

The 100-Point Divorce Plan

Chapter 1 Chapter

For three years, I documented the slow death of my marriage in a black journal. It was my 100-point divorce plan: for every time my husband, Blake, chose his first love, Ariana, over me, I deducted points. When the score hit zero, I would leave.

The final points vanished the night he left me bleeding out from a car crash. I was eight weeks pregnant with the child we had prayed for.

In the ER, the nurses frantically called him-the star surgeon of the very hospital I was dying in.

"Dr. Santos, we have a Jane Doe, O-negative, bleeding out. She's pregnant, and we're about to lose them both. We need you to authorize an emergency blood transfer."

His voice came over the speaker, cold and impatient.

"I can't. My priority is Miss Whitfield. Do what you can for the patient, but I can't divert anything right now."

He hung up. He condemned his own child to death to ensure his ex-girlfriend had resources on standby after a minor procedure.

Chapter 1

Blake Santos never expected to find the notebook.

He was searching for his favorite platinum cufflinks, a gift from his father, in the back of the shared closet. His fingers brushed against a leather-bound journal tucked away in a shoebox, hidden behind Caroline's winter boots. It wasn't hers; her journals were always brightly colored, filled with architectural sketches. This one was plain black. Curiosity, a rare emotion for him, took hold. He opened it.

The first page was titled in Caroline's neat, precise handwriting: The 100-Point Divorce Plan.

Blake frowned. He read the rules written below.

Starting Points: 100.

For every action that proves this marriage is a mistake, points will be deducted.

When the score reaches zero, I will file for divorce. No exceptions.

He let out a short, humorless laugh. A game. It had to be some silly game his wife was playing. He flipped through the pages. Each entry was dated, a meticulous log of his supposed transgressions.

-1 Point: He forgot our anniversary. Again. He was having dinner with Ariana.

-2 Points: He canceled our vacation because Ariana's dog was sick. He spent the weekend at her apartment.

-1 Point: He called me Ariana by mistake.

-3 Points: He bought the last bottle of a vintage wine I'd been searching for, only to give it to Ariana for her birthday.

The list went on, page after page. A detailed, painful chronicle of his neglect. Blake felt a flicker of annoyance, not guilt. He saw it not as a record of his failures, but as a testament to Caroline's obsession with his friendship with Ariana Whitfield. Ariana was his first love, the one who had shattered him when she left years ago.

Caroline knew that. He had married Caroline on the rebound, a convenient, stable choice from a good family, a person who could manage the Santos household while he focused on his career and, if he was honest, nursed his broken heart.

He shut the notebook, his annoyance hardening into cold indifference. He tossed it back into the box. A ridiculous, childish list. It meant nothing. He found his cufflinks and shut the closet door, the notebook already fading from his mind. He had more important things to think about. He had a custom-made necklace for Ariana in his briefcase. Her art gallery was having its grand opening, and he needed to be there.

He walked into the living room. Caroline was on the couch, sketching on a large pad, her brow furrowed in concentration. She looked up when he entered, a hopeful light in her eyes that he had long ago stopped noticing.

"You're home early," she said, her voice soft.

"I have to go out again soon," he replied, loosening his tie. "Ariana's gallery opening."

The light in her eyes dimmed. "Oh. Right."

He saw the notebook on the coffee table, a different one, one of her sketchbooks. He glanced at an open page. It was a drawing of a nursery, detailed and full of soft light. A crib, a mobile with tiny stars, a rocking chair. He felt a strange pang in his chest, an unfamiliar emotion he couldn't place. They had been trying for a child for over a year.

"Is that for a client?" he asked, his voice flat.

Caroline quickly closed the sketchbook. "Just an idea."

He didn't press. He didn't care. His mind was on Ariana. He looked at the clock. He should leave soon. He wanted to be the first one there, to see her face when she saw the necklace.

He stood there, a silent wall between them, when his phone rang. It was his best friend, Mark.

"Blake! Turn on the news! Now!" Mark' s voice was frantic.

Blake grabbed the remote and switched on the television. A live news report filled the screen. A building was engulfed in flames. Thick black smoke billowed into the night sky. The reporter' s voice was urgent.

"Firefighters are on the scene at the new Whitfield Gallery downtown, where a massive fire broke out just an hour before its scheduled grand opening..."

Blake' s blood ran cold.

Ariana.

The world narrowed to that single thought. He grabbed his keys, his coat, and bolted for the door without a word to Caroline. He didn' t look back. He didn' t see the look of utter devastation on her face as she watched him go.

