

Kissed AOM 1741

Chapter 1741

Sophia's expression stiffened as Zachary started asking about Corinne. "She... Umm... She was part of your former group of friends as well. That man, Jason, is dating her! It shouldn't be surprising that she looks familiar!" she said, observing his expression.

Zachary nodded somewhat skeptically. "Are you sure?"

His reaction made Sophia worry that he might have regained certain parts of his memory, but it also allowed her to breathe a sigh of relief. For the moment, at least, she believed he had not remembered anything yet. "Well, we're out to enjoy ourselves today, so let's not dwell on that anymore. Have some fruit, Zachary! I brought them for you and Benjamin. Our next stop is a very famous lake, and the scenery there has a very rustic feel!"

Zachary took the fruit that Sophia handed him and placed it on the small table inside the car. Rather than eating some, he stabbed a fork into an apple slice and handed it to Benjamin. "Eat some fruit." Benjamin was in a daze. He was on cloud nine when he saw Corinne earlier, and all he could think about was his beloved mother. It took Zachary's voice to snap him back to his senses. He took the fork from Zachary and ate the apple slice.

Sophia began to notice that Benjamin was a little different. She had paid so much attention to Zachary in the past that she had almost forgotten that she inadvertently took Corinne's child. The one Corinne raised seemed to be more assertive, devious, and talkative compared to Benjamin. However, the boy seemed to have taken on the reticent character that Benjamin had-quiet, and spacing out very often. "Benjamin?" Sophia tried to call out to him.

Benjamin immediately looked at her and asked with a frown, "What do you want?"

He reacted quickly and looked at her almost as soon as he heard his name being called. That was in stark contrast to Corinne's child, whose name was not Benjamin. Corinne's child would usually take several seconds to react whenever he was called.

'What's going on? Were the two children switched again?' Those thoughts left Sophia in fear, and she asked further questions to test the boy. "Why are you spacing out,

Benjamin? Is something on your mind? You don't seem excited that we brought you out to have some fun."

Benjamin frowned sullenly and shot back, "Are you going to stop me from spacing out? Don't you have anything better to do?"

Sophia did not know how to respond to him. The boy's sharp tongue and direct persona were unlike Benjamin, who would never be that straightforward even if he did not agree with her. 'Is he or is he not Benjamin?' she wondered.

Confused and at a loss, she looked at Zachary before closing her eyes to shut herself out from what was happening outside. She had to bring Zachary back to Molomia regardless of whether he regained some fragments of his memory. As for Corinne and her three children, someone would naturally take care of them for her.

A sinister glow appeared in Sophia's eyes as she took a whole apple and began to peel it. In her mind, she imagined the apple as Corinne and indulged in her fantasies of skinning Corinne alive.

Corinne and Jason came to an oriental restaurant. She chose a seat in the main dining area rather than requesting a private room. Her gesture did not sit very well with Jason, of course. "I've talked to the manager and was told there are empty tables upstairs. How about we move there?"

Corinne sat down and said, "You can go upstairs if you want. I'll stay put because I like it here. We'll have our meals separately then."

Chapter 1742

Jason did not persuade Corinne any further after hearing her protest. He shrugged, pulled out a chair, and sat opposite her. "Sigh! You always give me a hard time."

After Corinne flipped through the menu and ordered what she wanted to eat, she handed the menu to him and said, "Quit your nonsense and decide what to order! Let's wrap this up as soon as possible. I'll be busy later."

Jason took the menu and sighed again. He ordered some extra dishes before handing the menu to the wait staff. "Why do you have to be so careful around me when all we're doing is having a meal? Even my suggestion of dining in a private room seemed to have

rubbed you the wrong way. It's not like I'm asking you to come with me to a hotel room."

Corinne, who was busy typing a message on her cellphone, paused for a moment and glanced at him. "Other people could easily get the wrong idea if they spot a man and a woman having a meal in a private room. Since we're here to talk business, we could save each other the trouble by opting for the main dining area!"

