

## Kissed AOM 1861

### Chapter 1861

The voice frightened Joey, who turned to see who it was. He saw a man sitting next to the firewood, staring at him with a weird smile that unnerved him.

It took Joey a couple of minutes to shake himself out of his shock. Finally, he remembered who the man was. "You... You're the balloon seller!"

Joey recognized the man as he was quite distinguishable-a shaggy-looking man in his forties, with an unshaven beard and slovenly clothes. He also remembered that he had talked to him several times at the backdoor of their garden.

"Oh, you remember me? Clever boy! Too bad I don't have any balloons to give you now," said the man.

Joey felt his danger senses tingling. He huddled in a corner of the dog cage and asked, "Why... Why did you bring me here? What do you want?"

The man was amused by Joey's frightened look. He chuckled and said, "Don't be scared! I'm not going to hurt you. Your mother asked me to bring you here. She misses you so much!"

"You're lying!" Joey frowned with disbelief. "If she misses me, she'll find me at home, not at a scary place like this! Who are you? What do you want?"

The man smiled mysteriously. "I tell you no lies, boy. You'll know I'm telling the truth when your mommy gets here."

Joey suddenly doubted himself after seeing how confident the man was. He thought, 'Maybe Mommy really did ask him to bring me here? But why? This place is scary. No one would want to come here! And why lock me in a dog cage? Is this...some kind of scary surprise from Mommy?'

While all that was going on in his head, he heard noises coming from outside the cave.

He stared at the entrance, hoping to see Corinne. However, when the grass at the entrance was pushed open, the woman who entered was not Corinne, but his worst nightmare.

'No, it can't be! What is she doing here?!' Joey could not believe his eyes.

When the woman walked in, the man quickly held her arm, but the woman slapped his hands away in disgust.

"What do you think you're doing? Buzz off. Don't touch me!"

The man was not angry. Instead, he smiled and cooed, "Miss Anya, I brought the kid as promised. You know, I almost got caught trying to abduct him for you! So don't forget the money you promised me." Anya glanced at him and said, "Don't worry, you'll get what's yours. Now scram! Guard the entrance in case someone's coming."

"Alrighty!" replied the man as he headed out.

When Anya was alone with Joey in that small cave, she walked near the cage and squatted to have a close look at the shaking Joey, who curled into a little ball in the corner.

"Hi, Joey. Do you remember Mommy?" asked Anya with a smile.

Joey's tiny body froze for a while before he began to tremble like a frightened deer facing its predator.

"Oh, Joey, come on. Raise your head and take a good look at Mommy! Mommy misses you so much!" Joey buried his head between his knees in an attempt to hide himself from his nightmare.

## Chapter 1862

Anya was not pleased with the uncooperative Joey, who was in the cage. Her smile disappeared as she grew irritated. "I'm going to count to three. If you still won't look at me, I'm going to be very mad! One... Two..."

Before she could say 'three', Joey forced himself to raise his head and look at Anya timidly.

Anya was Joey's worst nightmare. She would always take out her anger on him whenever she felt unhappy. Although he could not remember every detail as he was a toddler back then, the mere sight of her could make his blood run cold. This horrible woman had instilled an instinctual fear in him.

When Joey finally looked at her, Anya put her friendly smile back on. She reached into the cage to stroke Joey's head. "Good boy. Who's the good boy? You are! Joey is Mommy's good boy!"

Her touch gave Joey the chills. He was downright terrified that she would suddenly strangle him to death.

"Joey, why are you looking at Mommy like that? Don't you miss me?" asked Anya with a smile.

Joey's reddened eyes welled up with tears of terror. He dared not say a word, let alone move an inch.

Apparently, his reaction enraged Anya again. She lost her temper and yanked Joey's hair. "Hey, I was talking to you! Did you miss me or not? Answer me!"

Her hoarse voice was a terror to the mind, and Joey began to silently cry. 'I'm scared! Mommy, where are you? Come quick... Save me!'

