

The 100-Point Divorce Plan

Chapter 4 Chapter

Ariana led the way into the restaurant, which was the same one where the accident had happened. It had been quickly renovated and reopened. She pointed out the new decorations, her hand resting possessively on Blake's arm.

"I always dreamed of having a place like this, Blake," she said wistfully. "A space for art and beauty."

"I remember," Blake said, his voice soft. "You wanted high ceilings, exposed brick, and a crystal chandelier right in the center. You said it would 'drip starlight.' "

Ariana looked at him, amazed. "You remember that? I said that when we were seventeen."

"I remember everything you've ever said," he replied, and the sincerity in his voice was a knife in Caroline's gut.

They were seated in a private booth. Blake took the menu, his eyes scanning it with practiced ease. "We'll have the seared scallops, the truffle risotto, and the duck confit."

Ariana laughed, a light, tinkling sound. "Blake, you ordered all my favorites. You should ask Caroline what she likes." She said it with an air of sweet concern, but her eyes, when they met Caroline's, were sharp with malice.

Blake turned to Caroline, a blank look on his face. He pushed the menu towards her. "Sorry. I... I don't know what you like to eat."

Three years. For three years, she had cooked for him, ordered for him, packed his lunches. He had eaten the food she prepared every single day, and he didn't know. He didn't know the simplest thing about her.

The humiliation was a physical force, pressing down on her, making it hard to breathe. She saw the smug satisfaction in Ariana's eyes, the casual indifference in Blake's. It was all too much.

"Excuse me," Caroline said, her voice tight. She stood up and pushed her way out of the booth. "I need some air."

She walked quickly towards the exit, desperate to escape the suffocating weight of their shared history. She heard footsteps behind her. It was Ariana.

"Let me show you the way to the powder room," Ariana said, her voice dripping with false kindness.

In the empty corridor, Ariana dropped the act. She blocked Caroline's path.

"You should just give up, you know," Ariana said, her voice low and cold. "You see how he is with me. He remembers every little thing about me. He doesn't even know your favorite food. You're just a placeholder, Caroline. A temporary solution until I was ready to come back to him."

Every word was a confirmation of a truth Caroline already knew, but hearing it spoken aloud was still devastating.

"He loves me," Ariana continued, her smile turning cruel. "He built his career for me. He ran into a burning building for me. He's giving up his future for me. What has he ever done for you?"

Caroline felt a wave of dizziness. The walls seemed to be closing in.

"What do you want, Ariana?" Caroline asked, her voice shaking.

"I want you to leave," Ariana said simply. "He's mine. He has always been mine. You're just in the way."

As she spoke, there was a loud creaking sound from above. Both women looked up. The large, ornate chandelier—the replacement for the one that had fallen before—was swaying ominously.

A collective gasp went through the restaurant, followed by screams.

Blake came running. His eyes darted between the two women and the falling chandelier. There was a split second of hesitation. A choice.

He lunged for Ariana.

He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her back, shielding her with his body as the massive fixture of crystal and metal crashed to the ground right where Caroline was standing.

The last thing Caroline saw before the world exploded in pain and went dark was Blake holding Ariana, his back to her, protecting the only person who mattered.

She woke to the blinding lights of a hospital ceiling. Every part of her body screamed in agony. Her head was bandaged, her arm was in a cast, and a sharp pain radiated from her abdomen. The room was empty. There were no flowers. No concerned husband. She was alone.

A nurse came in, her face grim. She checked Caroline's vitals.

"You're very lucky, Mrs. Santos. You have a concussion, a broken arm, and multiple lacerations. But you're alive."

Caroline looked at the empty chair beside her bed.

She reached for the small purse on her nightstand. Inside, wrapped in a silk cloth, was the black journal. She found a pen. Her hand ached, but she wrote with grim determination.

-15 Points: He watched a chandelier fall on me and didn't even try to help. He chose her.

A young nurse's aide came in to change her IV bag. She saw the notebook. "What's that?" she asked, her curiosity piqued.

"It's a scorecard for my marriage," Caroline said, her voice flat. "When it hits zero, the game is over."

The aide leaned closer, her eyes wide. "Wow. You're almost there. Only five points left."

Just then, the door opened, and Blake walked in. He looked tired and disheveled. He had been with Ariana. Of course, he had.

"What are you two talking about?" he asked, his gaze falling on the open journal in Caroline's hand.