"Tch!" Jason folded his arms. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but you're only being careful because you're worried that Jeremy might get the wrong idea!"

Corinne stopped typing for a moment before continuing, all while ignoring Jason's question. She had texted Zachary via the usual encryption process. Any outsider who chanced upon the message would see only a weather forecast notification. Unfortunately, Zachary never replied, and she was beginning to worry about him.

"Corinne? Hello? Are you listening to me?" Jason stretched out his hand and snapped her out of her daze by tapping the table.

"Huh? What?" she asked distractedly.

Jason frowned and said, "Didn't you hear a word of what I said to you?"

Corinne did not pay attention and was far from interested in his blabbering. However, she still asked absent-mindedly, "What did you say?"

Jason threw his hands up in the air and said, "Forget it. You can go ahead and play with your phone since you're not interested in talking to me!"

Corinne had been waiting for Jeremy's reply. The protracted wait led her to believe that it might be inconvenient for him to reply. She was hungry by the time the wait staff came over and served her the food, so she placed her phone to one side and began eating.

Jason's eyes filled with relief when he saw her finally place her phone down. "Ah, so you're finally willing to put down your precious phone, huh? I can't help but wonder who it is you're texting. You seem to be very concerned for them!"

Corinne looked up and rolled her eyes at him. "Eat your food and quit your nonsense!"

"A meal's not a meal without conversation!"

"Only those who aren't hungry will be in the frame of mind to talk."

Jason was rather happy even though Corinne was not very pleased with him. That would be much better than having Corinne ignore him completely. He scooped up some food for Corinne and was about to start a proper conversation, but Corinne's cell phone rang suddenly and interrupted Jason's train of thought.

Corinne's attention was immediately shifted toward her cell phone, and she thought that Zachary had replied to her message. Unfortunately, it was but a mere incoming call.

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Corinne picked up the phone and glanced at it. It was a call from the kindergarten principal. Concerned, she answered promptly, "Hello. Is something the matter?"

The principal's voice sounded rather anxious. "Could you please come to the kindergarten right now, ma'am? Joey beat up another boy, and their parents insist on meeting you!"

"What?!" Corinne stood up abruptly. It was hard for her to believe that the well-behaved Joey would resort to violence. After a moment, she composed herself and said, "I'll be there right away!" After ending the call, Corinne left hastily without explaining anything to Jason.

"Where are you going, Corinne? Did something happen?" Jason got up to follow her after sensing that something was amiss. However, the wait staff stopped him and asked him to foot the bill. By the time he left, Corinne was nowhere to be seen.

Corinne drove to the kindergarten within 15 minutes. She was incredibly worried about Joey as he had always been an obedient, mature, sensible, and friendly kid. The notion that he would hit someone without rhyme or reason was simply perplexing.

She might have believed it if such a thing happened to Bryan, so she suspected that Joey might have retaliated after being bullied. She rushed to Joey's classroom, only to be informed that Joey was at the principal's office.

She headed there in a hurry.

Inside the principal's office, Joey stood alone in a corner with his head drooping down. The principal was vehemently apologizing to the parents of the other child, but it seemed as though they were having none of it.

"How do you run this kindergarten? Is this how our children are supervised? How could you let another child beat Corinne up like that?" one parent exclaimed.

"That's right. We chose your kindergarten because of its excellent reputation, and we won't tolerate this sort of nonsense!" another parent added.

The principal bowed. "I'm very sorry. Joey is usually very well-behaved, but I'm not sure what's gotten into him today. We typically have several teachers supervising them, but there was a faulty air conditioner, and the teachers had to leave briefly to find the cause and ensure that the air conditioner was up and running again. Joey was put in charge, and the incident occurred in less than five minutes. I'm very sorry about that. Today's events were a mistake on our part, and we'll take full responsibility for this!"

The child's father retorted, "Your apology won't change the fact that my son was beaten! I can't even bear to hit my son! Can you imagine how I felt when I found out that someone else hit him? You won't hear the end of me unless the parents of that boy apologize to my son!"