Joey kept thinking of Corinne. He tried his best not to cry, but being a child after all-he could not hold it any longer and started bawling uncontrollably. "Mommy... Mommy..."

It was only normal for a child to cry for his mother when he felt alarmed.

Even though he was calling for Corinne, Anya thought he was calling her, so she smiled satisfiedly.

"That's right! Mommy's here, my baby boy. Don't cry! Good boy..." Anya let go of Joey's hair, wiped off his tears, and said gently, "Joey dear, do you know how miserable Mommy has been all these years? You're Mommy's good boy, so you must always take Mommy's side and avenge me, okay?"

Joey had no idea what she was talking about. All he knew was that his dread was growing.

"Now, Joey, why don't you call me Mommy again? Just one more time, then Mommy will let you out of the cage, okay?" said Anya temptingly.

Joey's eyes were filled with nothing but fear. He whimpered and said, "I—I'm scared..."

Anya held his little face in her hands and said, "Oh, don't be scared, silly boy. Mommy's here. Mommy will protect you no matter what!"

Anya's shifting attitudes reminded Joey of what Corinne taught him and his siblings.

'When dealing with bad guys, we must learn to be tolerant and pretend to compromise. As long as we're alive, there's still a chance to escape.' Joey could hear Corinne's voice in his ears as if she was right there in front of him.

He calmed down a little and stopped crying after that. Sniffling, he said pitifully, "Mom... Mommy. I want to go out... Can you please let me out of here?"

Chapter 1863

Calling Anya his mother made Joey extremely uncomfortable.

However, Anya was delighted that Joey finally came to his senses and was not that scared of her anymore. She showed a more sincere smile and said, "Of course, my boy. But, before Mommy lets you out of the cage, you have to answer some questions. If you answer them well, Mommy will let you out immediately. Deal?"

"Deal," replied Joey with a nod.

Anya grinned and asked, "First, sweetie: How was your life with the Holdens?"

Joey thought for a while and answered, "Umm... Not bad..."

Anya did not like what she heard. "What do you mean, not bad? Be more specific!"

Joey observed Anya's reaction and grasped an idea of what answer would please her, so he answered, "Not bad... As in so-so... I was given food and clothes, but they still favored Daddy's biological children more. I'm different from them, so I never get what they have."

Joey knew those were all lies. He had a great life with the Holdens, and Corinne treated him and his siblings equally.

Luckily, Anya bought his lies. It was exactly what she wanted to hear. She looked at him sympathetically and said, "My poor boy. You must've endured so much hardship just because you're an adopted son! Bu you don't have to go through that anymore now that Mommy's back! You're going to stay with Mommy. We'll be together forever, okay?"

"Okay," answered Joey uneasily. It took a lot out of him to go against his conscience.

'Mommy said that we must learn to endure, so I'll obey this scary lady as much as possible until I can see Mommy again. Yes, I'll do just that!' thought Joey to himself.

"That's my good boy! Mommy knew Joey would never betray Mommy!" Anya stroked Joey's head, satisfied.

Joey pouted and said, "Mommy, can you let me out now? It's so cold here. I'm scared..."

"Oh, don't be scared, sweetie! Mommy's right here with you! And Mommy still has a few questions for you."

"Okay... What are they?"

"Tell me, Joey." Anya grinned evilly as she asked, "When Mommy was absent these years, did that b\*tch Corinne get along with your daddy?"

Joey, who knew what answer she was expecting, shook his head and answered, "No."

"Is that so?" Anya's eyes lit up. "So how was it when they were together? Did they quarrel a lot? Have they gotten tired of each other?"

Joey did not know the answers for sure, let alone make up fake answers. After all, Jeremy had not been staying with them for years. He had just returned to them for only two days.

However, Joey assumed that Anya was not aware of that, so he said, "Um... They quarreled a lot...and got tired of each other. They're always busy with their own work, so they seldom talk to each other." Joey's answer made Anya laugh.

Just as Joey thought he managed to fool Anya, she suddenly turned fierce and grabbed his hair brutally.

