

The 100-Point Divorce Plan

Chapter 2 Chapter

The next morning, Caroline didn't go to the hospital. She went to see a lawyer. The office was on the 30th floor of a glass skyscraper, with a view of the entire city. It felt fitting. She was finally getting a new perspective.

She handed over a file containing her prenuptial agreement and a summary of her assets.

"I want to file for divorce," she stated, her voice calm and even. "I want to prepare the papers now, so they are ready to be signed the moment I decide."

The lawyer, a sharp woman named Ms. Davis, looked at her with professional sympathy. "Of course, Mrs. Santos. We can have everything drafted and waiting for your signal."

Leaving the lawyer's office, Caroline felt a strange sense of lightness. It wasn't happiness, but it was a release. She stopped at a small cafe and bought a container of chicken noodle soup and a thermos of hot tea, the kind Blake liked when he was sick. It was a force of habit, the ghost of a duty she had performed for years.

When she arrived at the hospital, she paused outside Blake's room. Through the glass panel in the door, she saw Ariana sitting by his bed. She was trying to feed him soup, but her movements were clumsy. She spilled a spoonful on his hospital gown, then another on the pristine white sheets.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Blake!" Ariana cried, dabbing at the mess with a napkin. "I'm just so useless."

"It's okay," Blake's voice was hoarse but gentle. He reached up and wiped a tear from her cheek. "It's just soup."

"But you're hurt because of me," she sobbed, her shoulders shaking. "The doctor said the smoke inhalation was severe. It could have damaged your lungs, your hands... your career..."

"Shh," he soothed her. "It was worth it. As long as you're safe."

Ariana looked at him, her eyes wide and shining with adoration. "You always wanted to be a neurosurgeon. You gave up your dream of being a painter for it."

Blake's gaze softened. "I didn't give it up. I became a surgeon because of you."

Ariana looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"Do you remember that day in high school?" he asked, his voice low. "You fell off the bleachers and hit your head. You were unconscious for almost a minute. I've never been so scared in my life. That was the day I decided I wanted to be a doctor. The best doctor. So I could always be there to save you if you needed me."

The soup container slipped from Caroline's hand, falling to the floor with a soft thud. She didn't notice. The words echoed in her head, a deafening roar.

His entire career. His life's ambition. It was all for Ariana.

Ariana gasped, her hand flying to her mouth. "Blake... I never knew."

She threw herself into his arms, burying her face in his chest. "Oh, Blake."

He hesitated for only a second, his eyes flickering towards the door as if he sensed something. But then his arms wrapped around her, holding her tight. A perfect, painful tableau of love and devotion.

Caroline felt a sharp, suffocating pain in her chest. Her vision blurred. She turned and walked away, her steps silent and numb. She left the soup and tea on the floor outside his door.

Downstairs, in the hospital lobby, she bumped into one of Blake's colleagues, Dr. Evans. He was rushing, a stack of files in his hands.

"Caroline! I was just coming to see Blake. How is he?"

"He's fine," she said, her voice hollow.

"Good, good. Listen, I have an emergency surgery. Can you give this to him?" He thrust a manila folder into her hands. "It's his resignation paperwork from the research board. He needs to sign it."

"Resignation?" Caroline asked, confused. Blake loved his position on the research board.

"Yeah, he's stepping down to fund a new private clinic. Crazy, right? Sacrificing his own research... but he said it's for someone important." Dr. Evans's pager went off. "Gotta run!"

He disappeared down the hall. Caroline stood alone in the bustling lobby, holding the folder. Her hands trembled as she opened it. Inside was Blake's official letter of resignation. And clipped to it was the business proposal for the new clinic.

It was a state-of-the-art mental health and wellness facility. The primary beneficiary and director listed on the proposal was Ariana Whitfield.

The world tilted on its axis. It wasn't just his past. It was his future, too. Every part of his life was built around Ariana. He had become a doctor for her. Now he was giving up his prestigious research position to build a sanctuary for her.

Caroline was just a name on a marriage certificate. A placeholder. A ghost in her own life.

She thought of the day he'd been celebrated for a groundbreaking surgical technique. She had been so proud, her heart swelling with love for this brilliant, dedicated man. Now she realized, with sickening clarity, that even that moment belonged to Ariana. Every achievement, every success, was just another step on his path back to his first love.

It was time to get off that path. It was time to find her own.

She walked out of the hospital and into the bright, unforgiving sunlight. She pulled out her phone and dialed a number she hadn't called in years.

Bridget Kelly. Her best friend from architecture school. The one who had always told her she was meant for more than just being Mrs. Blake Santos.

Bridget picked up on the second ring. "Caroline? Is that you?"

"It's me," Caroline said, her voice surprisingly steady. "You know that architecture firm we always dreamed of opening?"

There was a pause, then Bridget's voice, full of excitement. "Are you serious?"

"I'm serious," Caroline said, a faint smile touching her lips for the first time in what felt like a lifetime. "I'm leaving Blake. I'm ready to start."

"Oh, thank God!" Bridget squealed. "I'll start looking for office space! Something in Boston, close to your home, so it's convenient for you?"

Caroline looked up at the skyline, at the towering buildings she had once dreamed of designing.

"No," she said, her voice clear and firm. "Not Boston. Somewhere new. Somewhere far away from here."