Caroline followed him. She didn' t know why. Some desperate, foolish part of her needed to see it for herself. She drove through the city, her hands tight on the steering wheel, her heart pounding a sick rhythm against her ribs.

When she arrived, the scene was chaos. Police barricades, flashing lights, the roar of the fire. Blake had abandoned his car and was arguing with a firefighter, his face a mask of raw panic.

"She' s in there! I have to get her!" Blake yelled, trying to push past the man.

"Sir, it' s too dangerous! The structure is unstable!" the firefighter shouted back.

"I don' t care! She' s trapped!"

Mark was there, trying to restrain him. "Blake, calm down! They' ll get her!"

"They' re not fast enough!" Blake' s voice was ragged with a desperation Caroline had never heard from him. Not for her. Never for her. He looked at the burning building as if it held his entire world. In that moment, Caroline knew it did.

He shoved Mark away and made a run for the entrance.

"My hands!" he screamed at the firefighter who grabbed his arm. "Do you know who I am? I' m Blake Santos! These hands are insured for millions! They perform miracles! But I would trade them, I would trade my entire career, just to know she' s safe! Let me go!"

It was a declaration. A confession. A truth so brutal it felt like a physical blow.

Mark saw Caroline then, standing in the shadows, her face pale. He looked horrified.

"Caroline... I..."

She heard Mark' s wife, Sarah, whisper to him, "God, Mark, he' s been obsessed with Ariana since high school. I thought marrying Caroline would fix him, but he' s just gotten worse."

Sarah' s words confirmed everything. It wasn' t just neglect. It was a love story she had no part in. She was just an obstacle. An afterthought.

For three years, she had tried. She had loved him with everything she had, hoping that one day he would see her. She had decorated their home, managed his social obligations, comforted him after long surgeries, and endured his family' s cold scrutiny. She had believed her love could eventually heal his old wounds, that it could be enough.

It was a lie she had told herself. The truth had been there all along, in every missed anniversary, every canceled plan, every time he looked through her as if she were made of glass.

The 100-point plan wasn't a game. It was a lifeline. A way to quantify the slow, bleeding death of her love. A way to give herself a finish line, an escape hatch from a marriage that was hollowing her out. And tonight, watching him ready to burn for another woman, she felt a massive chunk of those points crumble away.

A cheer went up from the crowd. Blake emerged from the smoke, carrying Ariana in his arms. She was conscious, coughing, but otherwise seemed unharmed. He held her like she was the most precious thing in the world, his face buried in her hair. He carried her to the ambulance, whispering things only she could hear.

He never once looked for Caroline.

After ensuring Ariana was safely with the paramedics, Blake' s body finally gave out. The adrenaline faded, and he collapsed to the ground, unconscious from smoke inhalation.

In the sterile white waiting room of the hospital, the smell of antiseptic sharp in her nose, Caroline' s mind drifted back. She remembered the charity gala where she first met him. He was the most brilliant, captivating man she had ever seen. A star neurosurgeon from the powerful Santos family. She, a promising young architect, had been bold. She had pursued him.

He had been grieving Ariana' s marriage to another man. She knew that. But when he proposed six months later, she thought she had won. She thought her devotion had finally broken through his reserve.

The illusion shattered a year into their marriage. At a party, she overheard one of Blake' s friends, drunk and loose-lipped, telling someone the truth. "Blake only married her because Ariana got married. He needed a distraction, a wife to satisfy his family. Poor girl thinks he actually loves her."

That was the day Ariana became a thorn in her heart, a constant, painful presence in her marriage. It was the day she went out and bought the plain black journal. It was her last act of self-preservation. A way to measure the pain until it became too much to bear.

Ariana' s return to Boston after her own divorce a year ago had accelerated everything. The points on her list disappeared with terrifying speed. Her heart, once full of hope, had grown cold and heavy.

A doctor approached her, pulling her from her thoughts. "Mrs. Santos? Your husband is stable. He inhaled a lot of smoke, but he'll be fine. Miss Whitfield is also fine, just a few scratches."

Mark and Sarah came over, their faces etched with pity. "Caroline, he'll come to his senses," Sarah said, placing a hand on her arm. "The Santos family will make sure he treats you right."

Caroline just looked at them, a bitter taste in her mouth. She stood up and walked out of the waiting room, leaving them behind.

Back home, in the silent, empty house, she walked to the closet and took out the black journal. She opened it to the last entry.

-5 Points: He ran into a burning building for her.

-10 Points: He said he would give up his career for her.

She uncapped her pen. Her hand was steady.

-10 Points: He collapsed after saving her, and his first and last thought was of her, not me.

She did the math. Only a few points left. Very few. The end was near.