"You little liar! Corinne taught you how to lie, didn't she? You think you could fool me that easily? I knew you weren't being honest! That darn b\*tch has ruined my child! Look at how bad you've become! You've learned to lie to your own mother!"

Chapter 1864

"Agh!" screamed Joey.

Despite his cry, Anya pulled him harder by his hair. "My boy has changed. He's now a liar who lies to his own mother! Bad boy!"

"No... I didn't..." Joey's body was trembling.

Anya threw her head back as she cackled. "You didn't? You dare say that you didn't lie to me? Do you really think that I have no idea what's going on in the Holden family? Your daddy hasn't been staying with you all at all! He ran away with another woman! That b\*tch thought she could live happily ever after with Jeremy after she had stolen him away from me? In the end, she lived like a widow in that house for years! Hahahahahaha... Serves her right! She deserves this!"

"Y... You're hurting me..." Joey felt that his scalp was turning numb as if his hair was about to be torn off by the crazy woman.

Anya pulled even harder and growled, "Serves you right! That's what you get when you lie to your mother! Don't you dare lie to me ever again, got it?!"

While Anya was torturing Joey, Jeremy and Corinne arrived at the empty port beside the river bank. It was a dead end and vacant since it was already late at night.

"This is it!" Jeremy and Corinne got out of the car and looked around, but they found nothing.

Corinne gasped when she saw the river. "The kidnapper must've thrown the phone into the river after making the call out of concern he's been traced."

Jeremy agreed with the theory. He looked at Corinne and said, "Let's keep searching. Since that guy didn't ask for ransom, there must be a good explanation for why he took Joey away. Before he gets what he wants, Joey should be safe."

"What exactly does he want, then?" Corinne was worried sick. She squatted at the riverside and cried with her face covered.

Even though Joey was the eldest among the four kids, he was also the most sensitive and timid one. The abuse he experienced when he was under Anya's care haunted him for a long time. He was finally getting over those terrible nightmares, yet the kidnapping happened. To say he must have been extremely frightened would be no understatement.

Jeremy squatted beside her and pulled her into his arms. "Don't cry. I'll find Joey and bring him back safe and sound, I promise..."

After sobbing for a while, Corinne suddenly raised her head as a thought occurred to her.

"Anya Rivera! Could she be behind all this?"

"Anya?" Jeremy was startled.

Corinne grabbed Jeremy's arms. "That's right. Francine mentioned that she saw Anya recently. Aaron and the others also found that Anya had been released. She's probably the one behind this! We must go to the Rivera family, now!"

She quickly stood up and ran to the car. Jeremy frowned and got in the car silently. He turned the car around before driving to the Riveras.

At the Riveras' residence.

Maxwell had just been discharged from the hospital, so the Riveras gathered around for dinner to celebrate.

Cedric and Beatrice retired to bed early. Maxwell, who was still recovering and needed more rest, got into his room early as well.

Even though the night was still young for Sunny, he also returned to his room to call Xante.

## Chapter 1865

The living room light was still on as Lucas sat on the sofa and sighed. He lit a cigarette and asked the servants to have an early night. He wanted to be alone for a while. Wisps of smoke rose from the burnt end of the cigarette, but Lucas only took a few puffs. He was lost in thought.

Suddenly, a strong light shone through the French window and into his eyes. It was the headlights of a car.

'Who'd come at this hour?' thought Lucas irritably as he saw the car stopping at the main gate.

When he flicked the cigarette ashes, his phone on the table rang. His eyes immediately lit up after glancing absent-mindedly at the caller ID.

He quickly picked up the phone and answered, "Hey, Corinne. What's wrong? What can I do for you?"



"Open the gate!" said Corinne from the other end.

"Oh, that's you out there?" questioned Lucas with a raise of an eyebrow. "Hold on a sec, I'll get someone to open it for you right away!"

While Lucas was still on the phone, he ran to the yard and asked two servants on duty to open the gate.