The mother was visibly distraught. "Yes! No one in our family has ever laid a finger on him until now, and he's always been a very obedient child! How could you claim to say that Joey is a well-behaved child? Why would a well-behaved child bully someone else? It's preposterous for you to defend him, and it is grossly negligent for you to appoint a child with violent tendencies to be in charge!"

The principal could only continue to apologize in embarrassment. Just when he was at a loss as to what else he could do to placate them, he spotted Corinne at the door. "Ma'am! You're finally here! Please tell Joey to apologize to Matt. Matt is bleeding, and Matt's parents are very upset now."

Chapter 1744

Corinne came in and looked at Matt, who was shielded by his parents. Matt was in the same class as Joey, and Corinne had met him before while fetching Joey from class. Though they were of the same age, Matt was taller than Joey and appeared to be much stronger. It did not make sense for Joey to beat Matt up, but it was clear that both children were visibly injured.

Corinne turned to Matt's parents and said, "I've just arrived, and I don't know the full details of the situation yet. Give me a moment to talk to my son."

She then walked toward Joey who stood alone in the corner. Matt's parents were not happy, and they exchanged disapproving glances at each other while directing their concerns to the principal. Matt's father voiced his discontent. "What kind of attitude is that? Her son bullied our son, but rather than getting her son to apologize, she wanted to talk to him instead. What's the point of that? Her son isn't injured!"

"Exactly!" Matt's mother said in support. "Don't you interview parents before admitting their students to your kindergarten? Why didn't you screen such problematic children? This doesn't make your kindergarten any different from the other!"

The principal apologized profusely yet again and requested the parents to wait.

Corinne ignored their comments and squatted in front of Joey. She asked, "Did you hit him?"

Joey lowered his head and nodded silently without daring to meet her gaze.

Corinne then asked further, "Why did you do that?"

Joey kept quiet and lowered his head even more. Unconvinced that her son would harm a classmate without reason, Corinne gently held Joey's hand and encouraged him. "You need to tell me why so I can argue on your behalf. I believe you won't hurt someone without any reason, so don't be scared, okay? Tell me what happened."

Joey raised his head and opened his mouth. He hesitated for a moment and shook his head vigorously. He then pushed Corinne and ran off.

Since Corinne was squatting, Joey's push tilted her off balance and caused her to fall backward. She frowned and watched her son run away with a mix of concern and confusion.

The brief episode caught the attention of Matt's parents, and they seized the opportunity to drive their point home.

The father remarked, "Can't you see that the child has violent tendencies? He just shoved his mother to the ground! Allowing such a child to remain in your kindergarten is like allowing a ticking time bomb to fester here. If you don't expel him, we'll rally the other parents to withdraw their children from the kindergarten!"

Chapter 1745

"That's right," Matt's mother doubled down. "Children like that can't be allowed to stay in the kindergarten. This time, it's our child. It'll be someone else's child next time!"

The principal's expression changed abruptly when he heard the parents' intention to gather up the other parents for a mass withdrawal of students from the kindergarten. He hurriedly said to Corinne, "Please apologize to them, ma'am! We cannot let this single incident have such a huge effect on our kindergarten!"

Corinne stood up and dusted her clothes before approaching him. After apologizing to the principal, she turned her gaze to the parents and said calmly, "Though I still have no clue as to what happened, that doesn't excuse the fact that my son had admitted to hitting your son. I apologize on his behalf. I will take your son to the hospital for a full-body check-up, and I will cover all the medical expenses incurred." Matt's father refused to let the matter go just yet. "Do you think your apology is going to do any good? My son has suffered physical injuries as well as mental anguish after what your son did!" He received support from his wife, who said, "Yes!"

Corinne looked at the child's father and asked, "Can I take it to mean that you want to arrange for a psychiatrist to provide psychological counseling for your son? If so, I can make arrangements for that." The father retorted, "Psychological counseling? Do you think our family lacks the funds for that? If we can afford to have our child sent here, we can just as well afford to hire a psychiatrist for him!" Corinne raised her eyebrows and asked, "What do you want, then?"

