

## **My Sister 106**

Chapter 106 THE LOCKWOOD FAMILY TREE

MARGARET'S POV

My once bright and full house had grown unbearably hollow—no husband to share the silence with, Ethan too wrapped up in his shiny new mate, and Celeste gone off to live with Kieran.

It was just me now, rattling around in rooms that used to be full of voices, left to make conversation with my own grief.

So when Dr. Fairchild suggested I take daily short walks, get some “fresh air for the soul,” I agreed.

I thought I would go to the park, perhaps, or stroll down the avenue where the cafés spilled into the street with clinking glasses and low laughter.

Remind myself that although my world had stopped, the one around me moved on.

Instead, I heard myself read off an address I’d inadvertently committed to memory. And I found myself staring up at a house I knew but had never sought out.

Seraphina’s home.

I wasn't sure what possessed me to get out of the car.

My oldest daughter had made it clear—over and over again—that she had no use for me in her life.

But there I was, smoothing my blouse with trembling fingers, standing at the base of her front steps, staring at the modest little house that she'd made hers.

It was my first time seeing it. I had always assumed she lived in something temporary—a quick escape after the suddenness of her divorce.

But the ivy curling up the porch rail, the potted herbs on the windowsill, the faint scent of rosemary and earth—it was hers.

I almost turned back.

But then I thought of Dr. Fairchild's words: 'Make peace with your life as it is now.' 'Clear your mind.'

The heaviest burden on my mind was this: the yawning rift between me and Seraphina.

Edward's words, spoken just weeks before he was so cruelly snatched from me, replaced Dr. Fairchild's in my mind.

‘This family has been divided for too long. I believe it’s time we bring Seraphina home.’

My knuckles rapped lightly against the door before I could talk myself out of it.

There was a long pause. Long enough that I began to think she wasn’t home, and I should leave before humiliation claimed me. But then the door cracked open, and I drew in a breath.

Seraphina stood there, eyes wide, lips parted in shock.

Hair unpinned, mussed from sleep. Wearing a loose sweater and shorts. She looked...soft. Unguarded.

Not the armored daughter who usually faced me. I almost mistook her for the little girl she had once been. The one who clung to my skirts and looked at me like I was her world.

But then I noticed something else: the sweater slid off one shoulder, baring a collarbone—and a faint purple bruise.

Her cheeks were flushed—partly with shock, but partly with—

And then I saw him.

The doorway had a direct view of the stairs, and Lucian Reed descended those stairs at that exact moment, barefoot, his shirt unbuttoned halfway.

His eyes flicked to me, widening for a fraction before his face settled into an unreadable mask.

My gaze darted between them—the way Sera swallowed hard, the matching messy hair and disheveled clothing, the faint hickey.

The picture painted itself.

I lifted my chin, summoning steel into my spine. “I see I’ve interrupted.”

Sera flushed, the color high in her cheeks. “Mother, what are you doing here?”

I smiled thinly. “I was discharged a while ago. The doctor recommended a regular change of scenery. I thought...” I shrugged. “Why not see where my daughter has made her home?”

Sera snorted.

When I raised a brow, the amusement faded. “You’re serious?”

“Would I come all this way for a joke?”

Her lips pressed into a tight line, and for a second, I thought she was going to turn me around. Send me out of her home like she was determined to send me out of her life.

But then she moved aside reluctantly and sighed like she was accepting martyrdom. “Come in, then.”

I stepped into the foyer. Her home was smaller than what I was used to, of course, but not unpleasant.

Wood floors polished with care. Sunlight filtering through gauzy curtains. Books stacked in corners, photographs tucked into mismatched frames.

A house that lived and breathed, evidently filled with love—like ours had once upon a time.

Still, I could not resist the words that slipped from my tongue. “This is...very much your style, Seraphina. Not sophisticated, no, but...cozy. Your father would have approved. He always preferred comfort over ostentation.”

Inside, my chest ached. The mere thought, let alone mention of her father, was like pressing on a bruise that refused to heal.

Her eyes snapped to mine, sharp as glass. "Sorry it's not up to your standards, Mother," she said tightly. "I know how much you value sophistication."

"I meant no insult," I said, folding my hands.

I caught sight of Lucian moving behind her, casual and easy like a wolf in its den.

His presence filled the house, filled the air. When he brushed his hand against Sera's arm in a fleeting, almost protective touch, I noticed. And I did not miss the way she leaned almost imperceptibly toward it.

She'd made it clear in the hospital that she did not want me to meet him. But she was my daughter, and I had a right to know the kind of person she deigned to spend her time with.

I seated myself on her sofa, smoothing my skirt.

"Is there something I can help you with, Mother?" Sera asked.

She was still standing as if she had no intention for this visit to last long. As if she couldn't wait to be rid of me.

"I would love a cup of tea," I said.

She scoffed. "I don't know what you think—"

"I'll make it," Lucian offered, placing a hand on Sera's.