When the gate was opened wide, Jeremy stepped on the gas and whizzed in, stopping right before Lucas.

Corinne got out of the car hurriedly and ran toward Lucas. "Where's your sister Anya?"

"Anya?" Lucas was puzzled. "She's still in prison, of course. Why do you ask?"

Corinne was so panicked that she grabbed Lucas' collar and interrogated, "Don't you know she's out of prison? You were so close to her, but you're telling me that you have no idea where she is?! Tell me where she is now!"

Lucas had never seen Corinne so frantic before, so he figured something terrible must have happened. He put his hands on Corinne's shoulders to calm her down, then turned to Jeremy who had just gotten out of the car. "What happened? Why are you looking for Anya at this hour?"

"Joey has been kidnapped today. We suspect it has something to do with Anya-she got an early release recently," replied Jeremy seriously.

"What? Joey has been kidnapped?" Lucas was shocked. He finally understood why Corinne lost her usual composure. "Corinne, how did you know that Anya got an early release? No one, not even I, heard anything about it!"

"Francine saw her a while ago, so Aaron looked into it. He confirmed that she got an early release for good behavior," Corinne answered hoarsely.

Lucas frowned. That was different from what he gathered.

He had been told that Anya refused to follow orders in the prison and often pretended to be ill to avoid work. Since she was a Rivera, the warden did not dare to lay a finger on her. Instead, the warden sent someone to report her behavior to Lucas and asked for his further instruction.

Lucas made it clear not to make an exception and that the warden should treat her like any other inmate. Only then did she start to behave.

'How did Anya get an early release with her previous performance? And why was I not informed about her early release?' Lucas found the matter even more perplexing by the second.

He then looked at Corinne and said, "Alright, let's go inside for now. Give me a little bit of time to check whether Anya's still in prison or when she was released, and I'll let you know shortly, okay?" "Hurry up! Joey might not make it!" urged Corinne.

#### Chapter 1866

Jeremy walked over. He hugged Corinne close to him and soothed her back gently to calm her. He then led her into the house with Lucas.

After a few phone calls, Lucas came back to the living room and said, "It's true. Anya has been out of prison for a month, but she hasn't come home. We discovered that she worked a few jobs recently but resigned from all of them the day before yesterday. Nobody knows where she is now."

Corinne could not sit still after hearing that. She stood up and said, "It has to be her! Why did she kidnap Joey? What is she trying to do?"

Lucas looked at Corinne with a mix of compassion and helplessness, but he really did not have any other information that could help her locate Anya.

"Corinne, I have people looking for her everywhere. Please don't worry too much. It's probably safer for Joey if Anya is the kidnapper since she adopted him before..."

Corinne became even more anxious when this was brought up. "Seriously, Lucas? Don't you know her yet? Do you have any idea why she adopted Joey back then? Come on, you knew how she treated him, too! You know what? I'd rather think Joey got snatched

by some random person. That way, we can just pay the ransom! But Anya? She might want to take his life!"

Corinne started tearing up at her own words as her fears intensified.

She always kept a level head when faced with life's unexpected challenges before having children. However, after she became a mother, her children became her biggest weakness, and she could not maintain the same level of cool-headedness as before.

Lucas stayed silent, knowing Corinne was speaking the truth. It was impossible for them to figure out what Anya was up to if she was really the one who had kidnapped Joey.

Sunny, who was in the room upstairs and on the phone with Xante, frowned when he heard some commotion coming from the living room. He then sat up and listened carefully.

Xante noticed Sunny's unease, so she asked with concern, "What's wrong?"

"I think I heard Corinne's voice coming from downstairs."

Xante, too, was surprised. "The boss? What's she doing over there so late in the night?"

Sunny got up and put on his shoes. "I don't know. I'll go down and check. I'll call you back!"

"Okay."

After hanging up the phone, Sunny quickly went downstairs dressed in his bathrobe. Sure enough, he found Jeremy and Corinne in the living room. However, everyone was sporting a solemn expression as if something serious had taken place.

