” Zayden scoffed.

“Thank goodness he still expects you to help him and find things out for him. We’ll just feed him a fake piece of information to confuse him later. I’d like to see what he looks like when he gets betrayed!”

Zayden could not help but chortle at the thought. Sinister schemes had already rushed into his mind and he could not wait to screw Jasper over with them.

“Exactly, Mr. Hanks. With your formidable status, who is Jasper anyway? Even your smallest move will have him immediately crawl over to kiss your feet!”
Terence agreed.

“Has anyone told you that your ability to apple-polish is absolutely horrible?”
Zayden spoke as he glanced at Terence coldly.

Terence had fawned over Zayden so much that he might as well write sonnets about the man’s greatness. He immediately blushed out of embarrassment and did not say another word.

“Don’t think that I don’t know what your plans are. You’re just on my side because you don’t have another option. You’re afraid that Jasper will still hold you accountable for the things you’ve done.

“Not that I care anyway. As long as you can prove to me that you’re useful, then I’ll still protect you. The rewards I promised will be given as well.”

Zayden smirked darkly before continuing, “But... should you dare lie to me and play me like a fool, then you’d better prepare yourself when I come to kill you. Understood?”

“Understood! Crystal clear!” Terence frantically nodded to show his loyalty.

“Here, take the money.” Zayden pulled out a wad of around 10,000 Somer Dollars from a drawer.