Matt's father raised his chin and stated, "I want your son to kneel and apologize to my son. If he does, then we'll reluctantly allow your son to continue attending kindergarten here. If not, then you will not hear the end of it from us!"

Matt's mother lifted him and nodded. "Yes! He must kneel and apologize to our child!"

The principal, relieved that an apology seemed sufficient for them to retract their earlier threats, advised Corinne, "Well, since they've agreed to let the matter go once Joey has apologized, please get Joey to come over and persuade him to apologize."

Corinne's face remained calm. After a moment of silence, she said, "An apology is fine, but having him kneel is out of the question."

Upon hearing Corinne's unwillingness to comply, the child's father became more aggressive.

Seeing as her husband did not follow her, Matt's mother declared, "Your son beat my son up, yet you continue to believe that he's not at fault. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, as they say! I should never have given you a chance in the first place if you don't cherish it. I won't accept this now!"

Matt's father then turned to the principal and warned, "If your kindergarten doesn't expel her son, I'll see to it that your kindergarten shuts down! I am the leader of the Parents Committee, and I'm going to inform every single parent that your kindergarten harbors a violent child. I'm pretty sure they'll withdraw their children right away!"

"Nobody would want to send their children to such a dangerous kindergarten. Every kid is at risk of being attacked by that hooligan!"

The principal then implored in a panic. "Please! You don't have to do that! Let's discuss it calmly!"

Having reasoned with Matt's parents, he turned to Corinne and said, "Joey hurt his classmates. Tell him to apologize, I beg of you. Don't make things difficult for our kindergarten!"

"I won't make things difficult for your kindergarten, but I will first need to understand the situation before deciding whether my son should apologize. I would like to review the surveillance footage of this kindergarten so I can know how these two children got into a fight."

Matt's father was not pleased with her request. "What do you mean, got into a fight? It's not a fight at all. Your child hit ours for no good reason!"

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Matt's mother supported her husband. "Yes!"

Corinne smirked and turned to the principal. "We should review the surveillance footage before coming to a decision. May I know where I can access that footage?"

The principal glanced embarrassedly at Corinne, and then at Matt's parents. "I..."

Matt's father snorted. "Just show us the surveillance footage, then! I'm appalled at her claims that our children were fighting when her boy was completely unharmed. Let's see if she'll come up with some other excuse after watching the footage."

Seeing as both sides had agreed to check the surveillance footage, he escorted them to the surveillance room together.

Matt had been crying anxiously in his mother's arms, and he timidly reached out to tug at the hem of his father's clothes when he heard that his father was going to see the surveillance recordings. Thinking that Matt was still traumatized by what happened, the man patted his son's head and comforted him, "Don't be afraid, Matt. We'll get justice for you. I'll make sure that bully will kneel to you and say sorry!"

He took Matt from his wife's embrace and strode to the surveillance room with the principal. Meanwhile, his wife followed right behind him.

The monitoring room had only one security personnel, and the principal instructed the guard to retrieve the footage from the moment of conflict.

While the security guard was busy checking the recording, the principal apologized profusely to the couple for fear that they might resent his management of the kindergarten after witnessing their child being assaulted.

Corinne glanced at them with a faint look of disdain. She had sent her three children to the kindergarten without disclosing her family background, merely mentioning that her

family ran a small business. As a result, the principal seemed to perceive the couple as having more social status than her, as was evident from his attempts to appease them.

It was unfair for Joey to be deemed the wrongdoer in that conflict without even going through the necessary procedures of checking the surveillance system.

"Sir, we've retrieved the footage!" The security guard stood up and reported to the principal.

The principal nodded and asked Matt's parents to sit in front of the monitor. He did not even bother to show Corinne the courtesy of inviting her to watch the video. With a click of a button, the video began to play.

A teacher was initially present inside the classroom, but the teacher went out to investigate a noise she heard outside. After that, the teacher returned to the classroom and instructed Joey to come to the front row and sit on a small chair to face the entire class. The teacher told the class she had to step out for a while, and she tasked Joey with reading a storybook to the class while she was out. The children all agreed obediently.