"Hey guys, what's going on here?" Sunny asked curiously.

It was only after asking that Sunny noticed the tears on Corinne's face.

"Corinne, why... Why are you crying?"

It was shocking for Sunny as he had never seen Corinne cry like that before.

Corinne was not in the mood to explain; she looked like her life sucked out of her. As a mother, she could not do anything for her kid. She was just helpless as she had no contact with the kidnappers, no idea where Joey was taken, and no leads on Anya.

She was so worried about Joey, fearing he might be injured and scared.

Jeremy gently embraced Corinne. He stroked her hair and comforted her in soothing hushes. Sunny was even more puzzled. He turned to Lucas and asked, "What happened to Corinne?" Lucas frowned seriously. "Sunny, have you seen Anya recently?"

Chapter 1867

Surprised by the question, Sunny's gaze shifted elsewhere. "Uh... Why the sudden interest in Anya?"

Lucas knew Sunny very well. He could tell Sunny was lying as his wandering eyes would always betray him. Thus, he frowned and raised his voice, saying, "Answer me! Have you seen her or not?" "N-No, I haven't..." Sunny avoided Lucas's probing gaze.

Lucas grabbed Sunny's collar. "Joey is missing right now, and it might be Anya who took him. Look at how worried Corinne is! If you've seen Anya, you better tell us where she is!"

'Joey is missing?' Sunny thought with widened eyes. "No way! How could Anya..."

Lucas pulled him closer. "You really have seen her, haven't you?! Tell me, where is she?"

Corinne broke free from Jeremy's embrace and rushed up to Sunny. "Have you seen Anya? Quick, tell me where she is."

Sunny had promised Anya to keep it a secret, but faced with Lucas and Corinne's intense questioning and considering Joey's safety, he struggled for a moment before finally telling them the truth.

"Yeah, I've seen her..."

Corinne pushed Lucas aside and grabbed Sunny's clothes. "Where did you see her? When? Where is she now?!"

"It was just a few days ago. Xante told me that Francine spotted Anya, so I sent someone to track her down. When I found out she was working part-time at a fast-food restaurant, I went to see her. Corinne, I'm sorry. I know Anya has hurt you before, but she's still my sister, born of the same mother as me. When I heard she was struggling while working part-time, I couldn't bear it and went to check on her."

Corinne was not interested in these details at all. All she wanted to know was where Anya was.

She kept pressing Sunny. "Where is she? Take me to her! Right now!"

"I don't know where she is right now. The first time I found her, she was cleaning at a fast-food restaurant. She even treated me to a meal when she saw me. Then, she asked me for twenty-eight thousand dollars. Thinking of how much she must've suffered, I just gave her the money. After that, I wanted to check on her when I passed by there again, but the owner told me she had quit. Now I have no idea where she is. Corinne, Joey's disappearance might not be related to Anya. The day I saw her, she seemed different and more down-to-earth. I'm pretty sure she has cleaned up her act!"

Sunny was probably the only one hopeful enough to believe in Anya's change.

Corinne clutched Sunny's clothes. "Take me to that fast-food restaurant right now!"

Sunny blinked. "But it's pretty late. They've likely closed up by now."

"I don't care! Take me there immediately!" insisted Corinne.

Sunny nodded quickly. "Okay, let me go change real quick."

Before Corinne could respond, Lucas grabbed Sunny. "Forget about changing your clothes! You're not going on a date. Just go as you are!" Sunny sighed in resignation. "Fine!"

Then, they all hopped into Jeremy's car and sped toward the fast-food restaurant where Anya had once worked.

#### Chapter 1868

As the car sped along the road, Sunny and Lucas sat together in the back seat.

Suddenly, Sunny's phone buzzed in the pocket of the bathrobe he was wearing. He quickly declined the call as he did not dare to speak on the phone in the car during such a tense situation.

It was Xante checking in on him. After dismissing the call, Sunny planned to update her via texting. However, Xante's message popped up before he could finish typing his message. [What's going on? Did the boss really go to your place?] she asked.

