

## When It All Fell Apart Chapter 02

As I was told I needed to be hospitalized for a few days to stabilize my condition, Will Young, my neighbor who had driven me to the hospital, was incredibly helpful, running back and forth to take care of all the paperwork.

“Clara, don’t you want to give your husband a call?” Will asked.

My hand paused mid-sip.

“There’s no need. I’m planning to file for divorce.”

Will let out a surprised “Oh,” his expression momentarily awkward.

Feeling bad for bringing it up, I said, “Sorry, I shouldn’t have brought that up with you.”

Will simply gave me a bright, reassuring smile and waved it off. “Don’t worry about it.”

His reaction made me think about Ashton.

It had been a long time since Ashton treated me kindly. Whenever we talked, he either seemed impatient or gave me an irritated glare. It felt like every time I tried to say anything, he acted like I was a bother, questioning or doubting him.

Just then, the buzz of my phone pulled me from my thoughts. It was a message from Ashton, and he had sent a photo of an ugly scarf.

[I got you a birthday present. Are you happy now?]

When I noticed the brand logo on it, I immediately checked Ruby’s social media. Sure enough, I found her latest post flaunting a brand-new Hermès bag.

The post read: [I’m feeling sick from the pregnancy, but there’s nothing a new bag can’t cure! Thanks for the gift, Ash!]

I sneered. The scarf was just one of those cheap accessories that came with a luxury bag. It was probably too ugly for Ruby to keep, so Ashton re-gifted it to me like it was something special.

I typed back: [I don’t need it. You can give it to Ruby so she can clean her bag with it.]

That response set Ashton off immediately, and my phone rang with his incoming call.

“Can you stop being so petty and jealous? Ruby and I are soulmates, not whatever trashy relationship you’ve convinced yourself of!” he snapped. “If I really had something

going on with Ruby, do you think you'd be the one married to me, enjoying the good life?"

Enjoying the good life? Those words made me feel lightheaded.

Ashton and I started dating during my second year of college when Ruby had just left for her exchange program in Europe. Back then, Ashton's family barely got by, so I did not "enjoy" anything special.

Family vacation packages

After we graduated, he started his own business, and while it might have looked glamorous from the outside, in reality, we had to pinch pennies. He was constantly stressed, trying to cover the company's huge expenses.

It was not until two years ago that things finally turned around after a successful deal. However, by then, I had grown used to being frugal. I felt sorry for Ashton's struggles, so I never spent money carelessly. Meanwhile, I had to endure daily harassment from his mother for not giving her a grandchild.

How exactly had I enjoyed any of his success?

"Clara, have some food," Will said as he walked back into the room, holding the takeout he had just picked up.

His voice reached Ashton through the phone. There was a moment of stunned silence, and then Ashton's fury erupted.

"Who's there with you? Clara, do you really think pulling some stunt like this will get a reaction out of me? Tell that man to get out of my house, right now! Don't think I'll tolerate having some random guy around!"

I could not listen anymore, so I told him I was in the hospital because I was not feeling well. There was a brief pause, which was followed by Ashton laughing bitterly.

"I see what's going on. You're so childish. Ruby gets pregnant, so now you're faking a stomachache to get my attention, huh? Let me guess. You're going to tell me you're pregnant too? What a joke. I've never seen anything more pathetic or disgusting."

I gripped my phone tightly, repeating to myself not to get angry over and over again. More importantly, I could not afford to get upset because my baby could not handle the stress right now.

"Ashton, I'm not trying to force you to come back. I hope you and Ruby are having a great time. I have people looking after me here, and honestly, things are going just fine without you. It's actually a lot easier."

It was the first time I hung up on Ashton before he could finish.

Almost immediately, a flurry of angry messages came flooding in. Predictably, it was all about how unreasonable I was and making him upset for no reason. He warned me not to regret it and not to come running back to him crying and begging for forgiveness.

I simply tossed my phone aside, picked up my food, and ate it.

Two days later, the doctor told me everything had stabilized, and I was cleared to leave the hospital.

Will came to pick me up. I told him it was too much trouble and that I could just call a cab, but he just laughed and said it was no big deal—it was what neighbors were for.

His kindness hit with a pang of sadness. Ashton rarely ever drove me anywhere. However, if Ruby called, no matter how far she was, he would pick her up.

“You have a car, don’t you? Why don’t you drive yourself?”

That was what Ashton had thrown back at me the last time I asked him for a ride.

“Ruby doesn’t have a license, so of course I have to go and pick her up. What if something happens to her while she’s taking a cab? Are you going to take responsibility for that?”

I had just opened the car door to get into the passenger seat when I felt a strong hand yank me back. Startled, I turned to see Ashton standing behind me, his face dark and angry.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, confused.

I had not heard from him for two days. Did Ashton actually care enough to come to the hospital to pick me up the moment he returned?

Then, his eyes flicked over to Will, and his voice was full of anger.

“You’ve got some nerve! I came home, and the whole table was covered in rotten, moldy food! What’s the matter with you, huh? Other housewives could at least manage to keep the house in order and raise their kids. You can’t even have a child, and now you can’t even take care of the house?”

His accusations shattered the last bit of hope I had left.

I pulled my arm from his grip, my voice turning cold. “I told you I was in the hospital, didn’t I? Yet, you showed no concern for your wife, a sick person—just complaints that I didn’t clean the house?”

Ashton looked me up and down, his eyes filled with suspicion. "You look perfectly fine to me. Quit pretending."

The only reason I looked better was because Will had been visiting every day, bringing me food to help me recover.

Hearing Ashton's comment, Will stepped out of the car, ready to speak up for me. However, I gave him a small shake of my head, signaling him to go.

What I did not expect, though, was that Ashton did not plan on taking me home to rest. Instead, he drove us straight to a pub.