With the classroom door securely closed, the teacher left and Joey opened the storybook to begin reading. After barely one paragraph in, a large boy in the last row left his seat and snatched a butterfly hairpin from the head of a little girl in the front row. The little girl's hair was disheveled, and she burst into tears as she demanded the boy to return the hairpin.

Chapter 1747

Rather than comfort the crying girl, Matt tossed her hairpin to the floor and started to laugh at her. She cried even louder as a result. Joey, who was busy reading a storybook, could not bear to see the sight of i any longer. He went up to Matt, scolded him, and urged him to return the hairpin to the girl.

Matt ignored Joey's plea and made mocking faces at him. Joey warned him that he would call the teacher if he did not return the hairpin.

"I dare you!" Matt retorted. "I'll smash your head if you call the teacher!" Matt then grabbed Joey's collar before threatening him with a clenched fist.

Joey was not pleased, and it was clear that he was trying his best to endure what was happening. He took a deep breath and yelled, "Teacher!"

Matt then decided to punch Joey in the face to stop Joey from yelling. However, Joey was nimble enough to dodge the attack. He then pushed Matt away, and Matt lost his balance as he hit the table leg. Undeterred, Matt stood up and attempted to punch Joey again.

Joey avoided the assault and refused to retaliate. In a fit of anger, Matt attempted several punches and kicks but failed to land a single hit on Joey. Eventually, he fell awkwardly to the ground after missing a punch.

Matt, in his frustration, vented his anger on the little girl. He pulled her pigtailed forcefully and caused her to cry out in pain. Unable to bear the bullying any longer, Joey rushed over to intervene. However, Matt took the chance to swing his fist at Joey but missed yet again. Infuriated, he began to taunt Joey, "You little b*stard! You're an unwanted child! The whole kindergarten knows! B*stard! Hahahah!"

Joey seemed stunned for a moment and soon lost control. He retaliated and landed several punches on Matt. The kindergarten teacher, having been alerted by the commotion, rushed back and found Joey engaged in a scuffle while pinning Matt down.

The teacher quickly separated the two, bringing an end to the altercation.

As the parents watched the video, their expressions shifted from anger to embarrassment. The guilty-looking Matt avoided all eye contact and could not come to terms with the consequences of his actions. Corinne had a complex expression, particularly when she heard the chubby boy insult Joey. However, she calmed herself down and said to the principal, "The truth should be clear to you by now, I believe. My son didn't act unprovoked, and he didn't instigate the fight in the first place. Do you still believe Joey owes Matt an apology? Don't you think you should have remained impartial and commenced a thorough examination of the surveillance footage to determine the incident's cause before calling me here?"

The ashamed principal stammered, "Umm... I... I'm very sorry. It was an oversight on my part. I got anxious after seeing Matt's injury."

Before Corinne could respond, Matt's father interjected, "The video clearly shows that your son's fist struck my son's face first! Doesn't that make it clear he's the instigator? Didn't your son make the first move?"

His wife naturally supported him, though with less confidence compared to before.
"That's right! Your son who hit my son first!"

Corinne could not help but laugh. "Well, aren't you two the perfect match? Like you said earlier, the apple never falls far from the tree! Your son assaulted his female classmate, yet you conveniently turned a blind eye to his misbehavior!"

Chapter 1748

The couple was a little speechless after hearing Corinne's retort and could only exchange glances with each other. The man, however, appeared unwilling to come to terms with the truth. He clenched his jaw and gritted his teeth, saying, "Whatever the reasons were, your son beat up my son. He needs to apologize and take responsibility for that. If he doesn't do so, I'll make sure he'll be expelled from this kindergarten, and I swear I'll make it difficult for you to survive here in the city."

The distressed mother caressed Matt's bruised nose and swollen eyes, adding, "That's right! My son has never experienced this sort of injustice. And besides, he was just being a little mischievous when he teased his female classmate. What gives you your son the right to be nosy?"