Sunny pressed backspace on the message he was typing and replied with a simple, [Yeah.]

He then added, [It's nothing serious. Just go to sleep for now.]

It was pretty late, and Sunny did not want to worry her.

Xante, however, knew Sunny so well that she did not buy his lie. After all, Sunny would never dodge her call if 'nothing serious' was happening.

[Talk. There must be a reason why the boss would go to your place this late at night.]

Xante knew all too well that Corinne had no love for the Riveras. Therefore, Corinne would not step inside their home unless it was necessary.

'Ugh, it's so hard to fool her.' Sunny sighed internally.

[Joey is missing, and Corinne suspects Anya is the one who's kidnapped him. They want me to take them to find Anya now.]

On the other end of the phone, Xante frowned and texted back, [Do you know where Anya is?]

[I did go to see her once before, but I don't know where she is now. Corinne wants me to take them to the fast-food restaurant where Anya used to work.] [Then hurry up and take the boss to find her! Don't waste any time!]

Sunny could not shake the feeling that he had always played the role of a pushover in front of everyone. Thus, he texted, [We're on our way! You should go to sleep now.] [As if! Keep me posted on the situation!]

[Fine...]

Soon, Jeremy brought the car to a stop in front of the fast-food restaurant that Sunny mentioned. Corinne turned to Sunny and asked, "Is this the place?"

Sunny glanced outside and nodded confidently. "Yup. But see, they're closed. Just like I told you."

The fast-food restaurant had indeed closed up shop. The doors were locked, and the lights were out.

Corinne shrugged. "So what? It's still the right place."

After that, she stepped out of the car.

## Chapter 1869

Jeremy, Lucas, and Sunny followed Corinne out of the car. They had no idea what her intentions were, so they silently stuck close to her. These kinds of stores typically have alarm systems in place.

Corinne walked up to the fast-food restaurant's entrance, giving the rolling shutter door a powerful kick. She put enough force into it to break it.

The alarm finally went off, creating quite a racket and drawing the attention of passersby.

'What the hell? Are those people in the fancy cars seriously tearing down someone's shutter door?' they wondered in bewilderment.

The trio's commanding presence around Corinne deterred many spectators from approaching to witness the unfolding scene.

Before long, the blaring alarm summoned the store owner, a middle-aged man who brought his wife with him.

"Who are you guys? Why are you smashing my door? What do you want?" The store owner approached fiercely, but in the face of the three formidable men beside Corinne, he seemed diminutive.

The store owner's wife was somewhat frightened. She kept her distance and warned them with her hands on her hips, "Don't stir up trouble! We've already called the police. How dare you guys attempt robbery so brazenly. Have you no sense of shame at all?"

Corinne approached the store owner and bowed apologetically. "I'm really sorry about the door. I had no other choice. I needed to speak with you, but your shop was closed. It was the only way to get your attention quickly. We'll make sure to compensate you tenfold for the damage afterward."

The middle-aged woman, observing the situation, moved a bit closer to her husband. She gave Corinne an odd look and asked, "What do you want from us? We don't know you. You don't exactly strike us as a trustworthy person, so don't think we'll fall for your lies! I mean, who in their right mind approaches people like this? Our contact number is right there on the door, yet you choose to break in!"

Corinne once again bowed towards the middle-aged woman, saying, "I know this isn't right, and I'm really sorry! But I'm just in a hurry... Ma'am, my son has been kidnapped, and I need any information about the kidnappers that you and your husband might have. Please, can you help me? My son is only five years old!"



The mention of a child instantly created a connection between the two women. The store owner's wife noticed Corinne's eyes were red and swollen from crying, causing her to lower her guard slightly. "Young lady, what does your son's kidnapping have to do with us? We're just regular folks running a legitimate business, so we don't know anything about kidnappers!"

"I know! I'm not suspecting that you two know the kidnappers. It's just that there was a girl around my age who used to work for you, and she may be involved in my son's kidnapping. Can you please tell me how to contact her?"

