

### Chapter 53

Dominic nodded right away. "Yeah, sure."

Five minutes later, the group stopped beside a long limousine.

"Get in," Autumn said coldly.

Dominic ignored her tone and opened the door. For a moment, no one moved.

"What kind of joke are you trying to pull?" Autumn snapped.

Clarita had just passed away, and she'd been holding back her grief all day. Now her patience was nearly gone.

Dominic gestured for Clarita to enter first, then climbed in after her. Autumn followed.

The car's interior was spacious and sealed tight. No one outside could see a thing.

Autumn spoke slowly, every word edged with warning. "You can talk now. If you lie to me, even once, I'll make you regret ever being born—no matter who's backing you."

Dominic nodded. He knew she was grieving, so he didn't take the threat to heart. Instead, he said, "Your grandmother told me you grew up in Peachville."

"That's easy enough to find out," Autumn replied.

"When you were little, you loved the peach tree at the village entrance," Dominic continued. "You'd climb it before the peaches even ripened. One time, you ate a bunch of half-ripe ones and got diarrhea. It happened



right behind your house, at that old dirt outhouse, and then..."

He hesitated, disbelief flickering across his face. "Then the board broke, and you... fell in?"

"Wait... She actually fell into a latrine as a kid?"

Autumn's face flushed crimson. That was a secret only Clarita knew.

Thinking of her brought a sharp ache to Autumn's chest, and tears welled in her eyes.

"There were lots of peach trees, but Grandma's was the sweetest," she murmured. "Every summer, I'd climb it to cool off, and she'd chase me down with her cane, yelling about caterpillars in the branches. Grandma ... I miss you so much."

Clarita beside her began to cry too.

After Autumn had moved to the city, she and Clarita had seen each other less and less.

When the tears finally slowed, Autumn wiped her eyes and looked at Dominic. "What else did Grandma say? Go on."

Her tone had softened. An embarrassing childhood story like that wasn't something Clarita would share with anyone else.

Dominic nodded. He noticed Clarita's sorrowful expression and trembling body. Instinctively, he reached out to steady her.

The moment his hand touched her arm, Autumn's eyes widened. Right in front of her, Clarita appeared—whole, alive, sitting in the car.

"Grandma!" Autumn's voice shook.



Clarita froze, just as stunned. 'My granddaughter can see me?'

Without thinking, she reached out. "Sweetie!"

Dominic was startled and pulled his hand back.

At once, Clarita vanished.

Autumn fell forward, arms closing around empty air. For a heartbeat, she just stared, then cried out in anguish, "Grandma!"

Realization flickered across Dominic's face. He hesitated, then touched Clarita's arm again.

Her figure reappeared before Autumn's eyes.

This time, Autumn didn't doubt what she saw. She threw her arms around Clarita, sobbing. "Grandma, I missed you so much!"

Clarita held her tightly, tears streaming down her face. "Sweetie, Grandma's fine. Don't cry, don't cry."

Watching them, Dominic felt a sudden sting at the corners of his eyes.