The principal was caught in a dilemma and felt that the couple was being unreasonable. However, he was hesitant to offend them because they came from a rather influential and affluent background. Corinne, on the other hand, was at a disadvantage against them because she was a single mother raising three children.

In an attempt to defuse the situation, the principal persuaded the couple to calm down and discreetly pulled Corinne to one side. "Ma'am, I can tell that Joey is a kind boy, and whatever happened today isn't his fault at all. Unfortunately, Matt's parents are very influential, and I don't want you to be put in a difficult situation when it's already very challenging to raise three children on your own. Please consider apologizing to them, if only for appearances' sake. It'll help to avoid any further complications."

Corinne narrowed her eyes at the suggestion of a compromise. She understood the principal's intentions, but she felt a sense of contempt for him nonetheless. "Why should I ask my son to apologize when he's done nothing wrong? Principal, I didn't enroll my child here to become a coward, much less make concessions when he was not guilty. With the way things have turned out, they don't even need to force me into transferring him to another kindergarten. I'm already considering that as we speak."

The principal was left speechless.

Matt's father became even more enraged at Corinne's refusal to yield, and his arrogance got the better of him as he threatened, "Transferring your child to another kindergarten isn't going to settle this! If your son doesn't kneel and apologize, I'll make life difficult for you in this city, and even the entire country! It'll be too late for you to cry and beg me for my forgiveness!"

Matt's mother then said, "Hear that? My husband is giving you a chance. We might let this slide for now if your son apologizes to Matt. If not, you can forget about having it easy here in this city!" Corinne chuckled at the couple's act and replied, "Oho! I'm curious to know how you're going to make life difficult for me. I can probably still live my life like usual today, right? In that case, goodbye!" Corinne Ignored the displeasure on the couple's faces and turned away to look for Joey. The principal was left alone to face the arrogant couple, and he attempted to placate them as best as he could while clarifying the kindergarten's position on the matter.

After leaving the monitoring room, Corinne saw through the corridor window that Joey was crying inside the mushroom hut of a playground slide. She watched him for a while before deciding to head upstairs to the junior classroom.

Bryan and Christine were both in the junior classes, and she decided to fetch them as well since she was already there. As soon as they saw Corinne arriving earlier than usual, Christine and Bryan were equally surprised, elated, and curious.

"Mommy!" Christine asked, "Why are you picking us up so early today? Aren't you supposed to come in the afternoon?"

Bryan then added, "Yeah! Is today a special day? Oh, it must be a holiday! Are you taking us out to play?"

Corinne gently knocked Bryan on the head and said, "All you think about is playing!"

Chapter 1749

Corinne then bent down to lift Christine in her arms. "Have you heard any rumors about Joey in kindergarten recently?"

Christine was more observant than Bryan and often noticed many overlooked details. Curious at her mother's question, Christine asked, "How did you know about that?"

Corinne's guess was spot on. When she was watching the surveillance, she remembered Matt calling Joey a b*stard, as well as claiming that Joey was adopted. Matt also said that the entire kindergarten knew about it, which Corinne interpreted to mean that someone was spreading malicious rumors.

Meanwhile, Bryan and Christine were still unaware of Joey's recent altercation.

Corinne then asked, "I heard some nasty stuff being said about Joey, so I'd like to know if you heard the same thing that I heard. Tell me everything, Christine."

Christine glanced at Bryan, and the two of them were seemingly hesitant whether to disclose what they knew.

Corinne noticed Christine's reluctance and frowned. "Are you two hiding something from me? Is that why you won't tell me anything?"

Christine shook her head. "No, that's not it, Mommy. I... I'm just worried you'll be sad if we tell you about it."

Corinne then responded sternly, "I'll only be sad if you don't tell me the truth."

Christine blinked and confessed. "Okay, I'll tell you everything. The children in the kindergarten have recently been saying that Joey isn't your child, but an abandoned child that nobody wanted. They said that his biological mother does dirty work and has a lot of diseases, so everyone should stay away from him..."