The middle-aged couple exchanged glances before turning to look at Corinne again.

"Miss, it's not that we don't want to help you. It's just that we often hire temporary workers, and most of them don't leave any contact details. They're usually students on break or people facing difficulties and in urgent need of money. Which girl are you talking about? Most of the temporary workers we hire here are girls," said the store owner's wife.

"She's about my height and build, and she goes by the name Anya, but it's possible that she's using a fake name! Take a look at me; she could look a bit like me!" replied Corinne.

The store owner's wife stepped closer, examining Corinne's face carefully. After a moment of thought, she said, "Oh, right! There was a girl named 'An' who worked here for a few days recently. I ended up letting her go. She didn't stay long, and she didn't leave any contact information. I'm sorry, but we really can't be of much help."

Corinne's eyes dimmed with disappointment, but she was not ready to give up. "Could you please think again? Did she drop any other hints? I'm really worried about my son!"

Witnessing Corinne's anguish over her child, the store owner's wife could not help but feel a pang of sympathy. "Oh! What's your relationship with her? Why would she kidnap your son? I really want to assist you, but I don't have her contact details or address. The reason I let her go was because I found out she was trying to seduce my husband... Oh, wait!"

Chapter 1870

Corinne's eyes sharpened as the store owner's wife seemed to have a realization.

"Yes? Did something cross your mind?"

"I remembered something. That girl, 'An,' used to flirt with my husband while working here. My husband ignored her advances, and she turned her attention to one of the kitchen staff instead. Oddly enough, that kitchen staff guy quit not long after I fired her. There might be a connection between them!"

Corinne seized that glimmer of hope as she grabbed the store owner's wife's hand tightly. "Do you have a photo of that staff that you can show me?"

The store owner's wife pondered for a moment before answering, "Oh, we do have one! He was still working with us during our store's third-anniversary celebration last month. We took a group photo together! Honey, it should be on your Facebook. Quick, find it and show it to this lady."

The fast-food restaurant owner quickly pulled out his phone and scrolled through his Facebook account to locate the photo.

"Here it is. It's the guy on the far right."

Corinne's heart skipped a beat as she recognized the face in the photo; it was the balloon seller who frequently showed his face around her and the kids!

'So Anya really is the one behind all this!' thought Corinne.

"Could you please help me contact that kitchen staff, and if possible, arrange for a meeting with him?" pleaded Corinne.

Seeing Corinne in such a panic, the store owner's wife was more than willing to help.

"Sure, I'll contact him. Coincidentally, he left in a rush without settling the last month's wages."

Corinne nodded. "Call him now, and tell him it's about settling his wages. Don't mention anything about us yet."

Understanding Corinne's urgency, the store owner's wife took out her phone and dialed the kitchen staff's number.

After a brief conversation in a quiet spot, she hung up and turned to Corinne, saying, "I've talked to him. He said he's currently out of town and can't make it back right away. But he agreed to come by the store tomorrow afternoon to collect his wages."

"Did he mention where he is?" asked Corinne hurriedly.

The store owner's wife shook her head. "His signal was really bad. He hung up before explaining much."

Corinne frowned, getting a sense of the situation. "Alright! Thanks. Could you give me his number?"

The store owner's wife showed Corinne the number saved in her phone.

Corinne was able to memorize the numbers quickly due to her photographic memory.

"Thanks! Tomorrow, we'll send someone to compensate you for the damage to your storefront. We need to go now, sorry!"

Without waiting for a reply, Corinne turned to Jeremy. "Let's go!"

Understanding her urgency, Jeremy did not question and joined her in the car.

Lucas and Sunny exchanged glances, then turned, and hopped into the car.

Corinne was seated in the front. She worked on her computer to trace the number of the kitchen staff provided by the fast-food store owner's wife. Jeremy started the car, driving smoothly as they waited for Corinne's next move.

After a minute, she said, "He's at the wild hills on the outskirts of the city!"

It was an odd time for anyone to be in such a desolate place. They must have hidden Joey there!