Again, I noticed the way she instantly eased, leaning into him yet again. Interesting.

She turned to him, and a brief moment flickered between them before she nodded and he exited the living room.

Sera exhaled and turned back in my direction. She perched on the armrest furthest away and fixed an expectant gaze on me.

"That's not ladylike," I pointed out.

She nodded. "Thanks for your observation." She didn't move.

"You would never sit like that back in the Lockwood Manor."

She spread her arms around, gesturing to the living room. "Well, thank gods I'm not in the Lockwood Manor."

I swallowed. "Do you...Do you ever think of coming back?"

She snorted again. "It's way too early for jokes, Mother."

"Let me reiterate, Sera: I did not come here for jokes."

"Could've fooled me," she mumbled.

I sighed. "Perhaps next time, I'll bring the old family albums. It might do you good to remember those years, remember where you came from."

Her eyes flashed. "There's no need. I'm not a part of the Lockwood family tree anymore, remember?"

"Just because you got married—"

"No," she cut in. "Not because I got married. Because father said, and I quote, 'From this day forward, you are no daughter of mine.' Remember that, Mother?" She sneered. "You were right next to him when he said that. You have that in a photo album?"



The words were strangled, her face twisted, and I saw the wound they'd carved in her ten years ago. A wound that never healed.

Still, she must not have intended for her words to cut so sharp. The Seraphina I knew would never knowingly hurt anyone's feelings.

"Seraphina." I shook my head. "Do you truly believe you can erase bloodlines that easily?"

"I'm not the one who tried to erase my bloodline!"

"Your room is still preserved at home," I continued, refusing to relive the moment my husband disowned our daughter.

"Don't be stubborn," I chided. "You are still my daughter. I carried you for ten months. I labored with you for twenty-seven hours. I nearly bled out bringing you into this world. Do you think I would so easily abandon you?"

Her lips trembled—not with gratitude or sentiment but fury. "You already abandoned me. A long time ago."

The words rang in the quiet, and before I could compose a reply, Lucian's voice sliced through the air.

“I believe that’s enough.”

I turned, startled. His eyes were hard, his jaw tight. “You talk of sacrifice, but what you’re doing is manipulation. You cling to her not out of love, but out of control. You abandoned her when you chose appearances over her happiness. And now you come here, after everything, to claim motherhood when it suits you.”

“How dare you—” My voice cracked with indignation. “You presume to lecture me about my own child?”

“She’s not a child,” he replied evenly. “She’s a woman, forged from the fire of your family’s disdain and prejudice. And she deserves better than guilt disguised as affection.”

“Do not speak of what you don’t know—”

“I know enough.” He cut in. “And you’re delusional if you think there’s any justification for all the ways you failed her.”

The silence burned. I looked at Seraphina, expecting—hoping—for her to defend me. To scold him, to tell him he misunderstood.

But she didn’t.

Her eyes softened only when they fell on him. The same way they hardened when they fell on me.

The betrayal sank like a stone in my gut.

My throat closed. “So this is how it is, Seraphina? You’re just going to let him talk to your mother like that?”

Lucian moved a step forward, but Sera lifted her hand, stopping him. “That’s enough, Lucian. Mother, you should go home.”

“Sera—”

“Go. Home,” she pressed, her voice taking on a steel edge that reminded me of Edward. “I don’t want any more Lockwoods in my home, but I will call Ethan to get you if it comes to that.”

The finality in her tone left no room for argument. My daughter—the child I had raised, the baby I had held against my chest—was casting me out of her home.

My pride would not let me beg. I stood, smoothing my blouse, forcing my voice steady. “Very well. I’ll leave you to your life. But don’t imagine for one moment, Seraphina, that blood can be undone by will alone.”

Her eyes glistened, though her chin stayed high. She said nothing.

I left before my knees could give way.

#### SERAPHINA'S POV

After the door shut behind my mother, the silence in the house felt sharper, like the echo of everything unspoken still hanging in the air.

My chest was tight, and for a moment, I just stared at the spot where she'd sat, torn between guilt and relief.

Lucian's voice broke the quiet, oddly hesitant. "Sera, did I...overstep?"

I turned to him. His gaze was steady, searching my face for an answer I wasn't sure I had. I hated that he'd even asked—that he thought he might have done something wrong by defending me.

I shook my head. "No. You didn't. I just..." My throat ached, the words dragging. "You don't need to waste your energy on her—on any of them. I don't want my family's mess to bleed into your life."

The corner of his mouth tightened, not in anger, but in that way he had when he was restraining himself.

He stepped closer, close enough that I could feel his steadiness pressing against my chaos.

“Sera,” he said, low and unyielding, “the moment we chose each other, your battles became mine. Protecting you isn’t a waste of energy. It’s my responsibility—my choice. Even if the attacks come from your own family.”

Something inside me trembled, half afraid to lean on those words, half aching to collapse into them.