Corinne frowned and was disturbed by the realization that someone had been spreading such disgusting rumors among the children. It was no surprise that Joey had been in such a bad mood lately. Frustrated, she thought to herself, "Those people are animals! Joey isn't my biological son, but I've always viewed him as my flesh and blood! I treat him exactly how I treat Christine and Bryan!"

Jeremy had adopted Joey outside of the country, so Joey was of mixed ethnicity. His facial features were slightly different from most of the children, so it was difficult for her to tell him he was her biological son. Joey, being the smart kid that he was, could tell that he looked different from his siblings. Furthermore, he had developed a heightened awareness after suffering so much at a young age.

The rumors circulating within kindergarten were surely harsh on him.

Corinne did not even know who Joey's biological mother was or what kind of work she did, so it would be rather odd for someone else to have that information.

Her anger grew with every passing thought. She eventually asked Christine and Bryan, "Did you two try to comfort Joey after hearing about that?"

Christine exchanged glances with Bryan, and the two kids shook their heads.

Christine then explained, "It's not that we don't want to comfort him... He... He ignored us today! He acted as if he didn't hear us when we talked to him in the morning! Maybe he doesn't want to stay with us anymore. I think-"

Chapter 1750

Corinne interrupted Christine and warned, "Stop that nonsense!"

Christine pouted. She genuinely felt that Joey was a little distant from them.

Corinne looked out the window and said, "Joey's hiding in the slide over there. Could you bring him here, Bryan? Tell him that we're going to the amusement park." "Okay!" Bryan immediately did as Corinne told him. The prospect of going to the amusement park excited him.

Corinne followed slowly while carrying Christine in her arms. She could only continue to wonder where the rumors in the kindergarten originated from.

Bryan climbed into the little mushroom hut and found Joey inside. "Joey! Mommy came to pick us up! She says she'll take us to the amusement park! Let's go!"

Joey glanced at Bryan and shook his head sullenly. "No thanks. You guys go ahead."

Bryan frowned in frustration. "But you love the merry-go-round! Don't you want to come with us? Let's play together!"

Joey curled up and buried his head in his knees. "No. I don't want to be a burden on you..." His voice grew softer and softer, making it hard for Bryan to hear what he was saying. Bryan tilted his head and asked, "What's the matter, Joey?"

Joey stopped talking and let out a choked sob as he buried his head.

"You still have to come home with us whether or not you want to go to the amusement park. You're not going to spend the night in the kindergarten, are you?" Corinne came over and asked. Joey finally raised his head and looked at her.

When Bryan heard that Corinne had arrived, he poked his head out of the mushroom hut and said, "I don't think Joey's in a good mood. He says he doesn't want to go to the amusement park. How about we go another day?"

It was rare for Bryan to be considerate enough and give up on the opportunity to go to the amusement park.

Corinne then said, "Bring Joey down from there and come with me to the car. We'll decide later whether or not to go to the amusement park."

Bryan said cheerfully, "Okay!"

Then, he pulled Joey up and said, "Let's go, Joey! Mommy's waiting for us!"

Joey did not refuse Bryan's gesture and followed him down the slide obediently. However, he did not dare to look at Corinne as he felt that he had disappointed her by doing a bad deed.

Corinne kept quiet for the time being and led the three children into the car. Once she fastened the seatbelt for Bryan and Christine in the back row, she carried the still dejected Joey to the passenger seat and helped him fasten his seatbelt too.

Joey did not dare to look at her and even held his breath when she was with her.

Corinne got into the driver's seat and asked, "I won't be going back to work later. I'll leave it to the three of you to decide whether we go to the amusement park or go home."

The oft-quarreling Bryan and Christine displayed a united front.

"We'll let you decide, Joey!"

"Yeah! We'll let you decide!"

Corinne turned her head and looked at Joey, who was sitting in the passenger seat.

"Christine and Bryan have said that they'll let you decide, so we'll go wherever you want to go."